

# Engage for Education Equity

**A Toolkit for  
School Communities on the  
Every Student Succeeds Act**



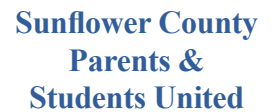
**DIGNITY IN SCHOOLS**



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# What is in this Toolkit?

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**Equity & the Every Student Succeeds Act: The Organizer’s Packet** \_\_\_\_\_ **1**

This is a packet of materials for leaders like you! It contains all the basic facts you’ll need to get started. This packet includes the [Organizers: Take Action!](#) worksheet on page 7.

**Toolkit Resources** \_\_\_\_\_ **15**

Resources for organizers to use with families, students, and the broader school community to educate, empower, and act!

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**Look for these icons!**



Learn More



School Improvement



Check Out This Tool



Did You Know?

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# Join Us!

## A Message from the Authors



### About the Toolkit

The [Dignity in Schools Campaign \(DSC\)](#), [Partners for Each and Every Child](#), a project of the Opportunity Institute, and the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. developed this Toolkit to serve as a call to action and to empower parents, families, care-givers, students, and other community members with the information and tools they need to be actively involved in making decisions that impact their schools.

### The Road So Far

This Toolkit was created by and for families, students, organizers, school board members, teachers, and other school community members from across the United States, with input and resources from national and state-based advocates.

Starting in the summer of 2017, this Toolkit was imagined, written, edited, and published with support from over 200 community members who came from towns and cities across the United States to more than 20 calls, meetings, and events; wrote in feedback online; and called in with ideas and edits.

**We are so grateful to each student, parent, organizer, and community leader who gave us their time, wisdom, and power to make this resource a useful and empowering set of tools, reflective of the communities we hope that it will continue to serve in the years to come.**

### Who is the Toolkit For?

This set of tools is intended to support organizers — including families and students — as they work with their school communities to understand and engage around the [Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\)](#).

### Why Now?

Our students need more from their schools:

- **Our public school children need more:** 51% of public school children in the U.S. are living in poverty, yet funding to support them is low.<sup>1</sup> In fact, high-poverty districts spend over 15% less per student than low-poverty districts do.<sup>2</sup>
- **Segregation in schools by race and class is increasing:** Latinx students — the largest minority group in the U.S. — are now the most segregated.<sup>3</sup>
- **Schools don't treat students equitably:** Black students are suspended and expelled more than three times more often than white students.<sup>4</sup>
- **Achievement gaps still exist:** In both math and reading, over 85% of white 12th graders receive higher test scores than the average black 12th grader.<sup>5</sup>
- **ESSA's requirements and funding can help us move forward:** Title I funding alone supports over 21 million students in more than 56,000 schools in the U.S.<sup>6</sup>

1. [Majority of U.S. public school students are in poverty](#) (Washington Post, 2015)  
2. [Good School, Rich School; Bad School, Poor School](#) (The Atlantic, 2016)  
3. [Report: School Segregation Is Back, 60 Years After "Brown"](#) (PBS, 2014)

4. [Achievement gap is our fault, not the kids'](#) (The Baltimore Sun, 2017)  
5. [Racial/Ethnic Enrollment in Public Schools](#) (NCES, 2017)  
6. [NCES Fast Facts: Title I](#)

## Why ESSA?

In 2015, Congress passed the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) — an update to the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) — that provides state governments with a vision of success for every student, especially those who need the most support. This new law provides several opportunities for states, districts, and schools to ensure that all students have access to the crucial resources they need to be successful. It also requires that families, students, and community members be a part of the process for improving and expanding opportunities for all students.

It is critical that we all play a key role in the decision-making process. Our communities are directly impacted by these decisions and are in the best position to determine what will work for our schools and students. ESSA offers us the opportunity to look at how we are serving students and what we can do to move toward greater equity and justice for our children — together.

## Who are the Authors?

**The Dignity in Schools Campaign** (DSC) is a coalition of over 100 grassroots and education advocacy organizations in 29 states. Since its inception in 2006, DSC members have worked to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline by challenging the systemic problem of unfair school discipline policies that push students out of our nation's schools and by advocating for high-quality educational environments that keep students in school and learning.



Founded in 1940 by Thurgood Marshall, the **NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.** (LDF) is the nation's oldest civil rights law organization. For almost 80 years, LDF has relied on the Constitution and federal and state civil rights laws to pursue equality and justice for African-Americans and other people of color.



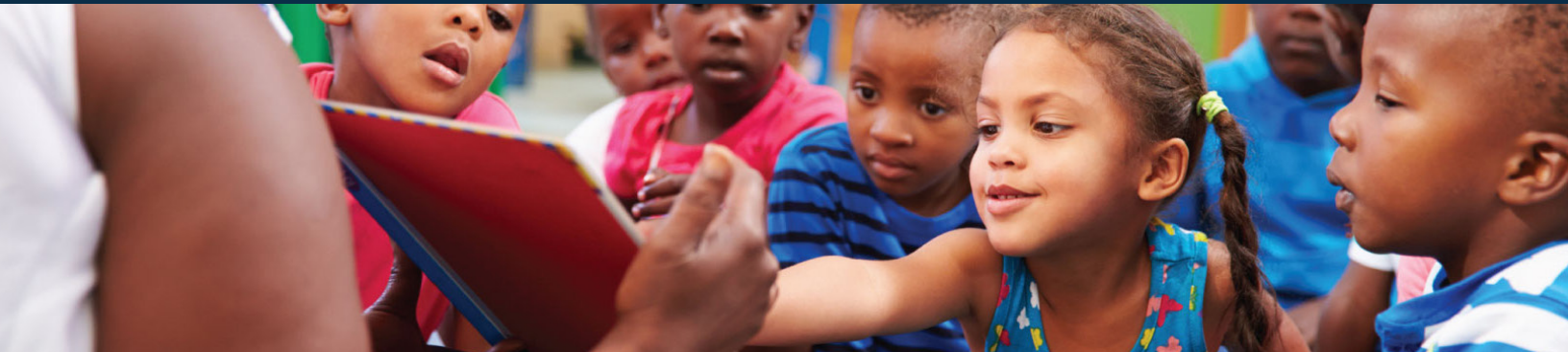
A project of the Opportunity Institute, **Partners for Each and Every Child** (Partners for) is a collaborative, nonpartisan network of education researchers, advocacy organizations, and policy experts who are committed to educational excellence for each and every child. Partners for works to advance sound educational policies that are responsive to the needs of at-risk, underserved, and politically underrepresented students.



**Together, we urge you to use the information  
in this resource to take a seat at the table and  
make your voice heard!**



# Equity & The Every Student Succeeds Act: The Organizer's Packet



The following pages contain the core information organizers will need to start taking action for school improvement under ESSA

## To Begin: A Vision for Our Children

**Our school communities have the potential to make sure all children have everything they need to succeed, including:**

- **great teachers**, thoughtful school administrators, and other excellent support staff, as well as ongoing training to support continual learning for staff and leadership;
- **support for families**, including parent organizing and leadership, classes, and regular access to the school's leadership and classrooms;
- **opportunities for high quality learning** for all children, birth through 12<sup>th</sup> grade;
- **access to nutrition and healthcare**, including healthy meals, physical education and recess, and mental health services;
- **positive discipline practices**, like Restorative Justice practices, reduced suspensions, or reduced presence of police in schools; and
- **advanced and creative coursework**, including implementing a culturally relevant and culturally responsive curriculum, adding courses like arts and civics, or providing internship opportunities.

**The *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) is just one tool for us to refocus our efforts to move toward equity and justice for all students:  
education is a human right!**

# Who is Part of a School Community?

All leaders — from students to parents, care-givers, and families to advocates to education agencies — should be involved in making your school a place where all children can learn and grow.

## The School Community:



Students

Parents, families, care-givers, mentors, and peers

In-school staff, health professionals, and youth program leaders

Community centers, local businesses, health organizations, and programs for families and youth

## The Broader Education Community:

Outside of your school community, national, state, and local education governing agencies and advocates are supporting schools and students. Use their resources!

As we talk about **families** throughout this document, we mean parents, care-givers, guardians, and other family members who are the primary adults in a child's life.



# What is the Every Student Succeeds Act?

- The **Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)** is the United States’ national policy for public education from pre-K through grade 12.
- **ESSA provides states with funding** to support students, teachers, and schools — for things like services for low-income students, English learners, and students with disabilities [and/or those with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs)].

## What’s New in ESSA?

- ESSA gives state and local governments more **flexibility** to decide how to measure student performance and school quality. For example, ESSA requires that all states adopt “challenging academic standards,” but allows states to choose what those standards will be.
- In exchange for that flexibility, ESSA requires that state and local government leaders **engage** with their communities to make decisions that best fit their needs.
- ESSA has kept in place many important policies and opportunities that matter to our country as a whole, including tracking how students are doing academically, looking at the gaps in performance among groups of students, and **making sure that those who need support receive it**.

## What is a State ESSA Plan?

- The first decisions under ESSA have happened at the state level, where state leaders engaged with the larger state education community to develop state ESSA plans, which outline how states plan to meet the requirements of the law. **These state ESSA plans include:**
  - **Standards** for what children should learn in each grade
  - **Assessments** for finding out if children have met those standards
  - **Long-term goals** for schools and students
  - **A way to measure** if schools are on track to meet those goals
  - **A system of support** for all schools, especially those that are struggling the most



## What Does ESSA Mean for My School?

- Every state’s ESSA plan is required to support schools and districts as they write their own local plans for **school improvement** and plans for **use of federal funds**. These local ESSA plans will describe how schools will support students and improve over time.
- In some states, only schools that are identified by the state as lowest performing will be required to submit plans for school improvement. **All schools** that receive federal funding must submit applications for those funds.
- Under ESSA, all local ESSA plans **must** be written in consultation with families and communities — called “stakeholder engagement” — and should be designed to support **education equity**.

Brief

### A History of the Law

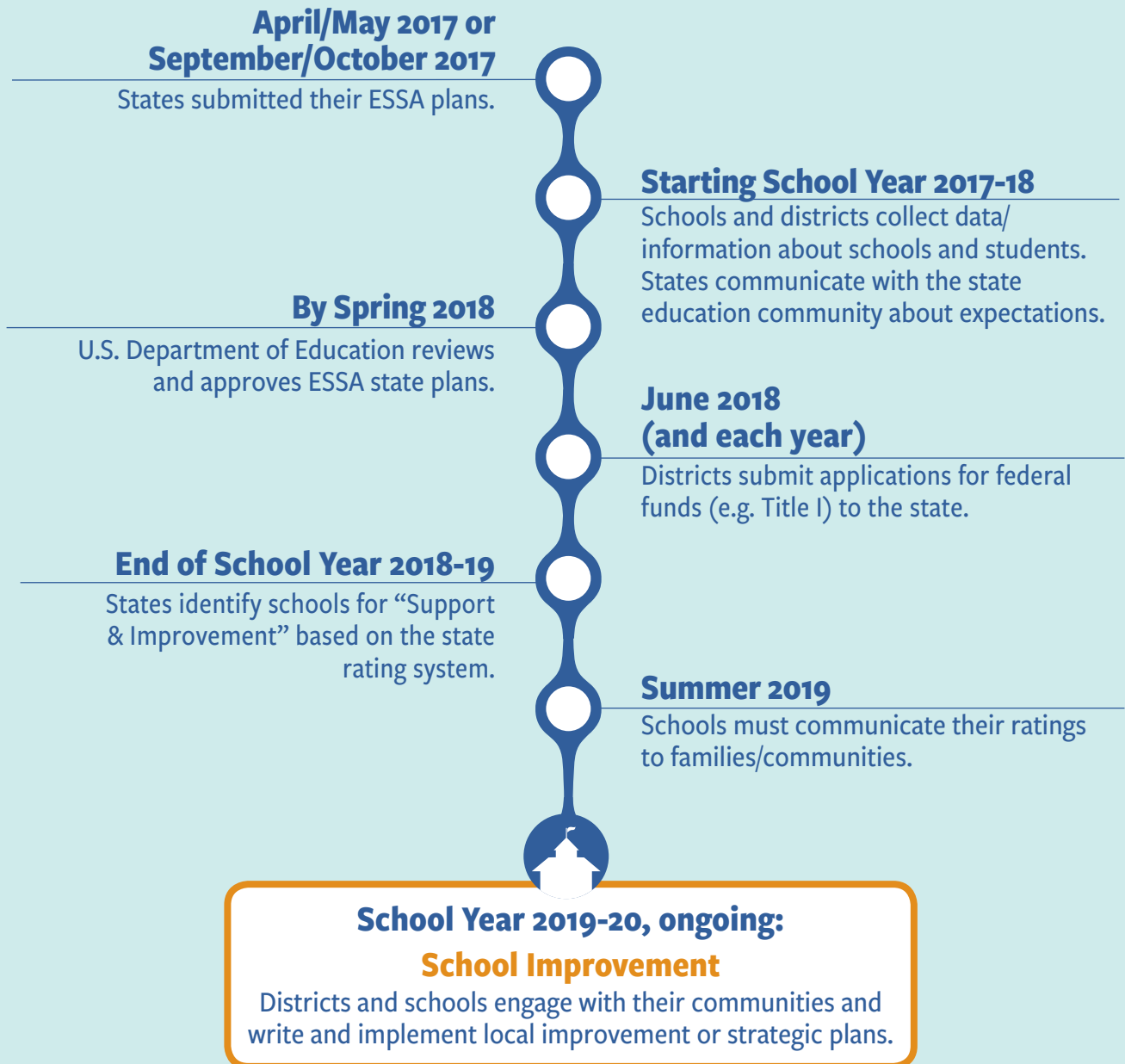
- **ESSA** is the current name for an old law: the **Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)**.
- From 2001 until ESSA became law, that same law was called the **No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)**. Every time the name has changed, edits have been made.
- Congress first passed the **ESEA** in 1965 during the Civil Rights Movement.
- In 1965, this law was the first time the federal government provided **comprehensive education funding** to states — specifically to support students from low-income families.
- With federal funding came **requirements** for how to use it, including how to measure school quality.
- Congress has revised those requirements several times, most recently by passing **ESSA** in December 2015.



