



Four State Advocacy Tips For the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

Implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which replaces the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), has begun. The ESSA website is <http://www.ed.gov/essa>. The development of federal regulations and guidance in 2016 will help clarify how some parts of the implementation will play out. However, we already know that states will have unprecedented discretion with respect to developing their plans for holding districts and schools accountable under the law. **These state accountability plans will have a major impact on whether the ESSA funding that goes to the states is being used to fulfill the law's purpose: "To provide all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and to close educational achievement gaps."**

Each state is required to develop its accountability plan "in meaningful consultation" with a number of different stakeholder groups, including parents. Also, after the plan is developed, each state must make the proposed plan available for public comment for a period of not less than 30 days. ESSA requires states to use their new accountability plans in the 2017-18 school year, but the U.S. Department of Education has not yet clarified the date by which states must submit the plans for approval. Nonetheless, **it is important for affiliates and families to set the stage for the work to come and be prepared if your state decides to move quickly.**

State advocacy is more effective when done collaboratively. To the extent possible, affiliate leaders/members and individual families who are interested in state advocacy should join together to use the following advocacy tips:

Advocacy Tips:

1. **Contact the office of your Chief State School Officer** (often referred to as State Superintendent) to find out the right person to meet with regarding ESSA implementation. Information about your Chief State School Officer and your State Department of Education can be found at http://www.ccsso.org/who_we_are/meet_the_chiefs.html. Another option is to **contact your State Director of Special Education**. A list of State Directors can be found at <http://www.nasdse.org/MeettheDirectors>. You will have to follow the links to your State Department of Education website to find a phone number or email address to use. When you have a meeting, do the following:

- Ask how your state intends to develop its accountability plan “**in meaningful consultation**” with **parents of students with disabilities**, including those who take alternate assessments, and provide additional suggestions if the outreach does not sound like a sincere effort to get meaningful input.
 - **Request to be contacted** when opportunities for meaningful consultation arise and ask what other means the state will use to notify families of these opportunities.
 - **Advocate for a 60 day public comment period**; these state plans will be very complex and the 30-day minimum public comment period is unlikely to provide sufficient time for you to get clarification of certain provisions from the State Department of Education, or experts in your state, if needed. Remember your state can always choose to do more than is required by the law.
 - **Find out your state’s timetable** for developing its accountability plan.
2. **Prepare self-advocates to join you at the meeting.** Help them communicate (verbally or using other means of communication) why it is important for their schools to be held accountable for their achievement. For example they can share what their dreams are for the future. Then they (or others at the meeting) can tie the importance of an academic education to that dream. Self-advocates who have already exited school can share stories of ways in which their education did or did not prepare them for postsecondary education or employment.
 3. **If you are not already on the NDSC email list, please sign up at www.ndsccenter.org** so you can get a detailed list of state advocacy tips, which will be distributed later, to help you provide meaningful consultation on the development of your state’s accountability plan and/or prepare you to make public comments on the proposed plan.
 4. Most of the big issues for ESSA implementation will involve rules that apply to all “student subgroups.” For example, ESSA requires each state to describe in the accountability plan how it will identify schools where a subgroup or subgroups are consistently underperforming. The subgroups in ESSA are students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged students, students from major racial and ethnic groups, and English learners. This is a good time to find out which organizations in your state are strong advocates for students with other disabilities and which are strong advocates for these other subgroups of students. **It will be important to reach out to these organizations and collaborate on the “subgroup” accountability issues.** Keep in mind that each of these subgroups includes students who also belong to other subgroups, so there is overlap between them.