



Policy Brief

Parent, Family Member, and Community Stakeholder Engagement in the ESSA

Executive Summary

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed into law on December 10, 2015. The ESSA represents a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), and will replace its predecessor, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

The ESSA takes full effect in the 2017-2018 school year. In the interim, states are tasked with creating a plan that addresses how they will handle everything including accountability, school interventions, English Learner inclusion, low performing schools and teacher evaluation among others.

At each stage of the planning and implementation process, states are required to include community input, and prioritize parent and family member engagement. To ensure the meaningful engagement of various community actors, it is important that advocacy groups are disseminating culturally relevant information about ESSA, and empowering parents to get involved with the process.

At a Glance:

- Overview of parent and family member engagement provisions in the ESSA
- Tennessee timeline for action and opportunities for advocacy engagement
- Four recommendations on ensuring meaningful parent, family member and community stakeholder engagement throughout the ESSA process

Introduction

Conexión Américas is pleased to invest in the TN NAACP's efforts to engage parents, community leaders, clergy, and educators across Tennessee in advocating for strong accountability for subgroups in the new federal K-12 law, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

By way of the Equity & Excellence sub-grants, TN NAACP will train a cadre of community advocates who will work to advocate on a local and state level during the various implementation stages of the ESSA.

The ESSA returns much control over K-12 education to the states, and in so doing requires states to seek community input at various planning and implementation levels, along with parent and family member engagement policies at the district and state level.

Initiatives like those of the TN NAACP are critical to ensuring that community voices are accounted for at every stage of the ESSA implementation. The following brief will provide an overview of the community engagement provisions in the ESSA, and examine opportunities for advocacy within ESSA implementation.

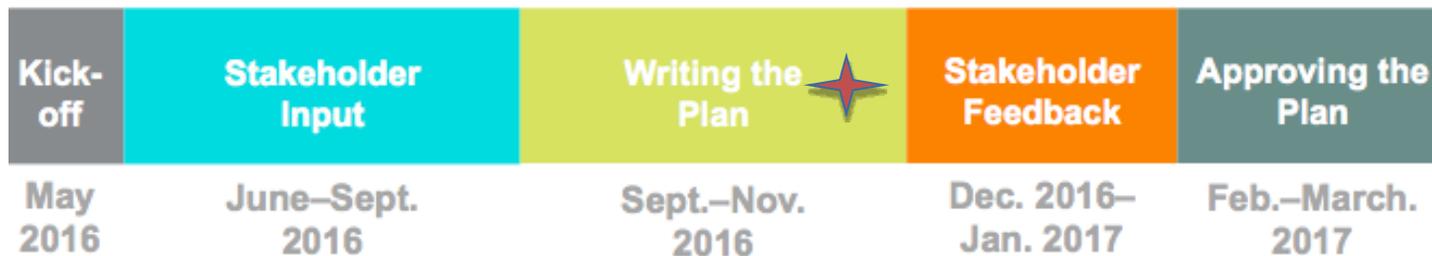
Parent & Family Engagement Provisions in the Every Student Succeeds Act

- ESSA, like its predecessor No Child Left Behind, requires districts to set aside at least 1 percent of Title I funds for parents engagement. This provision does not limit districts from reserving more than 1 percent. 90 percent of these dollars must be distributed by the district, with priority given to high-need schools. Further, the law requires that parents and family members of low-income students must be included in the decisions regarding how these funds are spent. Funds must be used for one of the following activities:
 - Professional development
 - Home-based programs
 - Disseminating information
 - Collaborating with community-based organizations
 - Other activities that the local education agency determines are appropriate and consistent with their parents and family engagement policy
- Under Title IV of the ESSA, federal grants are authorized to go to Statewide Family Engagement Centers. ESSA authorizes \$10 million in annual funding for these centers.
- The ESSA replaces the NCLB law's use of the phrase "parental involvement" with "parent and family engagement."
- Schools receiving Title I funds have to have written parent and family engagement policies, developed jointly with, agreed on with, and distributed to parents and family members. The policy will establish expectations and objectives for meaningful engagement, and be incorporated into the district's plan.
 - The policy will, among other aims, provide assistance in building the school's capacity in planning and implementing parents and family involvement activities, which may include meaningful consultation with employers, business leaders, philanthropic organizations, or individuals with expertise in effectively engaging parents and families in education.
- The additional indicator of school quality also provides community groups, parents, families and policy makers an opportunity to discuss and interpret additional factors that measure student success and which will be incorporated into accountability under ESSA.