Learn more about the new law and your state’s ESSA plan at [CheckStatePlans.org](https://www.checkstateplans.org)

# A Timeline of ESSA's Local Impact

All states have submitted their ESSA plans to the U.S. Department of Education, following two years of working with communities to answer the important questions asked in ESSA. Decisions made by the state will now be implemented at the local level. **What can you expect?**



## Find out More From Your State

Your state will have more information about when schools will be identified under the law for "Support and Improvement" (lowest performing schools) and what that means for you and your school and district. Find out more in your state's ESSA Plan and on your state's website. You can also work with a local organization to learn more!

# School Improvement Planning Under ESSA

## What Is School Improvement?



- **School improvement** is the process of learning about a community and working to make it better for all students. **School improvement means student success.**
- School improvement requires that district and school administrators and communities — including students and families — **work together.**

## 3 Ways Your School Is Planning for School Improvement

### 1. Support and Improvement Plans

- ✓ **ESSA Says:** Required for schools identified by the state as low-performing
- ✓ **Learn More:** Check out your [state's ESSA plan](#)

Find out if your school has been identified as low performing — called “Comprehensive Support and Improvement,” “Targeted Support and Improvement,” or “Additional Targeted Support and Improvement” schools under ESSA — by checking your school’s [report card](#), starting in Summer 2019. You can find report cards on your state education department’s website.



### 2. Funding Applications & Consolidated Local ESSA Plans

- ✓ **ESSA Says:** Required by all districts with schools receiving federal funds
- ✓ **Learn More:** Check out the US ED website: [ed.gov/ESSA](http://ed.gov/ESSA)

### 3. Local Strategic Planning

- ✓ **ESSA Says:** Not required for all districts or schools in all states
- ✓ **Learn More:** Check out your state’s ESSA plan or state strategic plan

## What this Means for Your School

- These three processes may be three parts of the same document or be entirely separate efforts. No matter the format, **they should be connected and aligned.**
- Keep in mind that **school improvement processes are different school to school and district to district**, as well as for charter schools, alternative schools, and schools in “turnaround,” which may include mayor, governor, or other state office involvement.

For more, check out our fact sheet: [School Improvement Under ESSA](#)



# It's Your Right to Be Involved

## What is Stakeholder Engagement?

- Under ESSA, state and local officials are required to engage with community members around decisions that impact schools and students. Meaningful **Stakeholder Engagement** is a process of communicating, learning, and partnering with school communities that acknowledges the unique needs and strengths of those involved.

## What is Equity?

- All students have the right to schools that are safe, healthy and nurturing environments where **every student has the opportunity to reach their full potential**.
- Some students need **more and different resources** than others — resources like funding, excellent educators and mentors, positive behavioral support, and opportunities for engagement.
- **Equality** means that all students get the same resources. **Equity** means that all students have the resources they need to be successful:



**Equality**



**Equity**



**Justice: No Barriers**

- **We must push for schools that promote equity for all students**, including low-income students, students of color, English learners, LGBTQ students, and students with disabilities.

## Engagement for Equity:

- **All community members have the right to take part in decision-making** to improve the schools they serve and that serve them. It is essential that local administrators and leaders move away from simply informing stakeholders about decisions, and move toward involving a diverse, inclusive group of school community members in active leadership and decision-making.



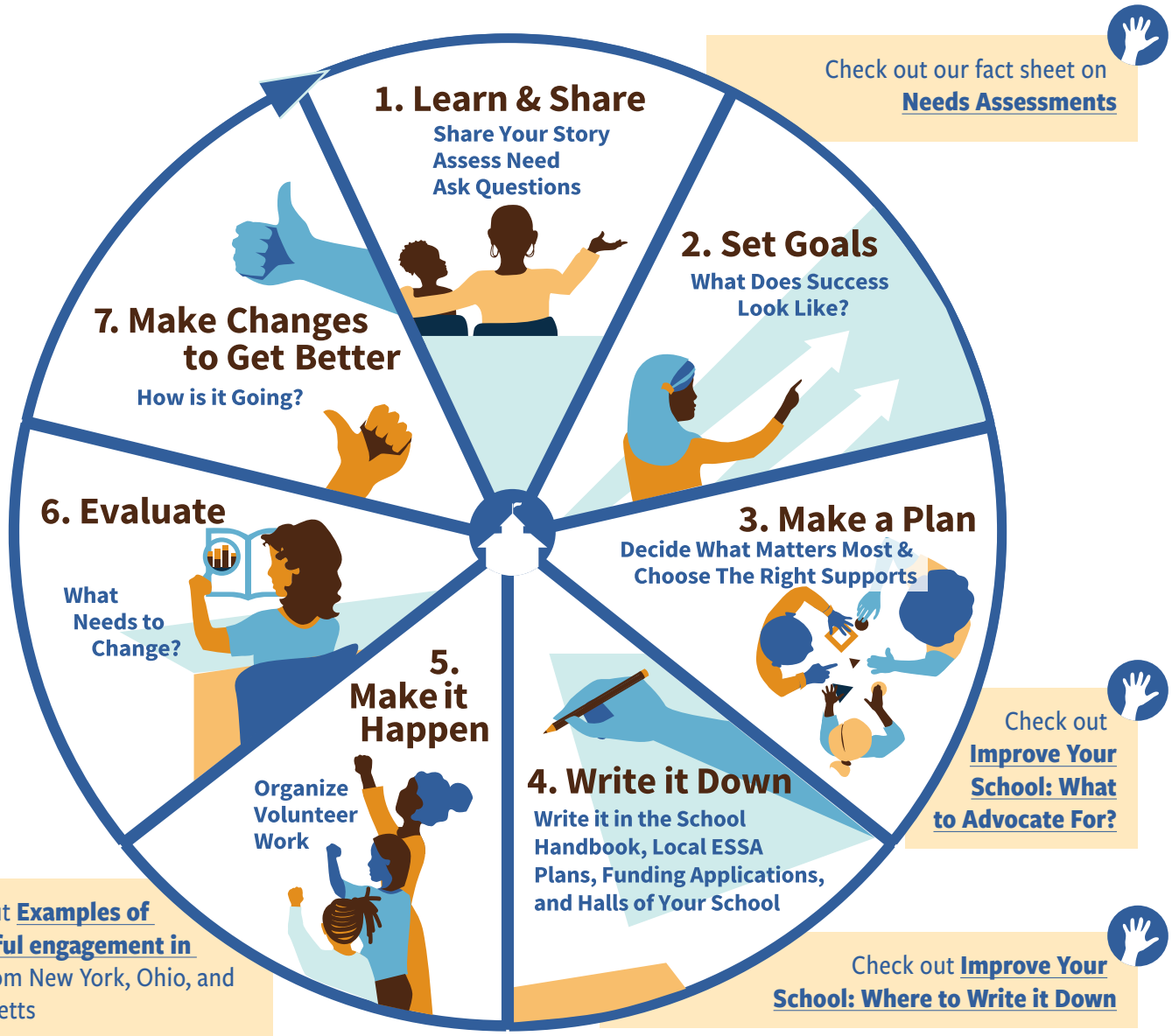
For more on engagement, check out [What Does an Engaged School Community Look Like?](#)



# Organizers: Take Action!

## Getting Involved in School Improvement

These steps are part of every school improvement process. Remember: This is your school community — **You can be a part of every step!**



For a deeper dive with school community members, check out our fact sheet: [School Improvement Under ESSA](#)



# 1. Learn and Share

Find out how your school and school community are doing and share that information with your peers and larger community

## Where to Start:

- ✓ **Check out your school's report card.** Report cards are available online and can usually be found on your state education department website. Report cards contain information about your school and district that is collected statewide, like demographic data about students.
- ✓ **Find more information about your district and state online** through: the federal [Civil Rights Data Collection \(CRDC\)](#); national foundations, like the Annie E. Casey Foundation's [Kids Count Data Center](#); and advocacy groups like the [Education Trust](#) and the [Dignity in Schools Campaign](#). You can also submit a Freedom of Information Act, or FOIA, request at [foia.gov](http://foia.gov). This is a way to ask for any public information from your government officials.
- ✓ **Build coalitions** and collaborative relationships to build up the community's voice. This helps to create an environment for sharing.
- ✓ **Help to package and distribute information** to families and students: distribute flyers; develop email or social media campaigns; or host a Q&A with your school community.



### Include Students!

Remember that in order to best serve students, students themselves must be included in the conversation!

Check out [educationdive.com/news/schools-creating-new-structures-to-encourage-student-voice/509849/](https://educationdive.com/news/schools-creating-new-structures-to-encourage-student-voice/509849/) for examples of how communities are doing this!

### Add your own action steps:

- ✓
  - ✓
- 

## Moving Forward:

- ✓ Information should be collected, aggregated, and analyzed regularly. Your school will collect data annually, but that should not limit you. You can affect what information is collected, when, and how to make sure it is useful and accurate by connecting community members with school officials and staff, and by making information digestible. As you advocate for change, **advocate for accurate and actionable information!**

Check out our fact sheet on [Needs Assessments](#) for more information about how school leaders “Learn More”!





## 2. Set Goals


Decide what you want your students and school communities to learn, experience, and achieve

### Where to Start:

- ✓ Look in your state’s ESSA plan for state goals for all students and student subgroups (e.g. low-income students). Help your community **understand how these goals apply** to your school.
- ✓ **Co-host family input meetings** to share the state goals, as well as and the school goals (look for these in your school handbook) and update them to better reflect what the school community wants.
- ✓ Help community members to turn their **broad vision into actionable next steps** for a school to take and help school and district administrators connect current data to long-term goals.
- ✓ Keep your goals simple and easy to communicate.
- ✓ Help community members articulate their values so that the goals you create together reflect what the community cares about. Again, be sure to include students!

**Add your own action steps:**

- ✓
- ✓



### Moving Forward:

- ✓ Your goals can and should change over time. Support regular meetings to **revisit and update your goals** to accommodate changes in your school’s performance and the needs of your students.





### 3. Make a Plan

Find out what programs and services are available to students and communities (in and out of school) and choose strategies that will work based on your goals

#### Where to Start:

- ✓ **Learn what strategies are available** and relevant to your school community. Organizations like the Intercultural Development Research Association ([idra.org](http://idra.org)), Evidence for ESSA ([evidenceforessa.org](http://evidenceforessa.org)), the Dignity in Schools Campaign ([dignityinschools.org](http://dignityinschools.org)), Understood ([understood.org](http://understood.org)), the Center for Parent Information and Resources ([parentcenterhub.org/category/topics/eseaessa](http://parentcenterhub.org/category/topics/eseaessa)), and others can also help!
- ✓ Work with local community groups and national advocates to **build a menu of possible programs and strategies for school improvement**, and speak with families, in-school staff, and other community members about their vision for how these programs might work.
- ✓ **Engage directly with school and district administrators** to push for the practices and policies you want.
- ✓ **Collaborate with other community organizers** to raise funds and implement programs outside of schools (e.g. after school literacy workshop at your local library).

#### Add your own action steps:

- ✓
- ✓

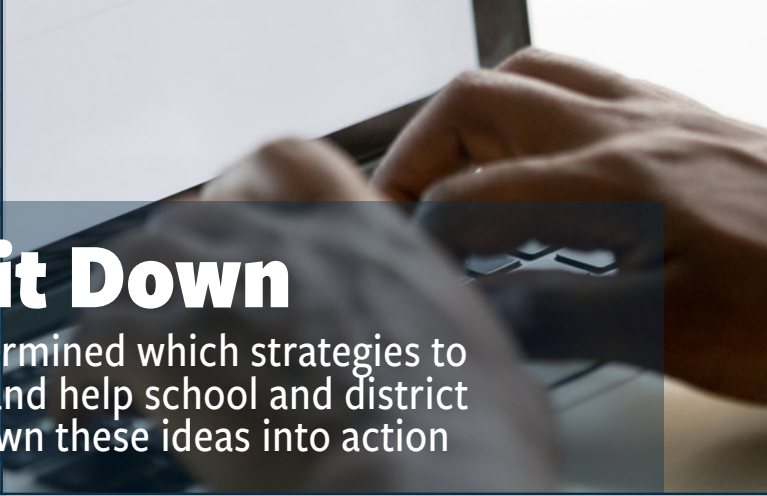
#### Moving Forward:

- ✓ While you must give strategies time to be implemented fully and correctly, it is important to also **update your plans over time** to meet the changing needs of your students. Ask for regular feedback about what's working and stay informed about new and innovative ideas by continuing to build relationships with advocates, researchers, school staff, and families.



Check out [Improve Your School: What to Advocate for](#) for more ideas!



