

Questions PTA Advocates Should Ask about ESSA

PTA and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)



Overview

State PTAs are more important than ever in ensuring that every child has a high-quality education. When the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed by President Obama on Dec. 10, 2015, it became the nation's national education law and longstanding commitment to equal opportunity. With the new law in place, focus for advocacy moves from the federal level to the states to safeguard effective implementation of the law, making sure that every child has the ability to reach their full potential.

National PTA has prepared these sample questions below to educate and empower PTA members, parents and families to be key players in the implementation process at the state and local levels, which includes the development of new state and local education plans required under the ESSA. Be sure to use these questions when speaking with state and local education leaders regarding the ESSA implementation.

ESSA Implementation Process

Portions of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) will be implemented in schools starting fall 2016. However, new state accountability systems will need to be created by states over the next year and will therefore not go into effect until the 2017–2018 school year.

- Where can parents and families access information on the state's role in the ESSA implementation?
- What is the state's timeline to develop its new state plan under the ESSA?
- Where can parents and families review the state's current state education plan?
- How will the state and school district communicate clearly and consistently with all parents and families in an understandable format about the implementation process and how they can be involved?
- What types of materials and/or resources on the ESSA implementation topics will the state and district provide to parents and families in a clear and concise manner that are relevant to their child's success?
- How will the state and district make the ESSA implementation information and materials publically available to all education stakeholders?

Consultation

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires meaningful consultation with parents and other education stakeholders in the development of local education plans, state education plans and in many other aspects of the new law.

- How will parents and families be invited and actively engaged throughout this process?

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- How will the state and school district ensure that families who may not know how to get involved— such as families with limited English proficiency —receive the proper information and opportunities to provide input on their child’s education?
- Will the state and district provide materials, meeting notices in languages other than English? And where will they be posted and/or available?
- Will the state and district hold meetings at accessible times and locations for parents, families and teachers?
- Will the state and district livestream its public meetings?
- Will there be an email list that stakeholders can sign up for to receive regular updates on the ESSA implementation process?
- What will the state or school district do to engage parents or family members with a student from each subgroup (major racial and ethnic groups, students with disabilities, English language learners, migrant status, homeless and foster students and students with parents in the military) throughout the implementation process to ensure that all children are provided the resources and opportunities they need to succeed?
- What avenues will parents and families have to communicate with state and district leaders about their questions, comments and input on implementation?

Indicators in the State Accountability System

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) eliminated annual measurable objectives (AMOs) and adequate yearly progress (AYP) that were required in No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Under the ESSA, states establish long-term goals and indicators for measuring the academic achievement of all students and each subgroup of students separately (economically disadvantaged students, students from major racial and ethnic groups, children with disabilities and English language learners). Each state will create their own annual system of meaningful benchmarks for all students and for each subgroup of students based on their identified indicators.

State accountability systems can include multiple measures of student achievement. The law requires state accountability systems to include:

1. Academic student achievement on annual assessments
 2. Another academic indicator— student growth or another statewide measure of student learning in elementary and middle school or graduation rates in high school
 3. English language proficiency
 4. At least one additional indicator of school quality or student success. For example, the law lists examples such as student and educator engagement, student access to and completion of advanced coursework and school climate and safety. States can opt to have more than one indicator of school quality or student success.
- If student growth is used, how will it be measured?

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- What type(s) of additional indicator(s) can provide a more holistic picture of school quality and student success? How can the state ensure that additional indicator(s) does not result in unintended consequences? For example, if a state uses attendance as a measure of student success, how will the state support accurate and consistent entry of attendance data so disparities are not masked?
- What considerations will the state give to the selection of the additional indicators?
 - Are there statewide systems in place to measure the additional indicator?
 - What evidence will be provided to show that the additional indicator is a reliable measure of school quality or student success and can be differentiated among schools and subgroups of students?

The first three indicators must carry “substantial weight” in a state’s accountability system as compared to the other indicator(s) of school quality or student success.

- How will the state effectively distribute the weight of the first three indicators to make sure the accountability system is taking a holistic view of school and student performance and not relying heavily on test scores?
- How will the additional indicators be weighted in comparison to the first three indicators?
- Does the state have the ability to include family engagement as an indicator of school quality?

