



STATEMENT OF THE NATIONAL DOWN SYNDROME CONGRESS ON ESSA STATE PLANS

House Education and Workforce Hearing July 18, 2017

The National Down Syndrome Congress and the Advocacy Institute have reviewed more than 30 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) state plans (drafts or submitted) and provide detailed analyses at <http://www.advocacyinstitute.org/ESSA/ESSA-StateDraftPlanAnalysis.shtml>.

While we applaud some decisions made by states in these plans, there are none that completely lived up to the requirements and the purpose of the law: “to provide all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable and high quality education, and to close educational achievement gaps.” In fact many of the states did not develop these plans with meaningful stakeholder consultation as required by the law and released drafts for public comment that were incomplete. Some states have yet to release a draft of their plan to the public, even though the deadline for submission is fast approaching.

NDSC is also troubled by the way many states are addressing two gateway issues regarding accountability: minimum subgroup (N) size and the failure of schools to assess 95% of all students and each subgroup. Both of these issues, must be handled in way that ensures maximum accountability for students with disabilities, as well as other student subgroups, in order for the purpose of the law to be fulfilled.

There are many other issues in the submitted and draft state plans that are of great concern to NDSC. The three most critical issues impacting student subgroups, including students with disabilities, are:

- Definitions of consistently underperforming subgroup that would allow students to fall too far behind, for too long, before schools are identified for targeted support and improvement plans
- Long-term goals and interim targets goals that are not ambitious enough to close achievement gaps
- A failure to factor subgroup performance into the school rating system that determines how schools are treated in the accountability system

The U.S. Department of Education (ED) has been reviewing state ESSA plans and providing feedback on critical issues. This federal oversight is a key responsibility of ED and is critically important to ensure that ESSA funds will be used to meet the purpose of the law. NDSC urges Congress to support ED in these efforts.

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About the National Down Syndrome Congress

Founded in 1973, the National Down Syndrome Congress is the country's oldest organization for people with Down syndrome, their families, and the professionals who work with them. A 501(c)(3) non-profit advocacy organization, the NDSC provides support and information about issues related to Down syndrome throughout the lifespan, as well as on matters of public policy relating to disability rights. The National Down Syndrome Congress is committed to creating a national climate in which all people will recognize and embrace the value and dignity of people with Down syndrome. For more information about the NDSC, please visit our website at www.ndscenter.org.