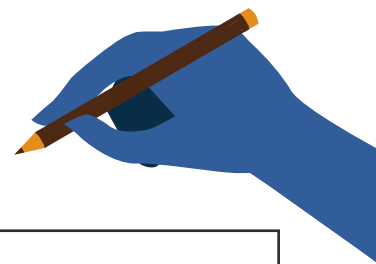


## 4. Write it Down

Once you have determined which strategies to focus on, seek out and help school and district officials to write down these ideas into action

### Where to Start:

- ✓ Your school community’s goals and priorities, as well as the strategies used to improve, should be **written in the places that matter most**: funding applications, local strategic plans or school improvement plans (ESSA), and school handbooks or mission statements (like on the school website). Write sample language and meet with school and district officials to make sure this happens!
- ✓ Help to ensure that **priorities match budgets** by working with your local school board.
- ✓ **Talk to other families, students, and the school’s leadership** to find out what funding is most needed and help school and community leaders secure additional grants for ambitious projects.
- ✓ **Write down the process!** Community members that helped to shape the plans will want to see it documented, and new families and community members will see that their voices count!



**Add your own action steps:**

- ✓
- ✓

### Moving Forward:

- ✓ Make sure that policies, vision, and budgets are aligned and **updated regularly**.
- ✓ Remember that there are many documents that can be edited to support the goals and describe plans, and that changes should always be documented so that **school leaders can be held accountable to their promises**.
- ✓ It can also be helpful to put up flyers or posters inside schools to reinforce values and remind communities of their plans and goals.



# 5. Make it Happen

Recruit and inform community members and work together to implement the programs and strategies that you have chosen

## Where to Start:

- ✓ As with every step in this process, **see yourself as an organizer.** Help new community members be a part of the process by sharing what you have done to-date and helping them to see how they can be a part of the process moving forward.
- ✓ **Show up** on school campuses to take tours, talk with students and staff, and to see the school facilities. Help students to know that their community is present and caring.
- ✓ **Volunteer or work at the school site:** Ask your school administrators what would be most helpful or offer your talents directly (e.g. work with a teacher, volunteer as an assistant coach, or help to decorate the teachers' lounge with relevant literature each month).
- ✓ **Join your school's leadership teams** like school site councils, stakeholder engagement teams, teacher leadership committees, etc. If a team is full or does not exist, consider creating a peer leadership role for yourself or others to develop a stronger voice and a body ready for action where needed.
- ✓ **Work together.** The strongest coalitions are intersectional - demonstrate solidarity for our human right to education through collective action!

For more on school improvement organizing, check out The Leadership Conference Education Fund's [ESSA Guide for Advocates \(2017\)](https://www.civilrightsdocs.info/pdf/education/ESSA/ESSA-Guide.pdf) at [civilrightsdocs.info/pdf/education/ESSA/ESSA-Guide.pdf](https://www.civilrightsdocs.info/pdf/education/ESSA/ESSA-Guide.pdf)



## Add your own action steps:

- ✓
- ✓

## Moving Forward:

- ✓ Engagement, like organizing, is not one-and-done. Our students need sustained support to continue to meet their varied and changing needs. **Commit to staying involved** and help others to do the same.



For examples of [Meaningful Engagement in Action](#), read stories of success in New York, Ohio, and Massachusetts



## 6. Evaluate

Measure how strategies or programs are working (or not working)

### Where to Start:

- ✓ **Find a trusted messenger** to give you the information you are looking for. Program leaders (e.g. school nurse, counselor, or social worker) may have the most recent and relevant information about attendance, involvement, and outcomes.
- ✓ **Look at data** from multiple months or years to find trends in improvement. Be honest about what is and is not working.
- ✓ **Share out** what you learn to other families and community members by making the data easy to understand and present at meetings and events where families, students, and community members can ask questions about it.



### Add your own action steps:

- ✓
- ✓

## 7. Make Changes to Get Better

Make efforts over time to change and improve

### Where to Start:

- ✓ Set aside time to **visit schools, talk with other students, families, and staff**, and make an effort to build your understanding over time.
- ✓ Organize community meetings to **review new information** and data and discuss any changes and what improvements are needed, be involved in recruitment efforts for new staff, hold or take part in trainings for existing staff, and keep your community up to date with new research, etc.
- ✓ Help to **connect families and school staff with the right change-makers** going forward.
- ✓ Make sure that it is **clear to all community members when and how to engage**. Help to connect process to outcomes: show what is working over time and help community members to support those successful efforts.



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# Toolkit Resources

**These are materials to support engagement efforts.  
Choose what works for you!**

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Use this worksheet to start thinking about how you can get involved in decisions that affect you and your peers under the ESSA.

# STUDENTS: TAKE ACTION ON ESSA!

## What you need to know about The *Every Student Succeeds Act*

- The *Every Student Succeeds Act*, or ESSA, is the United States' national law for public education from pre-K through grade 12.
- ESSA impacts school improvement, which is the process of learning about a school community and working toward equity for all students.
- District and school administrators lead the school improvement process, but you can take a leadership role and affect their decisions!

## What is Equity?

Equity means ensuring that students have access to the things they need in order to succeed.



## Students are leading inspiring actions to promote equity in schools. You can too!

- Revise your school's or district's disciplinary rules to focus on restorative practices, empathy, and relationship-building, rather than suspension or other harsh punishment.
- Organize your district or your entire state to have student feedback inform teacher evaluation and school curriculum.
- Work with your adult allies to edit your school's needs assessment. A needs assessment is your school's way of finding out what their community needs — like a questionnaire or survey. Make sure that it includes student voices!

# GET INVOLVED! TAKE ACTION TO IMPROVE YOUR SCHOOL

## 1. Research

- **Talk to peers, family and school leaders** about the issue to get their perspective. Do online research to see what others have done across the country. Conduct a formal survey.
- **Visit your school's principal** and/or office administrators, teachers, counselors, or aides. Find out what the timeline is for local planning – who is making decisions about the school vision, programs, and budget and when?

## 2. Take Initiative

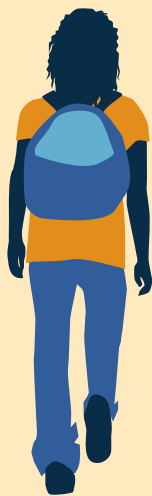
- **Use your research to request meetings** with community members in and outside of schools – like principals, legislators, and officials in the school district.
- **Present your findings** at a town hall or school committee meeting, or through a school newspaper or bulletin.

## 4. Refine

- **Keep fine-tuning your action plan** until there is a win! Never hesitate to dive into the continuous cycle of researching, taking initiative, growing your impact and refining your efforts.

## 3. Grow Your Impact

- **Ask for a seat and voting power** on leadership committees or teams that have decision-making power on these issues (e.g. school improvement plan team, local school board, or student government).
- **Educate and involve your peers** through fliers, social media, petitions, position statements and events. Work with adult allies who are willing to support your work.
- **Host an event, meeting, or class** to share your experiences as a student and what change you envision, or educate policy makers in person (e.g. your superintendent or school board) about the issues.



**Make sure to read your state's ESSA plan to know what may work best for your school!**  
Find your state's plan at [www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/statesubmission.html](http://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/statesubmission.html)





# YOUR ACTION PLAN!

## ESSA TIMELINE:

### Dec. 2015

ESSA was signed into law

### Since Then

States wrote “ESSA Plans” explaining state decisions

### Spring 2018

States will identify which schools need additional support to improve

### Summer 2018

Schools and districts start to plan for “school improvement” - a process you can be involved in!

### Going Forward

School improvement is a continuous process. Stay involved!

- What matters most to you about your school, and what is one thing about your school that you want to change?
  
- Who is affected by this issue and why is it a problem?
  
- Who are adult allies that can help you think through this change you want to see and/or point you in the right direction? What will you ask them?
  
- What are three concrete next steps you will take to get involved and how will you do them?
  - 1.
  - 2.
  - 3.
  
- How will your efforts benefit future students? What legacy do you want to leave behind?



**Next Page!**



# Parents & Families: Your Community Needs You!



## Get Involved in ESSA!

### What is ESSA?

- The *Every Student Succeeds Act* is the United States' national policy for public education from pre-K through grade 12.
- This law is the main way that the federal government provides education funding to states - specifically to support students from low-income families.
- ESSA also provides states with funding to support students, teachers, and schools [e.g. parent engagement, services for low-income students, English learners, and students with disabilities (and/or students with Individualized Education Plans, or IEPs)].
- ALL families can affect what ESSA means for kids by getting involved in school improvement planning!

### Now you know!

ESSA replaced the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2015.

2015

ESSA Passed

2016-17

States wrote ESSA Plans

Starting Summer 2018

School Improvement Planning



### A Civil Rights Legacy

ESSA is an updated version (re-authorization) of a law passed during the Civil Rights Movement in 1965. This law, which gives federal funding to schools for children in low-income families, **exists today because parents, families, and communities organized to advocate for better support and protection for our nation's children.**

The law began in the living rooms, community centers, churches, and school houses of communities like yours. **We hope you will join us to continue the tradition of local involvement in support of our kids.**

# A Vision for Our Children



**Every parent wants the best possible education for their child.** Our school communities have the potential to make sure every child has everything they need to succeed: great teachers, principals, and mentors and access to excellent services and educational opportunities.

## What You Need to Know About ESSA:

### What does ESSA do?

- ESSA is a set of requirements that states, districts, and schools must follow in exchange for federal funding.



ALL public schools, including charters, must follow ESSA!

### What is different?

- ESSA gives education system leaders, like superintendents and school principals, more flexibility than they had before, on the condition that they engage with families and communities when they make decisions.

### What can ESSA do for your child?

- For all schools in all states, ESSA impacts how we improve schools. Each state has submitted an “ESSA Plan” to the federal government that will tell you more. ESSA is just one tool that we can use to make sure that each child gets what they need.



Find your state’s ESSA Plan at [www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/statesubmission.html](http://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/statesubmission.html)

### What is “School Improvement”?

- School improvement is the process of learning about a school community and working to make it better by changing how money is spent, what programs are available, and who teaches, counsels, and mentors your child. District and school administrators lead the school improvement process, but they must engage with parents and families. This process happens in cycles (every year or every three years).

### How can you get involved?

- Under ESSA, parents and families must be involved in school improvement. In other words, regardless of whether you have been included in the past, and regardless of citizenship status, language, guardianship, or ability, YOU have every right to be involved in making your schools better. Your school and district leaders are required to make that possible. *See the next page for more!*



Check out [Improve Your School: What to Advocate For](#) for more!



This is a Tool from the **Engage for Education Equity Toolkit**. Find more at [partnersforeachandeverychild.org/engageforequity](http://partnersforeachandeverychild.org/engageforequity)

# Take Action for School Improvement!

## Your district and school are responsible for these steps:

**1. Learn More** about your community



**2. Set Goals** informed by what your community cares about



**3. Make a Plan\*** based on community priorities



**4. Write it Down** to be accountable to the plan



**5. Make it Happen** by working hard and involving your community



**6. Evaluate** and share how things are going so that we can all get better over time



## Parents and families can:

**1. Share your story** with other families & find common ground



**2. Inform the goals:** What is success for your child? What kind of school do you want for your child?



**3. Help set priorities** for student supports and programs



**4. Help to write the plan down** in all the places it can go!\* (e.g. the district budget, Local ESSA Plan, school handbook, bulletin, or newsletter)



**5. Organize, volunteer, & show up!** This is your community & You have a right to be involved!



**6. Give feedback to your school:** Is your child doing better? Has your school gotten better? How can we keep getting better?



**i** \*Your school has to write a “School Improvement Plan.” Learn more by contacting your district administrators.

**h** \*For more information about what you can help to write, check out our resource, [Where to “Write it Down”](#)

## Questions to Get Started:

Is your child struggling? How? How can your school support them? Are programs in place to support all students?

Do you know who in your school community can help you advocate for your child (e.g. other parents, teachers, a family liaison, community organizer, minister, coach, or nurse)?

What other parents/families and organizers want the same change? How can you work together?

Learn more about school improvement in the [Organizer’s Packet](#)



This is a Tool from the [Engage for Education Equity Toolkit](#). Find more at [partnersforeachandeverychild.org/engageforequity](https://partnersforeachandeverychild.org/engageforequity)

# Learn More



## You are not alone!

Look to other parents and local community organizations to support you as you learn more, organize, and take action!

Find more information about who can help you advocate for your child and all children at your local community center, health organization, or **community organization**.

You can also find information from **national advocates** like the Dignity in Schools Campaign, whose resources you can find at [dignityinschools.org](https://dignityinschools.org).

For information about your school and the decisions your state has made about ESSA, check out your **state education agency website**, like your state department of education, for a summary of your state's ESSA Plan and your school's "report card," which has information about your school's performance.

(**For Organizers:** Put information about local resources here — e.g. contact information for school site council)



# What Does An Engaged Community Look Like?

The whole school community must be involved in and lead education policy implementation efforts. Use this set of community goals to get started with a vision of what meaningful engagement looks like to you!

“Imagine this: A community comes together to set a vision for its public schools. In local libraries, neighborhood associations, school cafeterias, and places of worship, families sit down together and share their hopes and dreams for their children... Together they talk about what they love about their schools and what they’re worried about. They articulate their long-term vision for success — not just for their school or school system, but also for their young people.”

- Read more at [Tntp.org/Walking-Together](https://www.tntp.org/Walking-Together)

## 1. Communities Build Trust

School communities must *deliberately build* trust in order to support student success and dignity.