"Our key priority is to make sure parents and families and PTAs are at the table with school districts while they are planning their implementation of the new law—that parents can be there and can be meaningfully involved and not just checking the box."

- Jacki Ball, the director of governmental affairs for the National PTA.

Opportunities for Advocates with ESSA in Tennessee



Stakeholders will include directors of schools, principals, educators, parents and students, legislators, governor’s office, state board of education, school board members, CORE offices, community organizations, and advocacy groups.

Per the ESSA regulations, states have to engage community members, stakeholders, and parents and family members along each stage of planning and implementation. In May, Commissioner Candice McQueen launched a statewide listening tour to gather input on implementing specific components of the ESSA. Additionally, TDOE made available a general feedback form and a feedback form for parents and students.

The feedback period for the TDOE officially ended on August 15th 2016. However, various opportunities for stakeholder input are available in the coming stages of the planning timeline. This fall, TDOE will publish a draft of the state ESSA plan, and launch another period of community feedback. At this point, the state will share their plan for the new accountability system under ESSA, how ELs will be included, and what the additional indicator will be.

Ensuring that parents, community stakeholders, and educators understand the implications of these decisions, and can provide adequate feedback is

essential to ensuring that all areas – including how the state plans to ensure parents and family engagement – are ambitious.

The state is mandated to allow at least 30 days for public comments and feedback before submitting the plan to USED for review.

An additional area for advocacy is ensuring that the state adheres to all components of the parents and family engagement provisions of the ESSA. Among them is the requirement for states to provide an assurance (a statement that the state has complied or will comply with a requirement) that it will provide school districts and schools with effective parents and family engagement strategies.

Once the state plan has been approved, advocates should be ready to provide feedback to the state on implementation of the changes, and ensure that community voices are truly incorporated into the changes under ESSA to ensure that the law is effectively meeting all aims it was intended to.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the ESSA is a civil rights law rooted in the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which was created as a response to poverty and inequity across the country. The ESSA represents a turning point in K-12 education in the United States, which ushers in a return to state control, and a high focus on subgroup achievement. Ensuring the successful implementation of the ESSA and progress towards education equity for all students depends largely on how each state is willing to engage parents, families, and community stakeholders. A clear intent of the ESSA is to affirm the right of parents, families, and community advocates in driving the financial, programmatic, and policy decisions of the ESSA.

Ensuring that parents, families, and advocates are included and valued is not just a role for the planning phase of ESSA implementation. At each step of the way, year after year and at every revision period, states must value the critical input from stakeholders in improving the educational experience of all students. Along with the Tennessee Educational Equity Coalition, the TN NAACP is spearheading a critical and urgent task in Tennessee; that of ensuring that all members of the community are informed of the changes in K-12 law, are aware of the laws mandates on engagement, and are ready to advocate for strong accountability throughout all stages.

Recommendations

- ESSA requires that states must meaningfully consult parents and other stakeholders when developing plans. Additionally, districts must meaningfully consult parents of children in schools receiving title I funds when developing their plans. The TN NAACP should ensure that community members are aware of periods when input will be needed, and prepared to contribute meaningfully at each stage.
- The state must provide an assurance that it will provide districts with effective, research-based strategies for parental and family engagement. Community advocacy groups like the TN NAACP may seek to reach out to TDOE to contribute to the inclusion of culturally responsive and culturally sensitive strategies.
- On local level, the TN NAACP should train parents on the parental and community engagement provisions with the intent of recommending parents advocates for collaborations with districts as they draft their engagement policies. Ensuring that trained parent advocates are at the table when policies are being written is critical for advancing inclusive priorities on all levels of ESSA implementation.
- Via op-eds, ensure that diverse parent advocate voices are uplifted, including from diverse subgroups, and non-native English speakers. Additionally, include policy recommendations in op-eds, such as encouraging the state to pursue some “optional” parent and family engagement provisions and areas of additional funding.

References

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Tennessee ESSA Resources



[ESSA Compared to Tennessee Policy](#)

[PPT Presentation used for ESSA Feedback Sessions](#)