

THE 5 THINGS WE WERE LOOKING FOR IN CALIFORNIA'S ESSA PLAN – HOW DID THE STATE DO?

California's draft Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) plan is now open for public comment. As we reviewed the plan, we were looking for **five big things**. How did the state do? Here's what is in the plan and what we think still needs to be done to strengthen protections and services for low-income students, students of color, and other traditionally underserved populations. **Overall, we think the plan is thin on details, makes too few commitments, and falls short on equity.**

The good news is that state has the opportunity to make changes before it submits the plan to the U.S. Department of Education in September of 2017. Here, we offer recommendations for what needs to be done to improve the plan.

WE LOOKED FOR:

1 **AMBITIOUS, LONG-TERM GOALS FOR STUDENT SUCCESS**

OUR
RATING



What's There:

The plan doesn't yet commit to particular goals. But it proposes one possible approach: The long-term goal would be to get to Green on the Dashboard within 5 to 7 years. However, there are 5 green boxes on the state's 5x5 grid, and only 2 of those are included in the proposed goal (see **Figure 1**). The Green boxes that represent "declined" change or "medium" performance wouldn't count as meeting the goal. We think this is confusing and difficult to explain.

The state has not yet explained how the goals will matter. There are no incentives for schools or districts to reach or exceed goals, nor are there consequences or escalating supports for schools or districts that fail to progress toward goals.

The state has not set interim progress measures, as it is required to. The plan says that each district will be responsible for calculating how much progress it needs to make for each subgroup to be on track to achieving the goals and closing gaps. Unfortunately, the state provides no guidance or standards for how to do this, making it difficult for stakeholders to know how much progress their schools and districts are expected to make for each group, each year.

The State Should Make These Changes:

- Set a numeric goal for each indicator. If the state insists on using colors as goals, recolor cells on the Dashboard so that schools and districts are Green only if they meet goals. For example, recolor "high/declined" performance so that it is Yellow, not Green.
- Communicate on the Dashboard how much progress is needed to reach goals, for each subgroup, and whether that progress is being achieved.
- Create incentives for schools and districts to make progress toward goals. For example, after 5 years the state could change Yellow cells to Orange. Schools and districts still "in the Yellow" at that point would become eligible for technical assistance. The state could also consider offering awards or designations for schools and districts that achieve Green and Blue ratings for historically underserved subgroups.



Figure 1: Proposed Goal for Academic Indicator (goal = area inside dotted line)

		Change				
		Declined Significantly	Declined	Maintained	Increased	Increased Significantly
Status	Very High	Yellow	Green	Blue	Blue	Blue
	High	Orange	Yellow	Green	Green	Blue
	Medium	Orange	Orange	Yellow	Green	Green
	Low	Red	Orange	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
	Very Low	Red	Red	Red	Orange	Yellow

WE LOOKED FOR:

2 HOW EACH SCHOOL IS PERFORMING OVERALL, AND AS COMPARED WITH OTHER SCHOOLS

OUR RATING



What’s There:

The state has adopted a concise set of indicators that measure school and district performance. It evaluates performance and progress using a color-coded dashboard. Each school and district receives colored ratings for each indicator, for each subgroup of students.

The state does not plan to summarize data into an overall score, color, or rating. Stakeholders will have to rely upon the multi-indicator dashboard to differentiate schools. This will make it difficult for them to compare schools.

The state has developed a few options for identifying the bottom 5% of schools – those that are eligible for “Comprehensive” support. It intends to identify schools that are Red on all indicators, or that have a combination of Red/Orange ratings. The state plans to use these same criteria to determine which schools need “Targeted” assistance because they are low-performing for particular subgroups. The state has not yet communicated how this information will be made available through the Dashboard.

The State Should Make These Changes:

- Finalize the methodology for identifying schools eligible for **Comprehensive** support. Share a list of potentially eligible schools so that stakeholders can see the implications of this methodology.
- Develop a methodology for identifying the schools eligible for **Targeted** supports. These should be those that have a very low-performing or consistently underperforming subgroup of students. Share a list of potentially eligible schools so that stakeholders can see the implications of this methodology.
- When developing methods for identifying **Comprehensive** and **Targeted** schools, create more differentiation between schools than the 5 color categories currently allow. There is great variation between schools, even in the same color bands.
- Commit to displaying, on the dashboard, whether a school is receiving **Comprehensive** or **Targeted** support.
- Summarize each school’s performance into an overall color, and make equity matter in that overall rating.



A MEANINGFUL PLAN FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

What's There:

The draft plan includes few details and vague language when describing how school improvement will happen. It describes some elements that it “may include” without any firm commitments.

The state does not plan to implement “rigorous interventions” until schools have been stuck in the bottom 5% for an undefined number of years. Even then, it offers a list of light-touch, general improvement strategies, such as conducting a needs assessment and identifying evidence-based practices.