A system of trust includes:



## 2. Community Participation is Inclusive

Those who are involved in administration and decision-making must **reflect the political, racial, income/wealth, language, gender, sexual orientation, and cultural diversity** of the school community that they serve.

Ensure that:

- Administrators invite participation
- Community members take leadership roles
- Processes are transparent
- All community members collaborate with compassion
- There is time made for feedback

**Ask Yourself:**

- ? How can I speak up, and make my voice heard?
- ? How can I lift up the voices of those whose, thus far, have been left out?

### 3. Communities Are Empowered to Engage and Lead

Meaningful engagement means sharing responsibility, power, and voice:

- All members of the school community have the right to participate in decision-making.
- To invite participation, school administrators must build shared language around programs and policy.
- Decision makers at all levels must educate themselves about the needs and assets of their communities, including race and culture.

Students, families, and advocates know their communities; their empowered participation in impactful decision-making is essential, especially when the conversation focuses on policy, budget, or strategic planning.

**What does empowerment mean to you?**

### 4. Engagement is Strategic and Responsive

#### Strategic Means:

- Funded
- Regularly scheduled (e.g. quarterly meetings)
- Run by competent leadership
- Connected to the strategic plan or long-term goals of the school, district, and state
- Inclusive of all stakeholders

#### Responsive Means:

- Guided by agendas/goals that play to the strengths of participants
- Small enough for individual voices to be heard
- Held at times and in places that make it easy for members to participate
- Connected to relevant issues facing the students and school

### 5. Community Members are Involved in Every Part of the Policy Process!

This means that school community members are involved in understanding information, planning, writing policy and fundraising, budgeting, and implementation of new policy and existing practice!

*Nothing about us  
without us!*

**What is one thing you can do to be involved right now?**



To learn more about what process you can be involved in and how, check out [The Organizer's Packet](#)

This is a Tool from the **Engage for Education Equity Toolkit**. Find more at [partnersforeachandeverychild.org/engageforequity](https://partnersforeachandeverychild.org/engageforequity)



# School Improvement Under ESSA

Use this handout as a backgrounder for organizers and community members to understand the facts about school improvement under ESSA, and what it means for your school.

## State Decisions

- Your state has recently made decisions — written into their state ESSA Plan — about how to evaluate all public schools, including public charter schools. Some states are using a grading system to rate schools, for example, an A-F scale.

## Identification of Underperforming Schools

- States are required by law to identify the schools that are “lowest performing,” and schools where subgroups of students are performing at that lowest level or are “consistently underperforming”.
- The law says that your state must categorize these schools as in need of either “Comprehensive Support and Improvement” (CSI), “Targeted Support and Improvement” (TSI), or “Additional Targeted Support and Improvement.” (ATSI) These schools might be “F” schools if the state uses a grading system. If your school is identified as CSI, TSI, or ATSI, the school is required to notify you.

## School Improvement

- For all schools, the state is required to describe how the state system of education agencies (districts, regional offices, charter managers, etc.) will support your school with resources. These resources could include:
  - in-person trainings for changes in discipline practices and other topics
  - partnership with an outside consultant or nonprofit organization
  - online materials for teachers and administrators
- All schools, even those that do not receive any federal funding, have budgets that should be driven by local priorities and that support programs that serve school communities. These priorities and programs are called **school improvement strategies**.
- Depending on how the state evaluates or rates your school, these **school improvement strategies** are likely limited by requirements set by the state or district. Typically, high-achieving schools have the most flexibility and struggling schools must implement school improvement strategies determined by the state or district.

### What is a Tiered System of Support?

Support can mean materials, expert partners, money, training, etc. Sometimes states offer:

- one set of supports to all schools (e.g. a training manual available for download online),
- an additional set for the schools that are below average (e.g. access to a set of training videos), and
- a third, additional set of supports for the schools that are struggling the most (e.g. on-site, in-person training).

This tiered system of support offers different levels of support based on need.

### What is Your State’s System?

Find out more about your state’s system of supports for school improvement by checking your state education department’s website or by contacting your school’s leadership team, local school board, or district administrator.

Check out the **Organizer’s Packet** for more!



### Engagement

- All **school improvement strategies** must be decided and implemented by school and district administrators (e.g. principals) in collaboration with community members (e.g. students, families, teachers, advocates). **This collaboration (engagement) is both required by law and essential for effecting real change for students.** (Check out [A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement](#) from the National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools for why this works).
- Engagement of the whole school community, however, is not possible without resources. **ESSA includes funding for family engagement**, and many programs include engagement as an allowable use of funds. You can help to increase those resources by:
  - Advocating for additional funding and other resources for your school either from your local district or school (write a letter to your school board, attend or demand meetings with district administrators to address funding, partnerships, contracts, and staffing). You can also push for more funding from the state (join other families and advocates working to change your state’s budget or funding formula).
  - Taking a leadership role, either officially (run for office or join your school’s Title I School Site Council) or as a community leader who helps to gather families, host events, connect community partners to the school site, write grant applications, or participate in evaluation efforts (e.g. get the word out about results from a school climate survey).
  - Connecting funding to engagement by working with administrators and community leaders to ensure that engagement is written into grant applications, program strategies, and/or school policy.

#### Student Involvement

Students should also be encouraged to participate. Teachers and families can support this engagement by inviting students to events, running or supporting student leadership trainings or committees (e.g. student government), or focusing classroom projects on engagement in school and local government.

### Funding Available

#### Title I Parent and Family Engagement Set-Aside\*

Each district is required to reserve at least 1 percent of its Title I funds to carry out parent and family engagement activities, including those described in the written policy section below. The law further requires that parents and family members of low-income children must be involved in decisions regarding how these engagement funds are spent. These parent and family engagement funds must be used for at least one of the below activities:

- Supporting programs that reach families at home, in the community, and at school
- Disseminating information on best practices focused on engagement, especially for increasing engagement of economically disadvantaged families
- Giving subgrants to schools to collaborate with community-based organizations or businesses that have a track record of improving family engagement
- Any other activities that the district believes are appropriate to increase engagement

\*From The Leadership Conference Education Fund’s [ESSA Guide for Advocates \(2017\)](#)

# Needs Assessments

Use this handout to support a meeting around your local needs assessment, or to help community members begin thinking about information as a tool for action!

## What is a Needs Assessment?

- To learn more about what a school needs to better support students, school and district administrators sometimes conduct a “**needs assessment.**” This is a set of in-depth questions about school environments, teachers and staff, extracurricular programs, coursework, and other information. **Needs Assessments are required** for all schools identified for school improvement under ESSA and are a best practice for all schools wanting to improve.

## How do Schools Gather Equity Information?

- There are many ways that school and district officials and administrators gather information about students and the personnel, programs, and policies that support them, including **rubrics, open-ended questions and storytelling, surveys, and in-person conversations.**
- Help your school and school community learn more by collecting and **sharing the right information:** information should include both outcomes and inputs so that you know both where there is need and what might be able to fill that need.



### Get Involved

As a stakeholder, you can inform a needs assessment by working with your school administrators to add questions, fill it out, help to analyze the results, and/or communicate out what is learned to your community.

## Key Terms:

### Standards and Curriculum

Academic **standards** describe outcomes for students: *what should students know at the end of 3rd grade?* **Curriculum** is a set of inputs: *what will the teacher and students do together in order for students to learn the standards?*

### Indicators

**Indicators** are pieces of information about students and schools that let us know how they are doing and are used by the school, district, and state to inform decisions. Under ESSA, some indicators are required, including student performance on tests, but can also be non-academic information like school climate.

### Data

Indicators are measured through the collection of **data.** Sometimes this data is straightforward, like scores on a test, but often the simplest data is the least useful for understanding not only how students are doing, but what they need in order to do better, like whether kids feel safe in school.

### Student Assessment

A key component that connects a curriculum to standards is an **assessment** — a test: have students learned what they needed through the curriculum in order to meet the standards?

### Inputs/Outputs

An **input** is something that contributes to the learning and success of a student, like curriculum, effective teachers, and access to healthcare, arts programs, and extracurricular opportunities. **Outputs** are indications of student success, like scores on a test or responses to a school climate survey.

### School Climate

**School climate** refers to environment, including whether students are safe, learning, and respected; teachers are supported; and families are actively involved. It is often measured by survey but can also refer to specific measures like student suspension/expulsion rates and/or teacher absences.

For more Key ESSA Terms, check out the [Glossary](#)



# School Report Cards

Use this handout at a meeting on your school's report card, along with examples from your state's education department or school board website!

## What is a School Report Card?

- School report cards are similar to your student's report card, in that they show information about how your school is doing.
- School report cards are based on data and information on students, the teachers and staff that work at your school, and other things about the school's culture or the opportunities it provides to students.

### Want to Know More?

Check out the Data Quality Campaign's website! [dataqualitycampaign.org/showmethedata](http://dataqualitycampaign.org/showmethedata)

There you'll find information about:

- what states SHOULD be sharing,
- what to advocate for and how, and
- how to read your school's report card.

You can also find information in [Education Data 101](#)

## Where does the information come from?

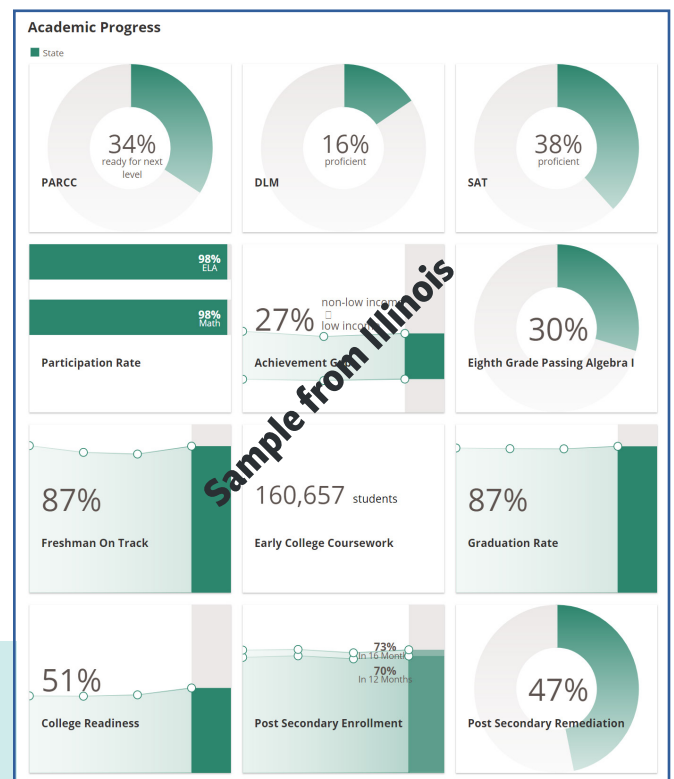
- States get information from districts and charter programs, who get their data from the schools themselves. If you want better or different information, you'll need to talk to your state representatives and your school leadership.

## Where can I find my school report card?

- School report cards are all hosted online on your state's education agency website. Search "(your state) school report card" and it will likely be the first link you see.
- You can also call your school or district office and request a printed copy. They are required to provide it!

## Who can help me understand my school report card?

- School report cards can be difficult to read. The first step is to find the report card and talk it through with a peer or other trusted advocate.
- Next, go together to meet with a school staff member - either a teacher, school site council member, or your school principal in-person. Ask them to walk you through the information on the report
- National organizations can also help! Check out Great Schools! at [greatschools.org/gk/ratings](http://greatschools.org/gk/ratings) and the Data Quality Campaign at [dataqualitycampaign.org](http://dataqualitycampaign.org)



What you learn will help you push for change. Use the information in your school's report card to empower your voice!



# Opportunities to Promote a Positive School Climate in the Every Student Succeeds Act

Use this handout in a meeting on school climate with community members, or to support improved school climate as an ESSA school improvement strategy.

## Measures of School Quality (Indicators)

- ESSA requires states to use at least four different measures to determine how schools are performing. These measures are called “accountability indicators” and include test scores and graduation rates.
- States have the option to use **school climate** as one of the indicators of school quality.
- Selecting school climate as an accountability indicator can help states make sure that unfair discipline practices that target certain groups of students (e.g. students of color) are addressed.
- States can measure the quality of school climate by using discipline data (e.g. how many and which groups of students are suspended every year) and school climate surveys completed by students and parents.
- States that select school climate as an indicator of school quality should develop a definition of positive school climate to incorporate in their state plans.



### State Plans CAN Change


States have already decided what their accountability indicators will be. However, states can make changes to their plans through an amendment process. It's not too late to push for the indicators you want to see in your state's plan!

## Supporting Districts

- ESSA requires states to describe how they will support districts to improve conditions for student learning in their state plans.
- This includes reducing:
  - bullying and harassment;
  - school discipline practices that remove students from the classroom; and
  - practices that may threaten students' health and safety. For example, isolating students from others and physically restraining them.
- States should provide districts with funding and other resources to support them in using alternative discipline strategies, such as restorative practices that help students address conflict in a positive way.



### DIGNITY IN SCHOOLS



The Dignity in Schools Campaign ([dignityinschools.org](http://dignityinschools.org)) envisions an educational system where all schools work toward preventing trauma, repairing harm and promoting healing, and reject a culture of punishment, and criminalization that fuels the school-to-prison pipeline by pushing students out of the classroom and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems. In this vision, all schools provide equitable resources — resources like funding, support staff, or positive school discipline interventions. For more, check out their resources: [dignityinschools.org/take-action/every-student-succeeds-act-essa/](http://dignityinschools.org/take-action/every-student-succeeds-act-essa/). In particular, check out [The Model School Code on Education & Dignity](#) — a set of recommended policies to schools, districts and legislators to help end school pushout and protect the human rights to education, dignity, participation and freedom from discrimination.

