

# THE 5 BIG THINGS WE ARE LOOKING FOR IN CALIFORNIA'S ESSA PLAN



The Education Trust–West

The new federal education law known as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) provides an opportunity for states to advance equity and ensure that all students have access to a high-quality education. In California, this gives us the chance to align our new system of state accountability and support with federal requirements as the state develops our ESSA state plan.

As we look at the state's draft ESSA plan during the review and public comment period in late spring and through the summer, we will be trying to answer **five big questions**:

## 1. DOES THE STATE HAVE AMBITIOUS, LONG-TERM GOALS FOR STUDENT SUCCESS?

ESSA requires states to set long-term goals and measures of interim progress on key academic indicators.

**We will be looking for numeric, time-bound goals.** We think the state must be clear about the test scores and graduation rates it expects schools and districts to aim for. We will not be satisfied if the state says that the goal is "Green" or "Blue" on the new Dashboard, as the color itself is not a goal. A color might, however, indicate whether a goal has been achieved. We also believe the state must set a clear timeframe for these goals (such as 10 or 20 years), with clarity about how measures of interim progress align with these goals, and a plan for how assistance will be provided to schools not on track to meet goals. Finally, we believe these goals must be clearly visible on the state's Dashboard.

## 2. DOES THE STATE PLAN TO COMMUNICATE HOW EACH SCHOOL IS PERFORMING OVERALL, AND AS COMPARED WITH OTHER SCHOOLS?

ESSA requires states to meaningfully differentiate all public schools and identify some schools for "Comprehensive Support and Improvement" and "Targeted Support and Improvement."

**We want the state to make this information clear and accessible through the new Dashboard.** While the Dashboard shows color-coded ratings for each school and district, these colors alone do not differentiate schools from one another. We believe the data needs to be aggregated or summarized in some way to make it easy for stakeholders to identify which schools are higher and lower performing. And if schools are identified for Comprehensive or Targeted Support and Improvement, we believe that information should be clearly visible on the Dashboard.

## 3. WHAT IS THE STATE'S PLAN FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT?

ESSA requires improvement plans for all schools identified for Comprehensive Support and Improvement or Targeted Support and Improvement. These schools must receive technical assistance. States must describe the criteria schools must reach before they stop receiving assistance, and states must also describe how interventions will be escalated in cases where schools don't improve.

**We want to see a detailed plan for how the state will provide assistance to identified schools.** We expect to see assurances that parents and the community will be involved in every step of the school improvement process. We will look for a description of the technical assistance that may be provided, defined exit criteria, and a clear indication of when interventions will be escalated. We also hope to see a plan for how the state will use funds strategically to provide 1) supports for the lowest performing schools, 2) assistance for schools that are consistently underperforming for one or more groups, and 3) efforts to improve the ability of leaders and educators to more effectively serve vulnerable student populations.

#### 4. DOES THE STATE PLAN SHINE A LIGHT ON AND ADDRESS RESOURCE INEQUITIES?

ESSA expects states to examine whether school districts are allocating resources equitably. School districts with significant numbers of schools identified for Targeted or Comprehensive Support and Improvement must review how they are allocating resources. And the state must report how much each school is spending per pupil, allowing stakeholders to examine whether resource equity is being achieved.

**We expect to see a plan for how the state will report per-pupil expenditures by school site.** We hope to see the state express its intent to disaggregate LCFF base funds from supplemental and concentration funds. We will also be looking for information on how the state plans to issue guidance to school districts to ensure that these expenditures are standardized and comparable across school districts.

#### 5. DOES THE STATE PLAN ADDRESS EDUCATOR EQUITY?

ESSA requires states to monitor whether low-income students and students of color have equal access to effective, experienced, and qualified teachers. It also requires states to support effective instruction.

**We want to see how the state defines *effective teaching*, and we expect the state to lay out a meaningful plan for monitoring equitable access to these teachers.** The state should have a plan to gather, report, and act on these and other data on educator quality. We will be looking to see whether the state has a plan to ensure that the students in low-performing and high-poverty schools have access to the most effective educators. Finally, we will be looking for information on the state's plan to improve teacher recruitment, induction, and retention so that every student has access to quality educators.