The state “may offer” additional assistance “such as customized planning support, coaching, participation in cohort networks, and COE mandatory planning and embedded coaching.” While these are important continuous improvement strategies for most schools, they do not strike us as the intensive intervention that is warranted in our most struggling schools. This may be too little, too late.

The State Should Make These Changes:

- ❑ Develop a clear plan for how the state will deliver support and what assistance will look like. At minimum, tell stakeholders when to expect that plan.
- ❑ If a district has one or more schools identified for **Comprehensive** support, identify that district as also required to receive technical assistance from its county or CCEE (in addition to existing LCFF criteria). This will ensure that any failing school is supported by a district that itself is receiving adequate support.
- ❑ Create a list of meaningful improvement options that will be available to schools identified for **Comprehensive** support.
- ❑ Create a list of assurances for parents whose children attend schools identified for **Comprehensive** support. This list should outline resources and options available to parents as well as opportunities for them to engage in the school improvement process.
- ❑ If a district has one or more schools identified for **Comprehensive** or **Targeted** support, require that district to modify its LCAP to show data on how it is allocating resources (including quality teachers, rigorous courses, and overall dollars) to school sites, and how it will improve the allocation of resources to be more equitable.



4 A PLAN TO ADDRESS RESOURCE INEQUITIES

What's There:

The plan says that California will “review resource allocation to those LEAs and schools” identified for Comprehensive and Targeted support. However, it does not define what it means by resources, nor does it make any firm commitments. It mentions a list of things that this process “may include,” including a review of improvement plans, program monitoring, and differentiated assistance. The language is as vague and noncommittal as the language regarding school support and improvement.

The plan does not include any language or commitments regarding budget transparency. Specifically, it does not say whether or how it will comply with ESSA’s requirement to report per-pupil school site expenditure data on the state report card.

WE LOOKED FOR:

5 A PLAN THAT ADDRESSES EDUCATOR EQUITY



What's There:

The state plans to annually track data on equitable access to ineffective, out-of-field, and inexperienced teachers, and it will annually report on the state’s progress toward eliminating teacher equity gaps. The plan says that districts with identified equity gaps will use their LCAPs to address these equity issues. This is an acceptable start.

The plan does not yet define ineffective teaching. The CDE has offered four “core principles” to guide the development of this definition. The first is “Respecting local collective bargaining agreements” and the second is “Facilitating cooperation between teachers and school leadership.” These principles emphasize adult interests rather than the needs of students and families.

It is unclear how the state plans to help districts and schools improve equitable access to teachers. The plan only says: “Upon request, the CDE will provide technical assistance regarding resolving issues of disproportionate

The State Should Make These Changes:

- ❑ Define “resource equity” as part of the state plan. We suggest that definition focus on, at minimum, equitable access to quality teachers, rigorous coursework, and dollars.
- ❑ Commit to reporting per-pupil expenditures by school site in the state report card and provide state guidance on how this site level reporting should be reported.
- ❑ Explain how this school site expenditure data, in combination with other state and local data, can be used by districts with Comprehensive and Targeted schools to ensure resource equity.

The State Should Make These Changes:

- ❑ Define “ineffective” or “effective” teacher. Revise the core principles guiding the development of this definition to focus on students.
- ❑ Identify and describe the data California will gather to measure whether ineffective (or effective) teachers are equitably assigned to school sites and students. Draw upon multiple measures such as credentials, teacher attendance, and teacher evaluation data where available.
- ❑ Articulate the state’s plan for monitoring equitable access to teachers, publicly reporting progress, and supporting schools and districts that have significant disproportionately.
- ❑ Describe the steps the state will take to improve the statewide supply and retention of effective teachers.
- ❑ Strengthen LCFF Priority Area #1 to include more data on such things as teacher working conditions, teacher turnover, teacher attendance, and educator

access.” The state needs to take a far more active role in monitoring access, requiring improvements in districts with significant disproportionate, providing technical assistance to districts around workforce and teacher quality issues, and working to improve the breadth and quality of the teacher pipeline so that students have better access to effective educators.

satisfaction. This will ensure that LCFF technical assistance and district LCAPs more substantially focus on quality teaching,

The ESSA plan presents an opportunity for California to articulate how “The California Way” will close opportunity and achievement gaps, so that all students can succeed in school, college, and life. Unfortunately, the plan isn’t there yet. With the changes we recommend here, we believe California leaders can better communicate their commitment to equity.

For more information:

- Our accountability resources:
<https://west.edtrust.org/equity-accountability-what-you-need-to-know>
- California’s ESSA state plan and opportunities to comment:
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/re/es/draftplantoolkit.asp>



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