

The Parent & Family Guide to Local Implementation of ESSA

PTA and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)



Last year, your state planned how it will implement the new federal education law, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). **Now it is your school district's—or your specific school's—turn to explain how they will improve outcomes for every student.** ESSA provides two main opportunities for you to have a direct influence on those decisions:



A Seat at The Table—ESSA requires districts and schools to involve parents and families in developing plans and policies. For example, families must be able to voice their ideas about how to improve low-performing schools and advise their district on how to spend its federal funds.

- By taking your **seat at the table**, you can help these plans truly meet the needs of your child and community.



Parents as Partners—There are also new opportunities and some dedicated funds to improve family engagement throughout the school year. Districts and schools can do much more to work with families to support student academic performance and well-being, and to provide parents with the information they need to make informed decisions about their child's education.

- By advocating for schools to work with **parents as partners**, you can help your child learn more.

This guide explains **what, when, who** and **how** for parents and families to get involved and be a partner in their child's success.

ESSA is the main federal law that provides billions of dollars each year to support public schools. By accepting those funds, states, districts and schools commit to developing and carrying out a range of strategies to improve equity, teaching and learning for all students.

Parents and families are experts on their children. Your voice is needed every step of the way—stay involved by **supporting implementation, providing feedback** along the way and **helping improve** policies over time. Your main points of contact for these plans will be school board members, superintendents and/or principals. For tips on preparing for a meeting with these local leaders, visit [PTA.org/AdvocacyToolkit](https://pta.org/AdvocacyToolkit).

Local ESSA Plans

Every district must develop a plan to implement all ESSA requirements, spend its federal funds and—most of all—improve student outcomes. For example, your district must explain how it will support low-income and at-risk students, teacher quality and professional development, English learners and other aspects of effective schools.



Families must be involved in developing this plan.



All parts of the plan should include strategies for partnering with parents and families.



There isn't a set timeline, however, local plans must be developed each year. They must also be periodically reviewed over time and revised as necessary, creating an opportunity and expectation for continuous improvement.

Family Engagement Policies

Every school district must create a policy that explains how the district will involve families in developing all the ESSA plans listed in this guide, and support schools in effectively engaging families to improve student outcomes. Districts must also plan how they will spend some federal funds to support family engagement, such as home visiting, staff training, partnerships and sharing best practices.

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Family Engagement Policies



The district must not only “develop jointly” the policy but also “agree with” families on it. Families must also be involved in deciding how to spend the federal funds.



The policy and the funds should focus on how best to communicate and partner with families to support student learning.



The family engagement policy must be submitted with the overall local ESSA plan described above. Annually, districts must—with “meaningful involvement” of families—evaluate their family engagement policy. If the policy isn’t effective, the district must revise and improve it in consultation with parents and families.

School Improvement Plan

States must annually identify “low-performing” schools that need additional support, either because of the school’s overall performance or the performance of certain groups of students. The district may apply to the state for additional federal funds to support some of these schools.



Family engagement could be in the plan as a key strategy for improving student outcomes.



All school improvement plans must be developed with the input of parents and families.



States must identify low-performing schools at the start of each school year. Depending on the reason a school is identified for improvement, the district or the school (or both) may be responsible for developing the improvement plan. Planning will start right away but may continue into winter or even spring.

District & School Report Cards

Each school district must create and make available an annual report card for the district as a whole and for each individual school. For more information, read [National PTA’s Top 3 Ways to Engage in New ESSA Report Cards](#) and National PTA and the Data Quality Campaign’s [Parent Resource on Education Data](#).



ESSA does not require districts to involve families in designing their report cards, but it lists parents as a key audience.



Most states and districts are looking for input on how report cards can best inform families.



States and districts must publish new report cards by Dec. 31, 2018. Report cards should be improved over time with parent and family input.

Want to learn more? Visit [PTA.org/ESSA](https://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.