## State and District Report Cards

- Every year, states and districts must publish a report card that includes measures of school quality, climate and safety in language parents can understand. Measures of school climate that must be included on the report card include:
  - In- and out-of-school suspensions;
  - Expulsions;
  - School-based arrests;
  - Referrals to law enforcement;
  - Chronic absenteeism (excused and unexcused); and
  - Incidences of violence, including bullying and harassment.

## School Improvement

- Schools that are low performing based on the state's accountability indicators must be identified for Targeted Support and Improvement or Comprehensive Support and Improvement.
- When schools are identified for Comprehensive Support and Improvement, the school district must work with community stakeholders to develop and carry out a plan to improve student outcomes.
- This plan must be based on a needs assessment, which identifies additional supports and services that could improve the school.
- Community members can push for the school district to include measures of school climate (e.g. discipline data and school climate surveys) in the needs assessment to determine if supports to reduce practices that push students out of the classroom should be included in the improvement plan.

### What is Restorative Justice?

Restorative justice is an approach to discipline that focuses on repairing harm through inclusive processes that engage students and adults in schools.

### Addressing Suspension: What is the impact?

“Besides the obvious loss of time in the classroom, suspensions matter because they are among the leading indicators of whether a child will drop out of school, and because out-of-school suspension increases a child's risk for future incarceration. Given these increased risks, what we don't know about the use of suspensions may be putting our children's futures (and our economy) in jeopardy.”

*Opportunities Suspended: The Disparate Impact of Disciplinary Exclusion from School*  
The Civil Rights Project

Schools must also support struggling students by introducing effective positive discipline practices, training teachers and staff to better address disciplinary disruption, and engaging with families and community leaders. When children are struggling, don't push them out; bring them closer.



# Opportunities to Support Early Learning in the Every Student Succeeds Act

Use this handout at a meeting on early learning with community members, or to support early learning as an ESSA school improvement strategy



## ESSA & Early Learning

- High-quality intervention and education that begins in the first five years and is maintained through the early elementary years can combat achievement gaps that might otherwise begin before children enter kindergarten and sustain as they move throughout K-12.
- Under ESSA, several sources of funding can be applied to early learning, including:
  - facilities (classrooms, school spaces)
  - educator development and support
  - innovative learning strategies for English learners and children with disabilities
  - improved data systems for young learners
  - expanded access to high-quality early learning opportunities
  - improved transitions into kindergarten
  - engagement of families and community members (check out Title IV Child-Parent Centers! talk to your principal to get more information)
- Many school districts provide early learning directly, and all districts can partner with local early learning providers to share information about children and families, align standards and expectations, coordinate professional development and supports, and implement systems that support the transition into kindergarten.

### More Resources:

- [What Early Learning in ESSA Can Look Like for States and Districts from the First Five Years Fund at ffyf.org/resources](#)
- [School Improvement Starts Before School and School Improvement: Don't wait until third grade, blogs by Elliott Regenstein from the Ounce of Prevention Fund. More resources at theounce.org](#)



## Building Bridges from Birth to K-12


- Creating an aligned system of supports for children and families across the early years and grades means supporting families and young children through not only access to childcare and early learning, but also through connection to K-12 public education systems that make sense.
- **All families — including those with young children — are affected by ESSA, and therefore all families can and should be involved in the process of improving schools.**



# What Does ESSA Provide Funding For?

**ESSA is organized into eight “Titles,” each containing a set of requirements that states and districts must follow in order to receive the funding that is allocated to each.**

The majority of ESSA funding is given from the U.S. Department of Education to states, and the total amount given is determined by Congress each year in the federal budget. *Learn more about this process and what funding is available for your school by speaking with your district or charter administrators.*

 Keep in mind that funding is not the only resource you need to succeed! People, time, and strategic decisions can help support changes at your school on a tight budget.

## **Title I of ESSA**

The first major chapter of the law, which includes the bulk of funding for school districts and schools and which contains the majority of the law’s accountability and reporting requirements. Title I funding is targeted **to serve low-income students.**

## **Title II of ESSA**

This chapter is focused on teacher quality and **support for teachers.**

## **Title III of ESSA**

This chapter provides funding and requirements **related to English learners.**

## **Title IV of ESSA**

This chapter provides funding and requirements for other areas of **student support**, including extended learning, afterschool programs, supportive school climate, well-rounded education, charter schools, and magnet schools.

## **Title V of ESSA**

This chapter provides additional requirements and limitations of the U.S. Secretary of Education, funding for **rural schools**, and rules governing the combining of federal funding.

## **Title VI of ESSA**


This chapter provides funding and requirements **related to American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian students.**

## **Title VII of ESSA**

This chapter provides funding and requirements for the **Impact Aid program**, which compensates districts for lost [revenue] due to federal lands, *and includes requirements for serving youth experiencing homelessness through the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.*

## **Title VIII of ESSA**

This chapter includes general **requirements which govern the law overall**, including which provisions may be waived by the U.S. Department of Education and restrictions on the U.S. Secretary of Education’s authority.

 Federal funding (including ESSA) only accounts for about 1/10th of your school’s budget. The rest of the funding that keeps your school doors open comes from state and local funding and funding from grants and donors.



*Adapted from The Leadership Conference Education Fund’s ESSA Guide for Advocates (2017)*



# Who Affects Policy in Education?

Use this handout as a background or meeting material for community members who are looking to better understand the governing structures that support their schools.

## U.S. Administration

- **Who:** The U.S. Department of Education, Congress
- **Access Point:** The [U.S. Department of Education](#) is responsible for the correct implementation of ESSA. You can contact the Department at (800) 872-5327 (multiple languages) or by asking a question at [answers.ed.gov](#). You can also write to, visit, or call your representatives to express your opinion about new legislation. Find their contact information at [house.gov/representatives](#) and [senate.gov](#).

## State Administration

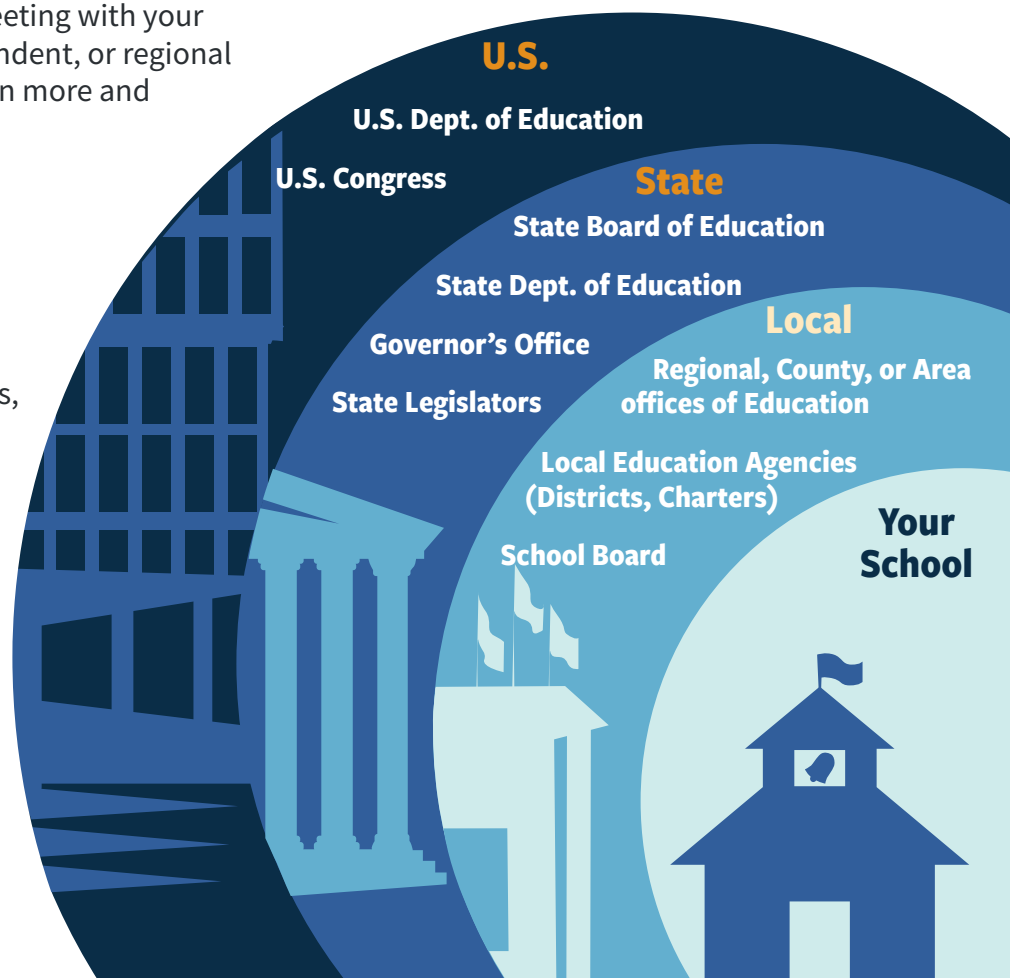
- **Who:** State Department of Education, Office of Public Instruction, Board of Education, Governor's office, and state legislators (state Senate and House of Representatives).
- **Access Point:** Call, write, or visit your state representatives to learn more and express your opinion. Attend town halls, open meetings, and listening sessions hosted by state leaders.

## Local Administration

- **Who:** Regional, county, or area offices of education → Local education Agencies (e.g. districts) → Schools
- **Access Point:** Request a meeting with your principal, district superintendent, or regional office representative to learn more and express your opinion.

## Charter Schools, Networks, and "Authorizers"

- **Who:** Charter school leaders, national charter networks, Charter Management Organizations (CMOs), and state charter authorizers
- **Access Point:** Get in touch with the principal or leadership team at the charter school via email, on the phone, or in-person, or contact an authorizer (found on your state agency website) or national office.



## Who Affects Policy in Education?

### Advocates, Professional Associations, and Business Leaders

- **Who:** State and local research, nonprofit (e.g. community-based or civil-rights organizations), and/or representative associations (e.g. PTA or teachers' union).
- **Access Point:** Advocates are often more involved in policy than you might expect, particularly in research and evaluation of local success and providing recommendations to policy leaders. You can inform these efforts by setting up meetings with organization leaders to learn more about what they do, share your stories, and push for action.

#### Check out these resources for more:

Public Impact's [building family and community demand for dramatic change in schools and resources](#) from The National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools at [sedl.org](#)  
NNPS' [School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action](#)

### Alternative Education Leadership

- **Who:** District leaders, for-profit companies, contractors, or non-profit public health centers that run alternative education programs for struggling students (such as those who have been expelled).
- **Access Point:** Start by meeting with the school's principal or leadership team. State and district leaders are most often in charge of contracts with alternative education leaders and can impact decisions about which schools are available to students and what services can be expected at each school.

### Philanthropy and Grant-Making Organizations

- **Who:** State and local foundations
- **Access Point:** Community organizations are often funded by philanthropic organizations. Working with philanthropic leaders to improve outcomes, consolidate or collaborate with other local grantees, and better align out-of-school services with on-site services in schools can be an effective way to build up community advocacy and have an impact on education.



Check out our [Template: Letter to Decision-Makers](#) for what to say or write when you get in touch!

1. What is the issue/question that you want to talk more about?
2. What level of governance will help to solve your issue/question?
3. Who is one person or office that you will contact to help you with this issue/question? How will you contact them? Is there someone who can help you, like a peer organizer, or other trusted ally?

**(Organizers!** Make sure to provide contact information for local advocates, your local school board or district office, etc.)





# How to Help Your Administrators Better Engage with You

Here is a list of recommendations that you can share with school and district administrators to promote greater community involvement.

## Reach the Unreached

**Prioritize the needs, participation, and leadership of communities that have historically been marginalized and underserved by political decision-making processes.**

- **Conduct leadership training:** Develop leadership trainings for school staff and the broader school community to grow existing and emerging leaders. For example, hold diversity and inclusion trainings for school administrators, families, and community groups.
- **Start with a question:** Begin by welcoming families and communities and inviting input, rather than beginning with workshops, information sessions, or take-home pamphlets. It can help to enlist the support of trusted messengers like widely known and liked family members, community organizers, teachers, and students themselves.

## Show Your Work

**Make your decision-making process transparent: all communities should be able to easily see when and how to participate, as well as how participation is valued and has real impact.**

- **Gather trusted information:** Invest in evaluation and data efforts that include community members, researchers, and data experts: it is essential that decisions are made based on accurate and relevant information. For example, enlist the support and leadership of trusted families and community members to collect this information (e.g. conduct a school climate survey).
- **Check for understanding:** After input sessions, leadership team meetings, and other events, enlist a few leaders to make sure that the information learned and decisions made were accurately reflected in the notes and follow-up action.

## Stick With It

**Engagement efforts must begin at the earliest planning stages, continue throughout implementation in structured, regular ways, and occur at all levels (federal, state, and local).**

- **Invite difficult conversation:** Do not sidestep the hardest conversations; conflict is healthy and addressing difficult issues is essential for breaking down the biggest barriers to trust, collaboration, and success. This might mean conducting a survey among teachers and families to learn more about grievances and holding a school-wide learning session where teachers and families are able to talk through their concerns in person with each other and school leadership. These conversations can benefit from outside moderation.



