This is NOT a Test:
The Every Student Succeeds Act and Parental and Caregiver Engagement
ESEA: Some history
History: The Elementary and Secondary Education Act

• Originally passed in 1965, ESEA is the main federal education law in the U.S.

• ESEA set up the Title I program, which currently provides more than $14 billion dollars to states to support the education of historically underserved students.

• There have been many iterations of ESEA since the 1960s, and the law has changed a lot over time
  • Initially – lots of requirements related to inputs (how money could be used, etc.)
  • Starting in 1994 – More flexibility regarding how money could be used, but an expectation of improved outcomes.
  • In 2002, No Child Left Behind set the important expectation that schools must be making progress with all groups, not just some
So what’s in ESSA?
The Every Student Succeeds Act: What’s In It? What Does It Mean For Equity?

Overview
January 2016

On Dec. 10, President Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) into law. ESSA is the most recent version of the federal government’s biggest K-12 law: the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which came into effect in 1965.

ESSA contains a number of meaningful levers that education leaders, parents, members of the business and civil rights communities, and advocates can use to advance education equity. These levers, covered in detail on the following pages, include:

- Consistent, state-adopted standards for all students that are aligned with the demands of postsecondary education and work;
- Statewide annual assessments aligned with statewide standards;
- Clear requirements that statewide accountability systems must ensure progress for the groups of students who have been behind; base school ratings on the progress of all groups of students and expect action when any group of students is consistently underperforming;
- Richer public reporting on academic outcomes and opportunities to learn for all groups of students, including, for the first time, school-level per-pupil spending and access to rigorous coursework;
- Resources to support teachers and leaders, and a demand that states and districts report on and address inequities in the rates at which low-income students and students of color are assigned to ineffective, out-of-field, or inexperienced teachers; and
- Continued targeting of federal funding to the highest poverty schools and districts.

To be clear, none of these levers will guarantee gap-closing and improved achievement for all. No law, no matter how strong, could ever do that.

But taken together, they represent key building blocks for an equity-focused school system—one that sets high expectations for all students, provides resources necessary for meeting those expectations, measures and reports progress toward them, and ensures action when any school—or any group of students—falls off track.

We at The Education Trust look forward to working alongside equity advocates from all corners—from classrooms to statehouses, community centers to boardrooms—to take hold of these blocks and together build the schools and systems all students need and deserve.

The following pages include more information on each of these levers, including information on what ESSA requires and questions equity-minded advocates should be asking. Those looking for even more detail about the specifics of ESSA can check out our detailed summary.

1 When used in this document, the term "district" refers to both traditional public school districts and charters.

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Standards
Why are **standards** important for equity?

- Standards are statements of what students should know and be able to do at each grade level.

- Having consistent, high expectations for all students is critical as a safeguard against some students being taught at a lower level than other students.
Standards: What does ESSA require?

- Statewide standards that apply to all students in at least math, English Language Arts, and science

- Standards must be aligned to
  a) Entrance requirements for credit-bearing courses in the state’s system of public higher education; and
  b) Relevant career and technical education standards
Key Questions

• Do the standards apply to all public schools and all public school children?
• Are they aligned with higher education institution entrance requirements without the need for remediation? How?
• Are they aligned with relevant state career and technical education standards? How?
• How will educators get the supports they need to effectively teach state standards?
• How will states and districts monitor how well standards are being implemented in high- versus low-poverty schools?
Assessments
Why are **assessments** important for equity?

- Statewide annual assessments provide an objective measuring tool to determine student progress across classrooms, schools, and districts.

- Good assessments help expose gaps in performance between various student groups.

- Good assessments give schools and systems information they need to get better at educating all students.
Assessment: What does ESSA require?

- **Annual statewide assessments** in reading and math in 3rd – 8th grade and once in high school; science assessments once each in elementary, middle, and high school.

- Assessments must be **aligned with state standards** and provide information on whether a student is performing **at grade level**.

- States or localities may create **their own laws on assessment participation**, and districts are required to notify parents about those, **but participation requirements still exist**.
Assessment Options: What does ESSA allow?

• **High School Assessment:** An option for states or districts to use a nationally-recognized assessment (e.g. SAT or ACT) at the high school level in place of the state test.
  – These assessments must be aligned to the state standards, provide results that can be used for accountability, and meet all the technical requirements that apply to statewide tests. District-selected assessments must be approved by the state.

• **Innovative Assessment Pilot:** Allows the US Secretary of Education to set up a pilot for states that want to experiment with other assessment formats, such as competency-based or performance-based assessments.
  – States may pilot new assessments in a subset of districts, but must scale up to statewide implementation if pilot is successful, or discontinue if it is not.
Key questions

• How will the district communicate with us, as parents and caregivers, about the implications of taking a test other than the statewide one?

• If the state or a district(s) uses an alternative high school assessment, what safeguards are in place to ensure that these assessments are rigorous and truly comparable to statewide tests?

• Is the district participating in the assessment audit? If so, how?
Data Transparency and Public Reporting
Why is data transparency and public reporting important for equity?

• Without data transparency and public reporting, outcomes for groups of students can be hidden behind averages.

• Data equip parents and caregivers to be informed partners in their child’s education.
What does ESSA require?

State and local report cards that include the following information:

- Disaggregated results for all accountability measures
- Disaggregated assessment participation rates
- Disaggregated rates of exclusionary discipline and access to advanced coursework
- Professional qualifications of educators, comparing high income to low income schools
- Actual per-pupil expenditures, disaggregated by funding source at state, district, and school level
- If available, rate at which high school cohorts matriculate to higher education (disaggregated by subgroup)
Key Questions

• Will parents and caregivers be consulted in the design of the report cards so that information is understandable and useful? If so, how?

• Do we have access to the data we have a right to and need?
Teachers and Leaders
Why are teachers and leaders important for equity?

- Strong teachers and school leaders matter for all children, and particularly students who are behind academically.

- Far too often, though, students who need strong teachers and school leaders the most have the least access to them.
What does ESSA require?

• States are not required to develop or implement an evaluation system.
  – Though if states or districts are going to use federal Title II dollars on evaluation, those evaluation systems must be based in part on student learning gains

• States and districts must ensure that low-income students and students of color are not taught at disproportionate rates by ineffective, out-of-field, or inexperienced teachers
  – States define what “effective” means
Key Question

• How does my child’s school district plan to use its teacher equity plan to take action in addressing inequitable distribution of teachers?
We have come ... to remind America of the fierce urgency of now. This is not the time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism. Now is the time to make real the promise of Democracy.“

-- Martin Luther King Jr. on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in 1963
Questions?
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