

ESSA Essentials for Educators

The enactment of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)—a new federal education law—last year provides educators with a unique opportunity to exercise their voice in education policy. Federal regulations that provide the details for implementation, as well as new state and district policies required under the law, are currently being developed. These new rules and policies will have a profound influence on educators’ professional responsibilities and obligations. Educators must be informed about the changes required by the new law and help decision makers ensure that the way the law is implemented will have the most positive effect on the lives of students and the success of schools.

What are the provisions in ESSA that educators should be aware of and advocate for?

1. **Assessments**—There are a range of changes to assessment requirements in ESSA, including the options for states to use a single summative assessment; allow districts to use an optional high school assessment; use computer adaptive assessments; and allow 8th grade advanced math students to take a higher level assessment that aligns with their advanced coursework.

ASCD Recommendation: States should take advantage of the opportunity to audit the student testing environment, including both state- and district-required tests, for which ESSA provides funding. Results on state standardized tests should continue to be disaggregated and reported publicly. To the maximum extent possible, districts and schools should be given the flexibility to choose and administer the assessments they deem in alignment with and supportive of their educational goals for students.

ASCD Resources: [ESSA webinar: “The Every Student Succeeds Act: What You Need to Know”](#); [ESSA webinar: “ESSA Assessment Changes from A to Z”](#); [ESSA FAQs: Title I, Accountability](#)

2. **Accountability**—State test scores remain the primary component of state accountability systems despite the elimination of NCLB’s adequate yearly progress requirements. However, other measures that must now be included in state accountability determinations include another academic indicator (besides test scores), the proficiency of English language learners, high school graduation rates, and at least one nonacademic indicator, such as school climate, access to advanced coursework, and chronic absenteeism. This requirement provides a unique opportunity to expand the definition of student success and move toward a whole child accountability system.

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ASCD Recommendation: States and districts should go beyond the bare minimum of federal requirements and consider more than one nonacademic indicator. Indeed, state accountability systems should include a variety of measures of student success and school quality based on the community's vision. These measures should be designed to ensure schools are delivering a well-rounded educational experience for all students, addressing their comprehensive needs, and providing a safe and healthy school environment.

Resources: [Using Multiple Measures to Redefine Success](#); [Making Accountability Meaningful](#); [Multimetric Accountability Systems: A Next-Generation Vision of Student Success](#); [ESSA FAQs: Title I, Accountability](#); [ESSA webinar: "Measuring Student Success Through Multimetric Accountability"](#)

3. School Improvement—The accountability measures previously listed will be the criteria for identifying schools for either “comprehensive” or “targeted” improvement interventions. A school will be identified for *comprehensive support and improvement* (CSI) if it is among the lowest-performing 5 percent of schools in the state (based on all accountability indicators taken together) or has a graduation rate less than 67 percent (for high schools). CSI schools will be subject to district improvement interventions determined primarily by district leaders, with input from educators, parents, and others. A school will be identified for *targeted support* (TS) if it has a consistently underperforming subgroup. Interventions will be implemented at the school level but monitored by the district. ESSA requires stakeholder involvement in the creation and implementation of evidence-based strategies for school improvement.

ASCD Recommendation: Districts should take advantage of the flexibility allowed in ESSA to select or create school improvement strategies that reflect a whole child approach, incorporating whole child indicators systemically through reform efforts. Any school improvement efforts must include educator training and supports aligned with the whole child approach to help teachers and school leaders address the comprehensive needs of students and improve their academic outcomes.

Resources: [ASCD School Improvement Tool](#); [Whole Child indicators](#)

4. Professional Development—ESSA expands the allowable use of professional development (PD) funds to more school personnel. In fact, many of the provisions in the PD section, Title II, specifically mention paraprofessionals and other school leaders, and some also extend PD opportunities to any school personnel directly involved with Title I students. And there is an additional 3 percent state set aside for PD for school leaders. The law also updates the definition of PD to include job-embedded, ongoing activities and programs that can help to drive instructional improvements throughout the school year. Principals and school leaders (including any school employee or officer responsible for the daily instructional leadership and managerial operations in the school) can also take advantage of newly authorized residencies to help prepare them for the job.