Under new accountability systems, at least once every three years a state must identify schools in need of comprehensive and targeted support that are “consistently underperforming” based on the state indicators. Schools that are identified as needing comprehensive and targeted support must involve stakeholders from the community, including parents and families, in developing interventions to improve school and student performance.

- How will the state determine what constitutes a student subgroup to be “consistently underperforming” to ensure students and schools receive the necessary resources as soon possible?
- How will families be notified and involved in the needs assessment and intervention process at the district and school level if additional supports and resources are needed?

States must assess 95% of all students in the required annual assessments under ESSA. As part of the accountability system, a state must calculate and report on the percentage or number of students participating in the assessment, whichever is greater.

- How will the state factor the participation requirement into the accountability system to ensure all subgroups of students are represented?

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- What steps will the state take to ensure that districts and schools meet the federal participation requirement?

Family Engagement

Each state plan must include assurances that it will support the collection and dissemination of effective parent and family engagement strategies to school districts.

- How will the state ensure school districts have the resources and effective strategies to engage parents and families in their child's education?
- Will the state provide a central repository of family engagement best practices that can be accessed by both parents and educators?

School districts must also include a written parent and family engagement policy in their education plan that welcomes all families and seeks to strengthen the partnership between families, the school and the community to improve student outcomes.

- What additional support will the state provide to districts to make sure that parents will be meaningfully involved in the creation and evaluation of the school district's policy?

Under the ESSA, school districts are required to use 1% of their Title I funds for family engagement, however nothing prohibits a district from reserving more than 1% for this use.

- How will the state monitor whether schools and districts are using the 1% Title I set-aside funds for meaningful family engagement?
- Can the district allocate more than 1% of their Title I funds for family engagement strategies?

PTA is committed to working with policymakers at all levels to embed evidence-based family engagement policies and practices in all aspects of a child's educational continuum.

- How can the state embed family engagement in current initiatives and practices? For example, has the state adopted family engagement standards? If so, do they reflect [National PTA Standards for Family-School Partnerships](#)? If not, will the state adopt the National PTA Standards for Family-School Partnerships?
- How can the state leverage current resources to strengthen family engagement policies and practices?
- How are school leaders and districts going to be informed on the requirements in the ESSA such as LEA written family engagement plans, the 1% family engagement set-aside and school-parent compacts?
- Who is going to provide professional learning for teachers and school leaders on effective family engagement practices?

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State and Local Report Cards

States and school districts are required to publicly disseminate an annual report card that is concise, widely accessible and developed in consultation with parents. Each state and local report card must include over a dozen data points such as the academic achievement levels of students listed by subgroup, per pupil spending at the federal, state and local levels and high school graduation rates.

- How will the state and school district present all of the data required in the state and local report cards in a way that is understandable to parents and community leaders?
- How and where will parents and families be able to access these report cards?
- How and where will the state make these report cards available in languages other than English?
- What kinds of tools, training or accompanying materials will the state, district or school provide to help parents and community leaders use this information to advocate for stronger learning opportunities for all children?
- If a school is underperforming, how will families be informed about steps that a school will take to improve student outcomes? How will families be involved in the improvement process?

What can you do if you are unable to participate in person at ESSA stakeholder meetings?

- Visit [PTA.org/ESSA](https://www.pta.org/ESSA) to view [each state's ESSA implementation website](#), plan for implementation and official ESSA contact. In many states, there is a dedicated email address to submit your comments or questions.
- Contact your local or state leaders to ask questions and/or offer input on the ESSA implementation
- Host an ESSA town hall meeting with state and local leaders through your state and/or local PTA.

Stay Informed

Check out National PTA resources on the ESSA implementation at [PTA.org/ESSA](https://www.pta.org/ESSA). Visit [PTA.org/TakesAction](https://www.pta.org/TakesAction) to get the latest updates on PTA advocacy news or sign up for the [PTA Takes Action E-newsletter](#).

Questions?

Contact [National PTA Government Affairs department](#).