Check out the NEA's [Parent, Family, Community Involvement in Education and Partners for Each and Every Child's Process and Protest](#) for more!

## Stick With It - CONTINUED

- **Use/Create community centers:** Partner with community centers of all types (faith-based centers, libraries, community/youth centers, etc.) to expand reach for recruitment into leadership and to share back about progress. To go further, it can be helpful to create a family or community center within a school. Creating designated, safe, and inviting physical space for communities can go a long way to encouraging their involvement.

## Maximize Your Resources

**Work with outside partners to strengthen your engagement efforts. This can add resources, staff, intellectual capital, and new perspectives.**

- **Ask community members for help in making materials:** Make materials with partners and community leaders that are accessible, available (in print), etc. Involve community members and families early in the process, and make sure that there are opportunities for revision of materials over time.
- **Focus involvement on student achievement:** Do not limit family, students, or community involvement to fundraising or chaperoning. For example, create an agreement among community members and leaders that is revisited over time that includes specific student, family, teacher, community partner, and school leadership contributions (*Check out [Project Appleseed](#) for more resources on family involvement at [projectappleseed.org](#)*)

## Double Down

**Pull together and analyze community feedback from separate and parallel efforts to identify areas of agreement, amplify the voices of the underserved, and build support for reform.**

- **Set up a leadership team:** Develop inside/outside leadership teams with representation from the community, including students and families. Additionally, moderate leadership team meetings with third-party partners to promote balance.
- **Involve families and students in hiring:** Involve community members in staffing and leadership decisions. For example, invite parents to interview teachers that might teach their children and give them the opportunity to ask their own questions.



**Add your own!**



Check out our [Template: Letter to Decision-Makers](#) for what to say or write when you get in touch!

# Improve Your School: What to Advocate For

Use this when you “Make a Plan” - See the [Organizer’s Packet](#), page 7, for more



**How can school and district administrators change our communities and schools to better offer students what they need and support their success? Here are a few ideas that you can advocate for with your school and district administrators:**



## School Teachers and Staff:

- **Communities help hire staff:** Write job descriptions/hiring materials in collaboration with parents, students, and school staff (e.g. principals, teachers, counselors, custodians), and involve parents and students in interviews
- **Community helps train staff:** Create a training program for new hires that includes conversations with families, students, and leaders; and make peer/community mentorship mandatory for new hires to make sure new staff are supported and integrated into the community
- **Content and “culture” training:** Offer additional professional development and training for staff around content and culture that includes families, students, and other school community members
- **Hire new staff:** Hire new staff, like counselors, social workers, bilingual teachers, special education educators, coaches, family engagement coordinators, internship coordinators, college and career advisors, and health professionals (nurses, psychiatrists, nutritionists)



## New and Different Learning Opportunities for Students:

- **More and different classes:** Add additional courses to the schedule for all students (e.g. performing and visual arts, psychology, civics, coding/computer programming, economics, sexual health)
- **High-level classes:** Offer and support student access to advanced coursework, such as online college credit courses or Advanced Placement (AP) courses
- **Internships, field-trips:** Connect with community businesses or nonprofit organizations to offer internship opportunities or off-site educational experiences (field trips to museums, factories, aquariums, libraries, etc.)

# Improve Your School: What to Advocate For



## School Culture:

- **Introduce positive discipline practices:** Implement Restorative Justice practices or [Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports \(PBIS\)](#), and connect students with mental health professionals, counselors, and mentors
- **Reduce harmful discipline practices:** Reduce out-of-school suspensions and expulsions and/or reduce police presence in schools
- **Community events, councils, and leadership:** Create more meaningful opportunities to bring school communities together in person



## Student Health:

- **Better school breakfast and lunch programs:** Advocate for more nutritious and better tasting food for kids.
- **Recess and outdoor play:** Provide more time for recess, upgrade your school playground (check out Kaboom! for help at [kaboom.org](#)), or advocate for more afterschool activities that support all students — no matter their ability or gender.



## What Else?

School improvement is not one-size-fits-all, and the best thing you can do to support your child is to advocate for what you care about.

If you are looking for materials to share with your community, check out these great resources:

**[Evidence for ESSA](#)** is a website with math and reading programs rated according to how well they work! [evidenceforessa.org](#)

**[The Dignity in Schools Campaign](#)** has resources for improving discipline policies at your school [dignityinschools.org/take-action](#)

**[Community Schools](#)** are a great way to begin linking efforts and growing your resources. Learn more at [learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/community-schools-effective-school-improvement-report](#), and check out the [infographic](#)



Check out our [Template: Letter to Decision-Makers](#) for what to say or write when you get in touch!

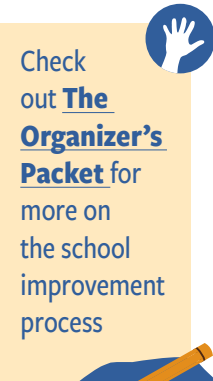
## Add your Own!

- What would you like to change about your school?
- What programs, classes, or committees would you like to be involved in?
- What does your school do well? Can it grow or be available to more students/families/staff?



# Improve Your School: Where to “Write it Down”

Use this page to learn what plans you can affect, and who in the education community is responsible for those plans. Use this on Step 4 of the School Improvement Cycle: Write it Down!



Check out **The Organizer's Packet** for more on the school improvement process

## What Can I Change?

### With My School

- The School Mission Statement or School Handbook → **School** principals and charter school directors are typically those in charge of school handbooks, websites, mission statements, and other school-level decisions
- Targeted Support and Improvement Plan (for schools where certain students are struggling) → Targeted Support and Improvement Plans are written by a **school**-level team, including the school principal

### With My District

- The Local Consolidated Plan (District Funding Application under ESSA) → Most ESSA funds are distributed to states. LEAs (charter schools, districts, regional offices, or other local education agencies) then apply to the state for these funds. Work with the **district** Federal Programs Officer and/or district Superintendent on these applications.
- The Comprehensive Support and Improvement Plan (for schools that are struggling overall) → Comprehensive Support and Improvement Plans and Local Consolidated Plans are written by a district-level team, including the **district** Federal Programs Officer
- School Budget → School budgets are typically written and/or approved by the local school board, **district** leaders, or charter school directors
- Needs Assessment → Required needs assessments are provided by the the **district** office. Your state education agency may provide a template.

### With My State

- Standards or assessments (state level decisions) → State ESSA plans, which include standards and assessments, are written and approved at the **state** level by the Sate Education Agency (SEA).
- State ESSA Plan → Work with the **state** superintendent's office, the Governor's office, or state legislators to make changes to the state ESSA plan

### With Philanthropy

- Grant applications (private or non-profit) → **Grant-making organizations** can be found at the national level, state level, and locally

# Template: Letter to Decision-Makers

Use this template to write to your school principal, school board member, district office staff, superintendent, or other local official. You can also use this as a script for calling by phone or writing an email.

**[Recipient name & address]**

Dear **[recipient name]**:

I am a **[parent/guardian/community member]** at **[name of school]**. I care about **[my child's/ our children's]** education and I want to be involved in making sure they get what they need.

I'm writing to find out how I can be more involved in efforts to implement *the Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) at our school. Every child deserves the chance to get a great education, and I'm excited that ESSA gives us all an opportunity to think about how to make that happen.

**ESSA requires states and schools to give parents and community members a way to participate, and I want to be involved.**

In particular, I'd like to be involved in how our state and school will be handling **[issue that's important to you]**.

This issue is important to me because **[tell your story!]**.

As a **[parent/guardian/community member]**, I know how important it is to be involved in helping students succeed. I look forward to hearing from you about how I can be involved in the ESSA process.

Sincerely,

**[Your name]**  
**[Your contact information]**

Open with a statement of how you are connected to the school and why

Remind them that they are required to help you participate under the law!

Talk about the issues that matter most to you! Tell your story to show why this matters to you.

Some examples:

- School discipline
- Good Teachers
- Classes that interest your child
- Afterschool programs
- Support for students with disabilities
- Support for English learners

Check out **Improve Your School: What to Advocate For** for more ideas!

Don't forget to give them a way to contact you!

## School Leaders: Who to Talk/Write to

- School Principal
- School Board Members
- District "School Improvement" Team
- Union Representative
- District Superintendent
- Governor's Office Education Policy Director
- School Site Coordinator
- District Title I officer
- Education Nonprofit Policy Directors

Find the contact information you are looking for on your school or district's website, by calling your school administrator's office, by asking your child's teacher, or by asking a local community organization for help.



# How to Make Your Meetings Accessible

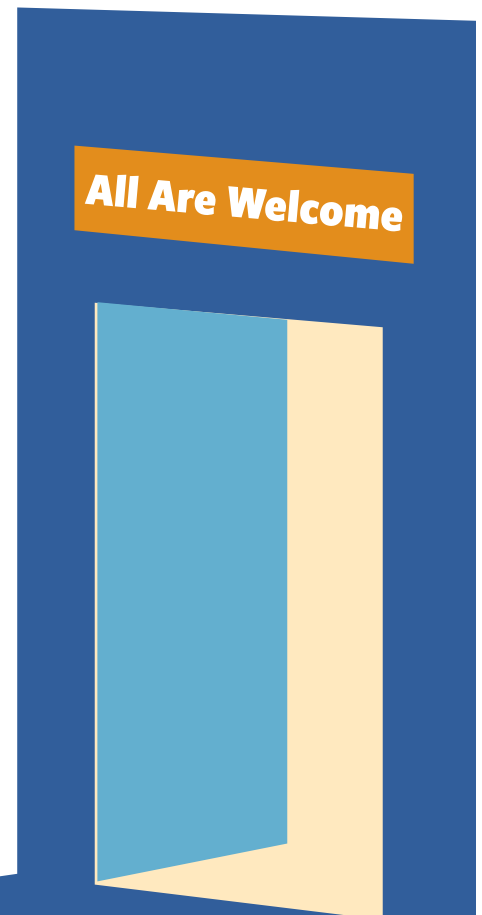
All meetings should be sensitive to the needs of the people who will participate. In order to promote greater representation from your community, consider the following suggestions for how to make meetings more accessible to all, and **ask school and district administrators to ensure that they do everything they can!**

## The Checklist

- ✓ **Target outreach** to those whose voices often go unheard
- ✓ **Make informative materials available:**
  - Ahead of the meeting (including questions to consider)
  - In multiple languages and formats in consideration of varied levels of literacy and proficiency
  - In a format that is easy for all stakeholders to understand
  - Online
- ✓ Host events in a central location that is **accessible** to people with disabilities [see the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)], with transportation assistance
  - We recommend hosting events in places where community members feel safe. Consider that school grounds may not be the best choice
- ✓ **Invite interpreters**, including American Sign Language
- ✓ **Provide food**, and include options for those with dietary restrictions
- ✓ **Hold multiple meetings**, held at times when families and teachers can attend
- ✓ **Provide childcare**
- ✓ Provide access to **homework help** at the meeting
- ✓ Send out **multiple reminders** via email, text and on paper
- ✓ **Record** and/or live-stream the event
- ✓ Where money is available, offer to **financially support travel**
- ✓ Ensure that multiple **experts on the issues are present**, with time for Q&A

## Moving Forward

Provide a **platform to continue to engage** with the issues following the meeting (e.g. a website and email for questions). You may also consider providing a **physical place for stakeholders** to go to provide ongoing input (e.g. Parent Center).



# Sample Meeting Norms

Meetings with families and community members are all opportunities to build greater trust and a lasting, informed, and involved community. **Take every opportunity to do it right!**

## What are Meeting Norms?

- Meeting norms are ways that your group agrees the meeting will go, how participants will behave, and what you hope to get out of the event.

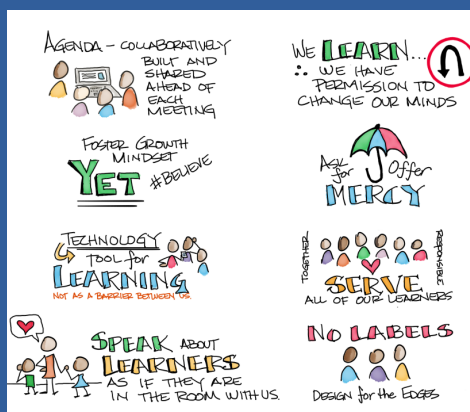
### How to Use Them

- Begin meetings with students, families, and community members by offering a few basic meeting norms for all members to follow and ask for community input to complete the list.
- This list should include norms for how you will engage together during this meeting and should be flexible to meet the needs of the community members in the meeting.
- Meeting norms should be written in large text and remain visible throughout the meeting.

## Sample Norms:

- We will treat each other with respect
- We will be present both physically and mentally
- We will ask questions when in doubt
- We will encourage the participation of all participants
- We will keep what is said anonymous, unless otherwise specified
- We will be sensitive to different perspectives and experiences
- We will keep to our agenda, and finish on time
- We will take notes and share back what we hear with the group

Check out [Learning Forward's](https://learningforward.org) tool for building meeting norms for more, at [learningforward.org!](https://learningforward.org)



# Sample Meeting Exit Survey

Use this survey at the end of a meeting to learn more about how it went for those who participated so that you can learn more going forward. Modify it to suit your needs.

**[Your Event Title]**

**[Date & Time]**

Please fill out the following questions so that we can learn from you and improve going forward.

Name (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

Contact (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

On a scale from 1-5, how engaged did you feel in this activity/meeting?