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ASCD Recommendation: Given the multiple opportunities and funding sources that are available for educator PD, state plans should incorporate personalized, job-embedded PD wherever possible. Districts should ensure that no funds allocated at the federal level for educator PD are diverted to other purposes. States should take advantage of the option to create consortia that focus on reciprocity of teacher licensure to help facilitate the free movement of educators to fill open positions.

Resources: [ESSA FAQs: Title II and Support for Educators](#); [ESSA webinar: “Professional Development for Educators”](#)

5. Educator Evaluations—ESSA does not require states to evaluate educators. However, if any Title II funds are used to update or improve evaluation systems, ESSA does require that such evaluations be based only in part on student achievement and include multiple measures of evaluation.

ASCD Recommendation: If a district decides to use some of its Title II allocation to revise its evaluation system, educators should provide input on the types of indicators that are most useful in those evaluations in order to help personalize PD opportunities and lead to the most effective improvements. Educator evaluation systems should embody the principle of lifelong learning and recognize and reward educators who fill a variety of roles. Educators should be evaluated on a variety of measures, the results of which must help drive continuous support and improvement.

Resources: [ESSA FAQs: Title II and Support for Educators](#); [ESSA webinar: “Professional Development for Educators”](#); [Using Multiple Measures to Redefine Success](#); [Making Accountability Meaningful](#); [Multimetric Accountability Systems: A Next-Generation Vision of Student Success](#)

6. Well-Rounded Education—Many programs that supported a well-rounded education, such as the Elementary and Secondary Counseling program and the Carol M. White Physical Education Program, were eliminated in ESSA. In their place is a new block grant intended to provide funds for every district to support well-rounded education, provide safe and healthy school environments, and enhance technology in education. The law includes a brand-new definition of a “well-rounded” education that includes everything from physical education to foreign languages to computer science. And, since that definition is mentioned in numerous places in the statute, the allowable uses of funds for those areas are greatly expanded, including Title I’s schoolwide programs and Title II’s professional development.

ASCD Recommendation: Districts use of the ASCD School Improvement Tool as the needs assessment required by ESSA to justify expenditures in the new block grant will help to ensure that all whole child indicators are measured and addressed. Well-rounded education programs can be funded through Title I schoolwide programs and should be considered in school improvement strategies. All opportunities for

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systemically incorporating the whole child approach should be considered, including preparation for educators to address the comprehensive needs of students.

Resources: [ASCD School Improvement Tool](#); [ESSA FAQs: Title IV and School Health](#); [ESSA webinar: “Meeting Students’ Needs Under Title IV”](#); [Funding for Social-Emotional Learning in ESSA](#); [Whole Child indicators](#); [U.S. Department of Education Guidance on Title IV](#)

7. English Language Learners (ELLs)—English language learner proficiency is now a mandatory component of school accountability. In addition, there are several new requirements around ELLs, including the option to either not test first-year ELLs or not have their tests results included in accountability systems for the first year they are identified as ELLs.

ASCD Recommendation: New accountability provisions for ELLs should also reflect the importance of ensuring that schools are meeting the comprehensive needs of these students. The use of multiple measures of accountability will help provide information about how well schools are meeting the needs of ELLs. In addition, English language educators and paraprofessionals should be explicitly consulted about and included in PD opportunities that prepare them to meet the specific needs of ELLs.

Resources: [ESSA webinar: “The Every Student Succeeds Act: What You Need to Know”](#); [ESSA webinar: “ESSA Assessment Changes From A to Z”](#); [ESSA webinar: “Measuring Student Success Through Multimetric Accountability”](#)

8. Funding Levels—Education has not been a federal funding priority, and Title I has received no meaningful appropriation increase in the past eight years. What’s worse, funding for the professional development of teachers has actually decreased by \$500 million during the last decade. Overall, per-pupil state expenditures are less now than they were before the great recession occurred in 2008. The federal Title I and Title II allocations have not seen meaningful increases in about 10 years (since 2006, the Title I allocation has increased by only about \$2 billion and the Title II allocation has decreased by about \$500 million), and states provided less funding per student in the 2014–15 school year than before the recession.

