

# Checklist for ESSA Implementation

In December of 2015, the **Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)** was signed into law, replacing the No Child Left Behind Act. This law provides federal funding, which has to be spent according to requirements in the law, to schools, districts and states to raise achievement for low-income students and other historically marginalized students.

ESSA has the potential to address longstanding educational inequalities and make a fairer and more effective system of public education, but that potential will only be realized if the right policies are put in place. As states begin to implement the law and make changes to their own policies and practices to comply with ESSA's requirements and maintain eligibility for federal funding, it is critical that states make decisions that help to build a more equitable education system for all children.

This checklist provides civil rights advocates and others fighting for educational equity a framework through which they can review state policy decisions to see whether or not they are likely to make our educational system work better for low-income students, students of color, students with disabilities, English learners and other marginalized students.

## 1

**Engage Parents, Families and Communities:** States, districts and schools should robustly engage parents, families and communities in the development, implementation, and review of policies and practices to implement ESSA

### Consultation in Plan and Policy Development and Public Reporting

- State, district and school Title I plans are developed in consultation with parents and communities, including civil rights organizations, tribes and other community-based organizations representing underserved communities. Consultation is meaningful, early and frequent.
- Opportunities to share priorities and concerns, provide feedback and offer perspectives are made widely available, occur at convenient times and locations, and include sufficient information for parents and communities to meaningfully contribute.
- Formal working groups, committees and advisory structures include representation from the civil rights community, tribes and community based organizations representing historically marginalized students and families.
- Parents, families and communities, including civil rights organizations and tribes, are involved in the development of school, district and state report cards.
- There is evidence of the involvement of parents and families of historically marginalized students including low-income students, students of color, English learners and students with disabilities in the development of district parent and family engagement policies, which are periodically reviewed and updated.

### Engagement at the School and District Level

- The process for deciding how the parent engagement 1 percent set-aside will be spent is transparent and inclusive of low-income parents.
- The process for deciding how all Title I funds will be spent is transparent and inclusive of low-income parents.
- Parent and family engagement policies are distributed in a language parents can understand.
- Parent and family engagement activities are held at convenient times and locations, low-income parents are encouraged to attend, and information about the activities is made available in places and languages accessed and used by parents.
- Parents and families receive regular information about their child's progress in school and what is being done to raise their child's achievement.
- Parents and families receive regular information about student achievement and other data about student opportunities and outcomes in their child's school and what is being done to address challenges with the school.

# 2

**Hold Schools and Districts Accountable:** State accountability systems should hold all schools accountable for the achievement of all students

## Goals

- The school rating system has goals for raising achievement for all students and each group of students that are ambitious and expect faster progress for groups of students starting behind.

## Identification of Schools

- The school rating system identifies schools as “consistently underperforming” when any subgroup of students fails to meet the state’s goals for two consecutive years.
- Every school is given a summative rating that reflects the performance of the school overall, for all indicators and for each individual subgroup (there are no combined subgroups or super-subgroups).
- No school that would have been identified as in need of support and improvement on the basis of student achievement, high school graduation, and progress towards English language proficiency ceases to be identified because of success on the other indicator of school quality.
- Data is reported and included in the accountability system for any subgroup with 10 or more students. (The “n-size” is 10.)

## Indicators in the Rating System

- Each of the indicators is disaggregated by each subgroup of students and is the same statewide for the applicable grade level.
- The high school graduation rate used is the four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate.
- The “other academic indicator” for K-8 schools is a measure of student academic growth compared to academic standards (not other students).
- The indicator of school quality, climate and safety is a measure of exclusionary school discipline and/or chronic absenteeism, disaggregated by student subgroup.

## Support and Improvement Plans

- There is a process for demonstrating that parents and community based organizations representing historically marginalized students, including local civil rights organizations, have been included in the design and implementation of school support and improvement plans.
- Support and improvement plans require additional research-based activities, implemented in partnership with the district and state, in the event that schools have failed to exit out of their category of identification after three years.
- In the needs assessment, access to high quality teachers and school leaders, per-pupil funding and exclusionary discipline (both overall rates and disproportionality) are all taken into account when designing the support and improvement plan.

## Inclusion in Assessments

- When fewer than 95 percent of students are included in the state assessment, it is reflected in the school rating and a plan is implemented to ensure that the school meets the participation rate requirement in the subsequent year.
- Accommodations are provided to students with disabilities and English learners and there is clear information, in a language parents understand, about how to seek assistance if students are not receiving accommodations to which they are entitled.
- Training based in detailed guidance is provided to IEP teams (including parents of students with IEPs), is provided to teachers, schools and districts about how to appropriately identify those students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who should be included in the alternate assessment.
- Procedures are in place to prevent the inclusion of more than 1 percent of students in a district in the alternate assessment.

# 3

**Allocate Educational Resources Equitably:** Critical educational resources should be equitably allocated within (and between) schools and between school districts

- Plans identify disparities in access to educational resources (including effective, experienced and in-field teachers and school leaders, per-pupil funding, discipline and climate, and advanced courses) and include definite timelines for addressing any disparities within or between schools or between school districts, with the state endorsing the State and district Title I plan of action.
- The public is able to easily access information about how federal, state and local funds are spent and how the public can be involved in budgetary decisions, especially Title I funds.
- States have defined what it means to be an “effective, in-field, and experienced teacher” in consultation with parents and in a way that encourages teacher diversity.
- States have publicly reported, at the school and district level, the level of access students have to effective, in-field and experienced teachers. Any disparities between schools and districts with (and without) large shares of students of color and/or low income students are clear in the publicly reported data.
- There is a robust and ambitious plan, developed in consultation with parents and communities (including civil rights organizations) to address any disparities in access to effective, in-field and experienced teachers.
- Parents and communities (including civil rights organizations) are consulted on how Title II grant funding for improving access to effective teachers and school leaders is spent.
- State, district and school reporting on access to rigorous courses is accurate, annual, timely and reported in a way that makes disparities clear.

# 4

**Provide User Friendly and Accessible Data:** Parents and advocates should have access to meaningful and informative data

- Information about the performance of individual students on assessments is available to and understandable to parents and guardians in a timely manner.
- Information about the performance of individual schools, districts and the state as a whole is available to and understandable to parents, guardians and the community in a timely manner.
- Information is provided in the language parents speak and with accommodations for parents with disabilities.
- School, district and state report cards are all comparable statewide and available on the state’s, districts’ and schools’ websites.
- Cross-tabulated data is available on the state department of education’s website in a way that can be manipulated by parents, advocates and researchers and which does not include barriers to access, including a fee.
- Data about AAPI students is further disaggregated by census categories, the state or district has published a date by which data will be available or the state or district has sought technical assistance from the U.S. Department of Education to help collect and report data disaggregated in this manner.
- Annual school discipline data is included on school, district and state report cards.