



EXPLORING EQUITY ISSUES:

How ESSA Provides the Opportunity to Target Inequitable Education Practices and Outcomes

Karmen Rouland, MAEC

Disclaimer

MAEC is committed to the sharing of information regarding issues of equity in education. The contents of this paper were developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. However, these contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the federal government.



EXPLORING EQUITY ISSUES:

How ESSA Provides the Opportunity to Target Inequitable Education Practices and Outcomes

Education policy has the potential to eradicate opportunity and achievement gaps. For those on the ground enacting policy, however, it can be difficult to translate it into optimal strategies for helping all students achieve.

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) is a way for state education agencies (SEAs), local education agencies (LEAs), and educators to undo the social and policy inequalities and practices that have contributed to the achievement gap between students of color and white students. ESSA does this by leveraging innovative strategies to transform how teaching and learning is done in this country. Unfortunately in 2018, we still need education policies to break down systemic barriers to educational opportunities for our most vulnerable students, including English Learners, students of color, students from low-income households, and students with disabilities. To address the individual needs of these students, we must acknowledge the complex relationship

between race, poverty, and systemic barriers to a quality education. How can we resolve issues of racial disparities without first acknowledging race?

PART I: BACKGROUND ON ESSA



The Every Student Succeeds Act was signed into law on December 10, 2015 and replaced many of the federally-mandated provisions in the No Child Left Behind Act. ESSA provides states with flexibility to remedy low-performing schools and requires states to design their own accountability systems. ESSA shifts authority from the federal government to states and districts. It

allows states to use Title I and Title II funds to support their highest poverty schools and districts and provide training to educators. In this brief, we highlight some of the key ESSA provisions that provide opportunities for SEAs and LEAs to forge a path towards equity:

Disaggregated data by subgroup.

ESSA asks each district and state to collect and report data on outcomes for students, disaggregated by subgroups, including youth with a parent in the military, youth experiencing homelessness, and youth in foster care. Measuring equity matters for all students, especially our most vulnerable students. Analyze data from an equity perspective by disaggregating the data and examining outcomes for subgroups of students. Educators and leaders can create SMART goals (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timely) and an action plan to monitor strategies to improve or sustain those goals until it is met.

Academic standards.

ESSA requires states to adopt consistent, high academic standards that will prepare all students for postsecondary education and careers. This includes students with disabilities and those receiving special education services.

Resources to support teachers and leaders.

ESSA Title II Part A funds can be used by SEAs and LEAs to provide students from low-income families and students of color greater access to effective teachers. In 2016, the U.S. Department of Education issued non-regulatory guidance to provide SEAs and LEAs with meeting obligations under ESSA Title II. Title II funding can be used to provide cultural competency training for educators, to recruit and retain a diverse educator workforce, and to support educators and educator-leaders ensuring that students have equitable access to excellent educators.

Support for and equitable access to a quality education for homeless students.

The McKenny-Vento Homeless Assistance Act ensures educational protections and rights for students experiencing homelessness. Under ESSA, SEAs and LEAs are obligated to review their policies and practices to remove barriers to a quality education and schooling for students experiencing homelessness. These students must have access to all eligible school programs and services.

Accountability goals and indicators.

In their accountability goals, SEAs are obligated to address academic

proficiency on standardized tests, proficiency for English Learners, and high school graduation rates for all student groups. According to ESSA, these goals must be long-term and ambitious. In terms of indicators, states must establish a means of differentiating schools on an annual basis based on the following indicators:

- Academic achievement
- High school graduation
- One or more academic indicators applicable to elementary and middle schools (e.g. growth)
- English Learners progress in attaining English
- Additional indicator of school quality or student success (e.g. postsecondary readiness, school climate and safety)

ESSA is providing the rails and giving opportunity for those in charge to do what is right for kids to ensure access to a quality and equitable education.

PART II: HOW CAN WE USE ESSA TO REINFORCE EDUCATIONAL EQUITY?



STRATEGIES FOR SEAs, LEAs, AND SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

1. Counteract racial inequality and unequal resource allocation by directing the use of Title funds and creating programs and pathways for student success, especially for schools and students with the greatest need.
2. Establish academies to provide training and support to educators, principals and other school leaders on equitable practices. An example of an academy is the Promising Principals Academy in Maryland. The Promising Principals Academy is a year-long, intensive professional development program, sponsored by the Maryland State Department of Education, to provide promising school leaders with the skills and knowledge they need to

successfully take on the role of being a school principal.

3. In order to recruit and retain educators, incentivize and reward excellent educators serving in high-needs schools. Create career pathways such as programs in Delaware and Missouri.
4. Develop “grow your own” initiatives to ensure that local talent remains in hard-to-staff areas. This is especially true for rural areas and will address the issue of teacher shortage.
5. Review school policies to ensure that students who are homeless, students with disabilities, and students in foster care are not adversely affected by current policies due to circumstances out of their control. This is especially true for discipline and attendance policies.
6. Set concrete goals for equity based on the performance of subgroups.
7. Create family engagement frameworks to that inform educators and parents in working together to support students.

STRATEGIES FOR CLASSROOM TEACHERS

1. Employ a student-centered approach. This approach is one where students are active seekers of information rather than passive receivers of information from teachers. In a student-centered classroom approach, students are involved in decision-making in the classroom and their skills and interests are incorporated into the learning environment.
2. Create a positive classroom climate where students feel connected to the teacher and other students. This has a positive effect on student attendance, engagement, and academic performance, all important outcomes and the basis of ESSA.
3. Provide opportunities for all students to learn by giving students intellectually challenging assignments.
4. Use instructional materials that consider multiple cultural perspectives. Much research has shown that culturally relevant instruction is instrumental in student academic success.
5. Examine the performance of students by reviewing assessment and other classroom data. Seek

supports for those students that need assistance to stay on track.

6. Communicate with families regularly about their child's progress and learning.

Written by Karmen Rouland, MAEC

REFERENCES

- Cook-Harvey, C.M., Darling-Hammond, L., Lam, L., Mercer, C., & Roc, M. (2016). *Equity and ESSA: Leveraging Educational Opportunity Through the Every Student Succeeds Act*. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.
- Simmons, W. (2016). Advancing Equity: A Student-Centered Approach Should Guide the “Every Student Succeeds Act”. Retrieved from Brown University, Annenberg Institute for School Reform <http://www.annenberginstitute.org/blog/commentary/advancing-equity-student-centered-approach-should-guide-%E2%80%9Cevery-student-succeeds-act>
- The Every Student Succeeds Act: What's in it? What does it mean for equity? An overview.* (2016). Retrieved from The Education Trust <https://1k9gl1yevnfp2lpq1dhrqe17-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/What-is-in-ESSA-Overview.pdf>.
- U.S. Department of Education. (2016, June). Non-regulatory guidance: Ensuring educational stability for children in foster care. Washington, DC: <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/edhhsfostercarenonregulatorguide.pdf>.
- U.S. Department of Education. (2016, September). Non-regulatory guidance for Title II, Part A: Building systems of support for excellent teaching and leading. Washington, DC: <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/essatitleiipartaguidance.pdf>.
- U.S. Department of Education. (2016, September). Supporting school reform by leveraging federal funds in a schoolwide program: Non-regulatory guidance. Washington, DC: <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/essaswpguidance9192016.pdf>.