1      2      3      4      5

What part(s) of the conversation and/or material were most useful? Why?

What part(s) of the conversation and/or material were least useful? Why?

What is one thing you learned today? What is one thing you still want to learn/know?

Would you be interested in following up with us or doing more in the future?

yes      no

Any additional comments?

**Thank you for participating!**

# Sample Meeting Agenda 1


## Engagement in School Improvement


60 minutes; 20-60 Participants


Parents, Families, and/or Other Community Members

We encourage you to change this agenda to suit your interests (topic, advocacy issue), your audience (families, teachers, students, etc.), and to your needs (timing, information level, and space).

- **Introduction: *Who are the presenters/facilitators?*** [10 minutes]
  - Introductions (Who are you? Why you are here?)
  - Poll participants (Who is here? Why/what matters most to you?).
  - Set group meeting norms.

 USE: [Sample Meeting Norms](#)
- **Engagement and ESSA: *What is engagement? Why is it important?*** [5 minutes]
  - Engagement means *meaningful community involvement in decision-making*.
  - Engagement is important! It is both legally required under ESSA, and essential for meeting the needs of our children.
- **The Essentials of Engagement: *Information, strategy, continuous improvement***
  - **Information:** What is ESSA? [5 minutes]
    - Answer basic questions about *what ESSA is* and what it means for your school.

 USE: [The Organizer's Packet](#), pages 3-6, or [Parents & Families: Get involved in ESSA!](#)
  - **Strategy:** getting involved in school improvement [5 minutes]
    - Review the School Improvement Cycle to understand the **process**.

 USE: [The Organizer's Packet](#), page 7, or the third page of [Parents & Families: Get involved in ESSA!](#)
  - **Continuous Improvement:** What additional information do you need? Where is your community trying to go? What might you do to get there? [20 minutes]
    - **Workshop:** In groups of 4-5, choose one thing that you see as a barrier to success for your child/school and answer the following questions:
      - **Learn More:** What other information do you need to help you break down this barrier?
      - **Set Goals:** What is your goal? What are you hoping to change? Set a positive vision!
      - **Make a Plan:** Starting with **engagement**, who will you start to inform and engage with?

 USE: [The Organizer's Packet](#), pages 8-13
- **Sharing out:** [10 minutes]
  - What was your barrier? What is one piece of additional information you need to address it? Who will you be reaching out to first to engage?
- **Closing:** [5 minutes]
  - What's next for this group? Make sure everyone knows when they will hear from you again and how, and that those who want to learn more have a way to do so.

# Sample Meeting Agenda 2

## Building Better Engagement in Your School

60 minutes; 5-25 Participants

Parents, Families, Students, and/or Other Community Members, including school officials/administrators or teachers

We encourage you to change this agenda to suit your interests (topic, advocacy issue), your audience (families, teachers, students, etc.), and your needs (timing, information level, and space).

- **Introduction: *Who are the presenters/facilitators?* [10 minutes]**

- Introductions (Who are you? Why you are here?)
- Poll participants (Who is here? Why/what matters most to you?).
- Set group meeting norms.



USE: [Sample Meeting Norms](#)

- **Engagement: *What is engagement? Why is it important?* [5 minutes]**

- Engagement means *meaningful community involvement in decision-making*.
- Engagement is important! It is both legally required under ESSA, and essential for meeting the needs of our children.

- **Your Role in Engagement [30 minutes] \*\***

- **The job of engagement:** We must engage ourselves and each other. This is our house! You belong in the room.
  - Ask participants to answer: *What are the ways that you have engaged so far in your school?*



USE: [The Organizer's Packet](#), page 6

- **Materials workshop: *What Does an Engaged Community Look Like?* [Page 37 of the Toolkit]**
  - In small groups (2-5 people), read and together fill out the worksheet.



USE: The [What Does an Engaged School Community Look Like?](#) worksheet

- Write down a list of ways that you could help build a more engaged community starting today (e.g. Set up a meeting with the principal! Host a dinner with parents to share and talk about these materials!).

- **Share out: [10 minutes]**

- Share out additions/modifications to the worksheet, and offer one thing that each of your group members (or the full room) will do to support better engagement going forward.

- **Closing: [5 minutes]**

- What's next for this group?
  - Make sure everyone knows when they will hear from you again and how, and that those who want to learn more have a way to do so.

# Sample Meeting Agenda 3

## ESSA and Your School

90 minutes; 5-50 Participants

Parents, Families, Students, and/or Other Community Members, including school officials/administrators or teachers

We encourage you to change this agenda to suit your interests (topic, advocacy issue), your audience (families, teachers, students, etc.), and to your needs (timing, information level, and space).

- **Introduction: *Who are the presenters/facilitators?*** [10 minutes]

- Introductions (Who are you? Why you are here?)
- Poll participants (Who is here? Why/what matters most to you?).
- Set group meeting norms.



USE: [Sample Meeting Norms](#)

- **What is ESSA?** [20 minutes]

- **Read and Ask:** In pairs/small groups, read the *What is the Every Student Succeeds Act?*
  - Optional: Together, come up with two questions to learn more. (e.g. What is a federal law? What is school improvement? How much federal funding does my school get?). If you have access to the internet, find out the answers. If not, go directly to sharing out.



USE: [The Organizer's Packet](#), page 3, and the [Glossary](#)

- **Share out:** What did you learn? What questions do you still have? (record these for follow up or answer them if you can!)

- **What Does ESSA Mean for Your School?** [40 minutes]

- **You Have a Right to Be Involved**

- *This is our house, and you have a right to be in the room, helping to make decisions that affect our children and schools.*



Optional - USE: [The Organizer's Packet](#), page 6

- **What is your State Doing?** Pair up and read or present key material in your state's ESSA Plan.

Share a summary of your state's ESSA Plan. Consider also printing out your school's report card.

- **What is your school *already* doing to support students?**

- Pair up and share strategies that schools do (or your school does) to support students.
- Write down 1-3 ideas for school change that you think will better support students.
  - Per strategy: write down how can you find more information about this idea and/or who to talk to about it (e.g. principal, teacher, students, community grant-maker).

- **Share Out:** [10 minutes]

- **Closing:** [10 minutes]

- Make sure everyone knows when they will hear from you again and how, and that those who want to learn more have a way to do so.
- Encourage participants to carry this information into their own communities.

# Meaningful Engagement in Action:



## Dayton Ohio Public Schools' Culturally Relevant Curriculum

### Learning More

Parent organizer Hashim Jabar was volunteering in a 3rd grade classroom during a lesson on genealogy. He watched as a classroom of all Black students read from a handout defining family members — such as uncles, cousins, sisters and brothers — that showed only pictures of white people. It was clear that these images were not relevant to their experience, and children were not engaged as a result. Worse yet, without representation in the classroom, what messages were the students internalizing about themselves and their families?

### Setting Goals

In response to problematic lessons like this one, more and more educators, parents, students and community leaders are calling for schools to adopt a curriculum that is relevant to the students in the classroom. Hashim was no exception.

### Making a Plan & Writing it Down

Hashim's experience led him to run a campaign to introduce culturally relevant curriculum in Dayton Public Schools through his work at the West Dayton Youth Task Force and Racial Justice NOW! The campaign included the following strategies:

- Curriculum review of the school district's books;
- Selection of culturally relevant books and professionally written lesson plans;
- Attendance at School Board meetings to learn about the process for changing the curriculum — urging the Board to add the new books to the high school curriculum; mobilizing community members to speak on behalf of the issue at School Board meetings;
- Presentation to the school district's policy committee to make the case for why the books were chosen and why they should be added to the curriculum; presentation of lesson plans to the school district's curriculum director; and
- Following-up with one-on-one meetings with the district superintendent, curriculum director, and elected school board members.

### Making it Happen

As a result of this successful campaign, the Dayton Public School Board voted in favor of including two books, *The Mis-Education of the Negro* and *Up From Slavery: An Autobiography* in the high school curriculum.

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For more information, contact H.A. Jabar at [hajabar@rjnohio.org](mailto:hajabar@rjnohio.org) or visit us at [rjnohio.org/crctk](http://rjnohio.org/crctk)

### Key Definitions

**Pedagogy:** the science and art of education, specifically instructional theory; instructional methods

**Culture:** the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group



# Meaningful Engagement in Action:



## New York City's Young Women's Initiative

In 2014, Girls for Gender Equity (GGE), along with other community leaders, challenged the New York City Council to include the racial and gender justice needs of young women of color within the Young Men's Initiative and the national My Brother's Keeper Initiative.

### Learning More

As a public Call to Action, GGE hosted a series of town hall hearings on girls of color in New York City in partnership with the African American Policy Forum (AAPF), dozens of local organizations, Public Advocate Letitia James and New York City Council Member Laurie Cumbo, Chair of the Committee on Women's Issues.

### Setting Goals

Following the hearings, the NYC Council Speaker staff and GGE met to share a vision for a dedicated initiative for young women and girls of color.

### Making a Plan

In March 2015, Girls for Gender Equity, the New York Women's Foundation, and the NoVo Foundation met with the Speaker's office to present a brief and discuss local and national efforts to build an agenda for young women and girls. In May 2015, City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito announced that the City Council would launch a Young Women's Initiative (YWI) focused on changing the lives of young women and girls of color. Along with Council Members Julissa Ferreras-Copeland, Elizabeth Crowley, Laurie Cumbo, and Darlene Mealy, Speaker Mark-Viverito presented an empowering vision before an audience of over 2,000 leaders of community-based organizations and philanthropic partners who gathered for the New York Women's Foundation's annual Celebrating Women Breakfast. Beginning in September 2015, over 200 stakeholders, City Council staff, and young people themselves met numerous times over a six-month period to develop policy, programs, data, and resource recommendations focused on lifting up young women and girls of color in New York City.

### Writing it Down

In May 2016, the New York City Council released the New York City Young Women's Initiative Report and Recommendations that included 80+ policy, program, legislative data and budgetary recommendations from all 5 work groups and overarching recommendations.

### Making it Happen

In August 2016, Girls for Gender Equity began the Young Women's Advisory Council 2.0 (YWAC) so the young women can continue to serve as strategic partners to city agencies, philanthropy and community members. YWAC acts in the capacity of advisory and accountability team as policy and program recommendations are implemented throughout New York City.

YWI Stakeholders continue to track these recommendations and work together to ensure that YWI meaningfully remains a part of the landscape of New York City.



# Meaningful Engagement in Action:



## The Boston Student Advisory Council (BSAC)

The Boston Student Advisory Council (BSAC) is a citywide body of student leaders representing their respective high schools across the city. BSAC organizers work to identify and address pertinent student issues, thereby putting students at the center of the decisions that affect them the most. BSAC acts as the student union of the district, leading organizing efforts, forging relationships with district and city leaders, impacting policy change, and transforming school culture across.

### Learning More and Setting Goals

A 1971 state policy stated that all districts should have a student advisory council (SAC). In 2000, there was no meaningful SAC in Boston and a school committee member brought in Youth on Board to revitalize the program.

### Making a Plan

Youth on Board, a Boston-based, youth-led and adult supported program focused on ensuring that young people are at the center of the decisions that affect their lives, partnered with the Boston Public Schools to co-administer BSAC. Over the next 18 years— through their unique inside/outside partnership, they have made BSAC what it is today.

### Writing it Down


Today, BSAC members:

- convene 1-2 times per week;
- meet with the Superintendent, the Mayor, and members of the School Committee to provide feedback on city and district projects and bring up issues important to them;
- provide student perspectives on education policy issues at the local, state and federal level;
- develop and disseminate materials to help students understand their rights and responsibilities;
- inform their respective schools about relevant citywide issues, and are trained in social emotional learning skills;
- develop youth-led campaigns about STTP, climate justice, student rights, education equity, SEL, and more; and
- get badges or course credit for their participation.

A member of BSAC also serves as a non-voting student representative on the Boston School Committee.

### Making it Happen

Now BSAC is a powerful citywide body of student leaders that represent most high schools in the district and consists almost entirely of low-income students of color, with demographics that closely mirror those of the district. BSAC members identify and organize around pertinent student-identified issues, putting these key stakeholders at the center of the decisions that affect them the most. Projects often operate on multiple levels, addressing district-level systems change, as well as systems change on the state level, while developing workable models of student-led campaign development and movement building for replication across the country. BSAC has worked with their advisors and partners on major initiatives. These include: student rights & responsibilities, sustainability and climate justice, the school-to-prison pipeline, student feedback & teacher evaluation, and more!



Learn more about what BSAC has accomplished at: [youthonboard.org/bostonstudent-advisory-council/](http://youthonboard.org/bostonstudent-advisory-council/)

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# ESSA's Local Engagement Requirements

**These are the parts of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) where local-level stakeholder engagement is required. It is important to keep in mind that while the following engagement opportunities are explicitly outlined in ESSA, all efforts to support schools and students will be more effective, meaningful, and lasting with explicit and ongoing community engagement.**

## Consolidated Plans (Title I)

Local Education Agencies (LEAs) must engage a variety of stakeholders in developing their Consolidated LEA Plan, and must periodically review and revise this plan [Section 1112(a)(1)(A)].

The Consolidated LEA Plan must describe strategies to be used to effectively transition students to postsecondary education and career, which could include coordination with institutions of higher education, employers, or other local partners. The plan must also describe how the LEA will coordinate with early childhood education programs [Section 1112(b)(6)].

