

What to Ask Your District and School Leaders About ESSA

PTA and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)



The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) provides a unique opportunity for parents and families to give input on their children's educational experience, and strengthen parent are family engagement.

As your school district and/or specific school implements this new federal education law to improve outcomes for every student, National PTA believes parents should have a seat at the table when decisions are made—and districts and schools should work with parents and families as partners throughout the school year.

Our Parent & Family Guide to Local Implementation of ESSA explains what to expect as the law is implemented in your community. This document provides questions to ask your district and school leaders as you take your seat at the table as an essential partner in education. It also provides some specific questions to ask your district and school leaders about four of the main parts of ESSA.

QUESTIONS YOU SHOULD ASK:

Seat at The Table

ESSA requires districts and schools to involve parents and families in developing various plans and policies.

- How can we help develop the plan? What opportunities will we have to give meaningful input to help design a plan that meets our children's needs?
- How are you both inviting parents and families to take a seat at the table (e.g., planning committees) and giving all parents and families multiple chances to share their ideas (through surveys, focus groups, etc.)?
- How are you ensuring all parents and families can meaningfully participate, especially those who speak languages other than English, have disabilities or work multiple jobs?

Parents As Partners

There are new opportunities and dedicated funds to improve how parents and families are engaged as partners in their children's education throughout the school year.

- How can family engagement be used as a key strategy for improving student outcomes?
- How will funds be used to increase parent and family partnerships? How will you communicate how these funds are being used to families?
- As you put the plan into action, how will you get feedback from families about how it's going? What will success look like? When can parents help make adjustments before small challenges become big problems?

Local ESSA Plans

Every district must develop an overall plan to implement all ESSA requirements, spend the district's federal funds and, most of all, improve student outcomes.

- How are you helping teachers and leaders get better at communicating and working with families as true partners in our children's education?
- How are you ensuring that schools are ready, willing and able to communicate and partner with parents and families of English learners? Of students with disabilities?

Family Engagement Policies

Every district must create a family engagement policy that explains how the district will involve families in developing all ESSA plans and support schools in effectively engaging families to improve student outcomes.

- How can parents and families help you develop a family engagement policy that truly meets their needs, including how best to spend the federal funds dedicated to supporting family engagement?
- What role will parents and families play in evaluating and revising family engagement policies each year?

School Improvement Plans

Every school year, states must identify a set of low-performing schools that need additional support. The district may apply to the state for additional federal funds to support some of these schools.

- What information is being used to decide whether a school is “low-performing”?
- When you assess our school’s needs, will you look at how well the school partners with parents and families? How will you use the strengths of parents and families to address these needs?
- How will parents and families help identify the types of resources beyond funding (such as access to experienced teachers, textbooks, computers, career/technical and advanced coursework) that will be part of the district review of how equitably it provides resources to schools identified for improvement?
- What family engagement strategies will be a part of the school improvement plans, so parents can support all students’ learning and growth?

District & School Report Cards

In addition to report cards created by the state, each district must create and publish an annual report card for the entire district and for each individual school.

- When will parents and families give input and feedback on the report card design? If necessary, how will parents and families help continuously improve the report cards to include information most important to them?
- How will you help parents and families understand and act on the report cards when they come out?
- When and where are you going to publish the report cards? How can all parents and families access them? What languages will they be translated into for parents and families that do not speak English?

Want to learn more? Visit [PTA.org/ESSA](https://www.pta.org/ESSA) for resources on how parents and families can get a seat at the table and be partners in this work at the local level.