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The Every Student Succeeds Act and English Learners

On December 10, 2015, President Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) which reauthorizes the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) for four years. In general, ESSA reduces federal intervention in state education policymaking and sets parameters within which states have authority to design their own education, assessment, and accountability systems. The intent of the law is to raise achievement for low-income and otherwise disadvantaged children. ESSA still requires, however, that states support specific strategies and programs for English Learners. In fact, ESSA includes several new requirements for English learners (EL), both in terms of identification and also in terms of including English proficiency among ELs as a measure of school quality in a state's accountability system.

Pennsylvania's Consolidated State Plan makes clear that teachers will actively participate in the development of Language Instructional Educational Programs (LIEPs) as well as progress monitor through all facets of the EL process. Teachers will be trained to use rubrics created by the state to evaluate students' language and complete inventories required through ESSA.

PA's Goals for ELs

Through its ESSA planning, Pennsylvania commits to develop a more culturally responsive educational system that includes in meaningful decision-making the parents and communities that represent students who are low income, of color, English learners, Native Americans, immigrants and/or those who have a disability. Among ELs, Pennsylvania plans to reduce the percent of students who fail to graduate, increase the percent of students who meet with success on standardized tests, and support EL students to achieve English proficiency. PDE stresses the use of PA-MTSS (Multi-Tiered Systems of Support) framework to progress-monitor EL students.

Screening and Reclassification in Title III, Part A

Two particularly important aspects of ESSA Title III, Part A (Language Instruction for English Learners and Immigrant Students) are screening and reclassification.

Screening: LEAs must continue to administer a standard home language survey and parent interview for newly enrolled students for whom English is not the primary language spoken in the home. If there is no documented evidence of English language proficiency in the student's academic records, a World-class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) screener should be given to the student, based upon appropriate grade level, within 30 days of enrollment in a Pennsylvania school.

Reclassification, Monitoring and Re-Designation of English Learners (NEW in ESSA): Students may be moved from "active classification" status to "former English Learner" status upon meeting exit criteria. Consideration is given to the student's ability to access challenging academic content as well as interaction in an academic environment with teachers and peers, academically and socially. ACCESS¹ for ELs as well as standardized language inventories are

¹ ACCESS is a secure large-scale English language proficiency assessment administered to Kindergarten through 12th grade students who have been identified as English language learners (ELLs).

combined to produce a single score, which could reclassify a student, based upon state cut scores. LIEPs are developed within each local education agency (LEA) to determine how procedural measures will be accomplished for EL students. After reclassification, students will be monitored for two years to insure continued success in the academic setting. This will be done using rubrics developed by PDE. Through the ESSA state plan for ELs, content teachers will be selected to complete inventories and staff will be trained to use the rubrics and evaluate students' language use.

School Impact

As Pennsylvania and LEAs begin to consider changes that result from the new law, there are several opportunities for educators to be involved in decision-making. PSEA is advocating for member participation in decision-making at the state level. Local leaders also should begin to think about the role of local members in ESSA decision-making and should discuss with their employer the involvement of local educators in planning and implementation of ESSA requirements. As always, PSEA UniServ Representatives are prepared to assist and guide local leaders and members as they become involved in local ESSA implementation issues. UniServ representatives will also work with a cross-divisional staff work team that is focused on implementation issues.

For More Information

For more information about the Every Student Succeeds Act, including additional information about the ways educators may be involved in consultation and decision-making in Pennsylvania, see [PSEA's ESSA Webpage](#). For additional information about English learners and ESSA, PSEA members may contact Judith Petruzzi (jpetruzzi@psea.org) in PSEA's Education Services Department.