ASCD Recommendation: The increase in the national student population, the historically high number of students living in poverty, and the enactment of ESSA demand greater investments in education to meet the comprehensive needs of students and the goal to graduate all students college, career, and citizenship ready. Titles I and II deserve 10 percent funding increases immediately, and educators can contact their lawmakers to ask for robust funding for the new Title IV block by accessing the ASCD [action portal](#).

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Resources: [Funding for Social-Emotional Learning in ESSA](#); [ESSA webinar: “Professional Development for Educators”](#); [ESSA webinar: “Meeting Students’ Needs Under Title IV”](#)

9. Public Engagement and Stakeholder Input—ESSA requires states to engage multiple stakeholder populations as they implement the new requirements in the statute. From assessments and accountability to school improvement and funding, states are to engage with educators, parents, tribal organizations, the civil rights community, school boards, and many others as they undertake this new work. The U.S. Department of Education published [guidance](#) earlier this year to outline the requirements in the statute and provide states with advice on how to meet these requirements.

ASCD Recommendation: Identify the opportunities for input in your state and district and work with your colleagues and educator networks to ensure educators are included in your state’s decision-making processes. States should abide by Secretary King’s reminder that “meaningful and ongoing stakeholder engagement helps ensure that stakeholders are able to provide feedback and inform continuous enhancement of State and local strategies to improve student outcomes and meet State-established performance goals.”

Resources: [ESSA State Implementation Map](#); [CCSSO Stakeholder Engagement Guide](#); [U.S. Department of Education’s Dear Colleague Letter on Stakeholder Engagement](#)

ESSA Implementation at the State Level

1. What decisions do states have to make? ESSA shifts authority for a myriad of decisions to the state level. See ASCD’s [NCLB/ESSA comparison chart](#) to learn about the changes and new state- and district-level decisions. Here is a brief list of some of the major decisions and actions states must make.
 - a. Create new accountability systems with additional indicators of student success and school quality.
 - b. Determine the weighting for accountability indicators.
 - c. Decide whether to use one or more nationally recognized high school assessments for districts in place of the statewide assessment.
 - d. Participate in an innovative test pilot alternative.
 - e. Decide whether to use a single summative assessment or multiple interim assessments.
 - f. Decide whether to limit the amount of time students spend taking tests.
 - g. Determine how to assess and account for ELL proficiency.

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- h. Define “consistently underperforming subgroups” for identification of a school in need of targeted support.
 - i. Decide whether to create a consortia with neighboring states to address teacher reciprocity.
 - j. Work with districts to support evidence-based school improvement strategies.
2. What is my state doing? See ASCD’s [ESSA State Implementation Map](#) to find out and see how you can get involved.

What Should Educators Do?

1. *Get Informed*—You’ve taken the first step by accessing this resource! Additional information and details are available on [ASCD’s ESSA webpage](#), including webinars, FAQs, and links to U.S. Department of Education resources.
2. *Share Information with Colleagues*—Be sure to let your peers and others know what you learn. The more voices that are heard by decision makers, the better. Ask your district leaders about the opportunities to participate in discussions and decision making around ESSA implementation, and tell them you want to get involved.
3. *Prioritize Your Positions, Goals, and Asks*—Which areas are most important to you? Which issues will have the greatest influence on your profession and in your daily work? What changes would you like to see from the current education system in your state regarding standards; educator evaluations; testing; and data collection, disaggregation, and reporting?
4. *Organize and Collaborate*—Develop leadership teams in your school to provide input to decision makers on issues such as which multimetric indicators you believe would be valuable in your state’s new accountability system. Conduct polls within your school to identify professional development activities and programs your colleagues want and need. Present these ideas to your school and district leadership.
5. *Develop a Plan*
 - a. Know the timeline for state decisions.
 - b. Identify the meetings you can attend.
 - c. Share information with colleagues.
 - d. Become a trusted resource for state decision makers.
 - e. Hold the decision-making authority or team accountable for their decisions.
 - f. Keep apprised of the activities and decisions in your state.

ASCD will continue to develop resources to inform you through the entire ESSA implementation process. You may access our ESSA resources—a webinar series, FAQs, ASCD statements and letters, links to U.S. Department of Education resources, and much more—at www.ascd.org/essa. Do not hesitate to send questions to gr@ascd.org.