## School Improvement (Title I)

### Schools Identified for Comprehensive Support and Improvement

- LEAs must develop Comprehensive Support and Improvement Plans for all schools identified by the State and must partner with stakeholders to develop and implement these plans [Section 1111(d)(1)(A)].

### Schools Identified for Targeted Support and Improvement

- LEAs must monitor each Targeted Support and Improvement Plan developed by identified schools and relevant stakeholders [Section 1111(d)(2)(B)] and these plan provisions to ensure that, among other requirements, schools identify eligible children most in need of services under targeted support and improvement [Section 1112(b)(7)].

LEA plan provisions must include strategies for implementing effective parent and family engagement strategies; supporting, coordinating, and integrating with early childhood education programs; and facilitating effective transitions to high school and postsecondary institutions [Section 1112(b)(7)]. LEAs must also support participating schools in planning and implementing family engagement strategies, potentially collaborating with other stakeholders with expertise in this area [Section 1116].

## Weighted Funding Flexibility Pilot (Title I)

*IF PARTICIPATING:* With regard to Flexibility for Equitable Per-Pupil Funding, LEAs must consult with stakeholders in developing and implementing the local flexibility demonstration for weighted per-pupil funding [Section 1501(d)(1)(G)].

### Teachers and Leaders (Title II)

LEAs must consult with a range of stakeholders in developing applications for Title II formula funds, seek advice on how to improve activities, and describe how data and ongoing consultation will be used to continuously improve Title II local activities [Section 2101(b)(2)].

### English Learners (Title III)

LEAs must use Title III funds for parent and family engagement activities related to English learners, among other required uses of funds [Section 3115(c)(3)(A)].

For subgrants serving immigrant students, LEAs (and other eligible entities) must also describe how they will promote parent, family, and community engagement, and how they consulted with stakeholders in developing their Title III plans [Section 3115(g)(3)].

### Supporting 21st Century Schools (Title IV)

LEAs must consult stakeholders in developing a Title IV plan for Safe and Healthy Schools and Well-Rounded Education, and consult them on an ongoing basis while implementing strategies and programs under Title IV [Section 4106(c)(1)], and LEAs may receive training in all family engagement policies, programs, and activities through partnerships with family engagement centers [Section 4501(1)].

An LEA may:

- use Safe and Healthy Schools funds to designate a coordinator to engage the community by building partnerships and strengthening relationships and supports between schools and communities [Section 4108(5)(H)];
- be consulted in the development of needs and assets analysis for the Promise Neighborhoods Program [Section 4624(a)(4)(B)]; and/or
- be included in an applicant's explanation of how a Promise Neighborhood will establish and continue family and community engagement including involving representative participation from the neighborhood, among other activities [Section 4624(a)(9)(A)].

Additionally, Full-Service Community Schools applications that include broad stakeholders – which may include LEAs – receive priority [Section 4625(b)(2)].

Read the full text  
of the law at [www.  
ed.gov/essa?src=rn](http://www.ed.gov/essa?src=rn).



# A Glossary of ESSA Terms



Adapted from the **ESSA Guide for Advocates**, a publication from The Leadership Conference Education Fund, found at [civilrightsdocs.info/pdf/education/ESSA/ESSA-Guide.pdf](https://civilrightsdocs.info/pdf/education/ESSA/ESSA-Guide.pdf)

**This glossary defines terms and jargon used frequently in education policy conversations. It is designed to help education advocates and parents better understand what education policy professionals mean when they use these terms.**

## academic standards

A set of benchmarks for what all students should know and be able to do by the end of each grade level in order to advance to (and be ready for) the next grade level. States are required to have standards in reading/language arts, math, and science. They may also have standards in other subjects including social studies or physical education. *See also: assessment*

## accountability

The policies and procedures states use to set goals for how well all students (and groups of students) should be doing academically, measure and identify how well schools do in meeting those goals, and support and improve schools and districts that are failing to meet the state goals. *See also: state school rating system, indicators, support and improvement plan*

## additional targeted support and improvement schools

In the Every Student Succeeds Act, these are schools that have been identified for additional targeted support and improvement by the state because one or more groups of students in the school are performing at the same level as the lowest performing 5 percent of Title I schools in the state. These schools put together an improvement plan that is approved by the district. *See also: comprehensive support schools, targeted support and improvement schools, support and improvement plan*

## assessment

Another word for “test.” In the federal education policy context, the term “assessment” refers to the one standardized annual test required under federal law in every grade between 3-8 and at least once in high school (grades 9-12). These measure student achievement (what a student knows and can do) and do not measure intelligence (a student’s underlying ability and potential). *See also: indicators*

## chronic absenteeism

This is a measure for how many students miss a significant number of school days—such as 15 days or 10 percent of school days—for any reason, excused or unexcused. This is different from average daily attendance, which is the percent of students in attendance throughout the year.

## comprehensive support and improvement schools

Schools in which a large share of students is not meeting state goals. These include schools in the bottom 5 percent of all Title I schools in the state, schools with graduation rates below 67 percent, and additional targeted support and improvement schools that have not improved. These schools must design and implement a support and improvement plan which is comprehensive and designed to raise achievement for all students in the school. *See also: additional targeted support schools, targeted support and improvement schools, support and improvement plan*



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### disaggregated data

Disaggregated data refers to data that is broken down to see information about different groups of students. Under the Every Student Succeeds Act, data must be disaggregated by race, ethnicity, family income, disability status, English learner status, gender, migrant status, status as a child in foster care, homelessness status, or military connected status. *See also: subgroup*

### English-language proficiency

The ability to speak, listen to, read, and write English accurately and quickly. Students who are learning English as a second language are typically called “English learners” until they master the English language. This is different from proficiency in English/language arts, which is mastering the state’s academic content standards for reading, writing, speaking, listening, and using language. *See also: English learner (EL), academic standards, indicators*

### English learner (EL)

A student between the ages of 3-21 in elementary or secondary school whose native language is a language other than English. Identified English learners are entitled to civil rights protections and accommodations. Title III of ESSA provides funding to support English learners. *See also: English-language proficiency, Title III*

### indicators

Indicators are measures of different aspects of the education system that — taken together — create a picture of a school’s effectiveness at educating all students (e.g. graduation rates, expulsion rates, assessment scores). ESSA requires certain indicators in state accountability system and allows for others. *See also: state school rating system, summative rating, accountability*

### individualized educational program (IEP)

A plan or program developed by a team, including teachers, specialists, and a student’s parent, that is designed to meet the educational needs of a student with a disability who qualifies for specialized instruction. Schools are required under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to create IEPs for students with disabilities who qualify for specialized instruction.

### local educational agency (LEA)

The formal name for governmental bodies that are legally sanctioned by the state to administer elementary or secondary schools (e.g. school district, charter school that is also a district) in a community. *See also: SEA*

### n-size

The minimum number of students in a subgroup (e.g. Black students, English learners) that must be present in a school to trigger specific reporting and accountability requirements under federal law. An n-size is necessary to ensure data are not reported on so few students as to make identifiable personal information (e.g. reporting that all Latinx students are advanced in math when there is only one Latinx student means knowing the proficiency of a specific student, which is a violation of that child’s privacy). *See also: subgroup*

### needs assessment

The analysis of the needs of a school that has been identified for support and improvement. This analysis forms the basis of a school’s support and improvement plan. *See also: support and improvement plan*

### participation rate

The percent of students who participated in the state’s statewide annual assessment required under ESSA. The law requires that 95 percent of all students and of each subgroup of students be included in the assessment in order to prevent the exclusion of students who are historically marginalized and to ensure there is sufficient data to understand how whole schools and districts are doing. See *also: assessment*

### state educational agency (SEA)

The formal name for governmental bodies that are legally sanctioned by the state to provide information, resources, and technical assistance to schools, districts, and people in the community served by schools (e.g. state department of education). See *also: LEA*

### state school rating system

The system which combines various indicators to produce a summative rating for a school. These ratings are based on a standard set of criteria identified by the state. The system must also identify schools that are in the bottom 5 percent of all Title I schools, schools that have graduation rates of less than 67 percent, schools that have a subgroup of students who are consistently underperforming, and schools that have a subgroup of students whose performance is so low that it is comparable to the performance of schools in the bottom 5 percent of schools. See *also: summative rating, comprehensive support and improvement schools, targeted support and improvement schools, additional targeted support and improvement schools, support and improvement plan, indicators*

### subgroup

A group of students identified by their race, ethnicity, family income, English proficiency, or disability status (e.g. Black students, White students, students who qualify for free or reduced price lunch). Using data about individual student groups helps to identify the presence of barriers to success based on identity and point toward the need for targeted remedies. See *also: super-subgroup, disaggregated*



### Report Cards

Access to data is an important advocacy tool because it provides the public with information about areas where schools or districts need to improve that they wouldn’t otherwise know. To achieve this end, ESSA requires states and districts to publish annual report cards with information about the state as a whole and all districts and schools within the state. Most of this information must be separated (or “disaggregated”) by student characteristics, including major racial and ethnic groups, family income, disability status, and language status. Some data must also be disaggregated by gender, foster care status, homeless status, military connected status, and migrant status.

#### The data that must be reported includes:

- Details of the state accountability system, including which schools were identified for Comprehensive Support and Improvement and Targeted Support and Improvement;
- Results on all accountability indicators (such as student achievement and high school graduation); and
- Opportunity measures (such as Advanced Placement/International Baccalaureate/ dual enrollment, suspension and expulsion, chronic absenteeism, educator qualifications, and per-pupil expenditures).

See page 10 of The Leadership Conference Education Fund’s [ESSA Guide for Advocates](#) for more on School Report Cards



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### support and improvement plan

The plan a school designs and implements to raise student achievement on either a comprehensive (meaning for all the students in the school) or targeted (meaning for a subgroup of students in a school) basis once the school has been identified. The plan must be informed by an assessment of the needs of the particular school, be developed with stakeholder input (e.g. parents, teachers, and principals) and implement research-based strategies. *See also: state school rating system, comprehensive support and improvement schools, targeted support and improvement schools, additional targeted support and improvement schools*

### targeted support and improvement schools

Schools that are identified through the state school rating system because they have one or more groups of students who are consistently underperforming. These schools must design and implement a targeted support and improvement plan that is approved by the district and is designed to raise achievement for the group(s) of students that is (are) consistently underperforming. *See also: comprehensive support and improvement schools, additional targeted support and improvement schools, subgroup*

### Title I plan / consolidated state plan

A state's plan for complying with the requirements of ESSA. A state has the option of submitting plans separately for each title (e.g. Title I plan, Title III plan) or for submitting a plan which describes what the state intends to do to comply with the requirements of the entire law (consolidated plan). These plans must be developed in consultation with stakeholders, be available for public comment, and be submitted to and approved by the U.S. Department of Education. ESSA includes various requirements for the information included in a state's plan such as specifics of the statewide accountability system. *See also: Title I*

## Components of ESSA

**Title I of ESSA:** The first major chapter of the law, which includes the bulk of funding for school districts and schools and which contains the majority of the law's accountability and reporting requirements. Title I funding is targeted to serve low-income students.

**Title II of ESSA:** This chapter is focused on teacher quality and support for teachers.

**Title III of ESSA:** This chapter provides funding and requirements related to English learners.

**Title IV of ESSA:** This chapter provides funding and requirements for other areas of student support, including extended learning, afterschool programs, supportive school climate, well-rounded education, charter schools, and magnet schools.

**Title V of ESSA:** This chapter provides additional requirements and limitations of the U.S. Secretary of Education, funding for rural schools, and rules governing the combining of federal funding.

**Title VI of ESSA:** This chapter provides funding and requirements related to American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian students.

**Title VII of ESSA:** This chapter provides funding and requirements for the Impact Aid program, which compensates districts for lost revenue due to federal lands.

**Title VIII of ESSA:** This chapter includes general requirements which govern the law overall, including which provisions may be waived by the U.S. Department of Education and restrictions on the U.S. Secretary of Education's authority.



# About the Authors

## The Dignity in Schools Campaign (DSC)

DSC is a coalition of over 100 grassroots and education advocacy organizations in 29 states. Since its inception in 2006, DSC members have worked to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline by challenging the systemic problem of unfair school discipline policies that push students out of our nation's schools and by advocating for high-quality educational environments that keep students in school and learning.

DSC members were actively engaged in the crafting of the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA), a federal education law that replaces the No Child Left Behind Act and provides much needed funding and resources to schools serving low-income students and students of color.

## NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF)

Founded in 1940 by Thurgood Marshall, LDF is the nation's oldest civil rights law organization. For almost 80 years, LDF has relied on the Constitution and federal and state civil rights laws to pursue equality and justice for African-Americans and other people of color. LDF litigated and won the historic U.S. Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education*, which instituted the principle of equal access to education for all students and banned racial segregation in our nation's schools. Since *Brown*, LDF has continued to represent students in school districts to ensure they receive quality and equitable educational opportunities.

## Partners for Each and Every Child (Partners for), a project of the Opportunity Institute

A project of the Opportunity Institute, Partners for Each and Every Child (Partners for) is a collaborative, nonpartisan network of education researchers, advocacy organizations, and policy experts who are committed to educational excellence for each and every child. The network grew out of the work of the Congressionally chartered national Commission for Equity and Excellence in Education. Our mission is to build an infrastructure of interconnected work that will encourage a growing portion of the education policy community to break down barriers to advance sound educational policies, attentive to matters of equity and responsive to the needs of at-risk, underserved, and politically underrepresented students.

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