



March 2018

## THE EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT (ESSA): SUPPORTING ALL STUDENTS

The recent reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, called the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), was signed into law by President Obama in 2015. Similar to the No Child Left Behind Act, which it replaced, ESSA emphasizes school accountability, academic standards, and student assessment. In contrast to NCLB, ESSA reduces the federal role in defining state policy and returns significant decision-making authority to the states.<sup>1</sup>

ESSA programs drive billions of dollars in education funding to states primarily through Title I. However, in order to receive this Federal funding, each state must submit a plan to the United States Department of Education (USDOE) and receive approval of the plan. Pennsylvania's ESSA Consolidated State Plan was approved by USDOE on January 18, 2018.

In its plan, Pennsylvania commits to implement **four initiatives** to provide all students with a high-quality, rigorous education

***Ensuring well-rounded, rigorous, and personalized learning experiences for all students.*** Within the context of holistic and personalized learning, Pennsylvania commits to support equitable student access to a well-rounded curriculum that includes career and technical education (CTE); English, reading, and language arts; health and physical education; science, technology, engineering, and mathematics; music and the arts; social studies (history, economics, geography, civics and government); and world languages. In addition, Pennsylvania seeks to increase student participation in advanced coursework, particularly among minority and low-income students.

To accomplish these goals, the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) will identify local education agencies (LEAs) that need extra support to increase rigorous coursework enrollment. In addition, PDE will convene a statewide workgroup to identify strategies to increase rigorous coursework offerings, increase low-income and minority student representation in rigorous courses, and increase postsecondary enrollment rates for underrepresented students.

In addition, Pennsylvania commits to promote equitable access to education in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). Strategies to increase equitable access to STEM courses include increasing cross-sector stakeholder engagement and partnerships to create greater connection of STEM efforts across the state and across pre-K to 12 grade spans.

Pennsylvania's plan also emphasizes meaningful college and career pathways that include opportunities

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview of ESSA and the PA state plan, see PSEA's Advisory, [The Every Student Succeeds Act: Pennsylvania's Consolidated Plan](#).

for students to explore and identify interests, build skills, and examine careers that align with their interests and skills. PDE will encourage LEAs to use federal funds to hire school counselors and other support staff to help all students; encourage the use of PDE's [Work-based Learning Toolkit](#), [PA Career Standards Webpage](#), and [PA Career Zone](#); and promote community/business/school partnerships including Educator in the Workplace opportunities for Act 48 credit and student coop experiences. Pennsylvania will include career ready benchmarks in the Future Ready PA Index.<sup>2</sup>

***Addressing the needs of students through school-based supports and community partnerships.*** To support community schools in high poverty areas, PDE will focus both on the state and local levels. At the state level, PDE is establishing the PA State Coalition for Community Schools to share successes and best practices across the state. The coalition will focus on professional development, advocacy and policy, stakeholder engagement and governance, and communications around community schools.

Locally, PDE will provide technical assistance to specific schools to plan, develop and scale up partnerships between schools and community organizations. This assistance may take the form of:

- Planning sessions that include environmental scans.
- Facilitation of key systemic partner discussions.
- Collecting and/or reviewing relevant data.
- Linking to best practice sites across the state and nation.

***Promoting successful transitions in early childhood through postsecondary education.*** PDE proposes several programs to support student transitions from early childhood to elementary, Pre-K to Kindergarten, elementary to middle, middle to high, and high school to postsecondary.

In the transition from early childhood to elementary education, the Plan supports home visits, Keystone STARS, Early Intervention, pre-K programs, pre-K to 3 alignment through Early Learning Standards, data linkages between early childhood and K-12 student databases, and promotion of principal professional development focused on pre-K to 4.

The elementary to middle transition support utilizes the PA Early Warning System (EWS), which uses attendance, behavior, and course grade data to help schools identify middle school students at risk of dropping out before graduating high school.

To support healthy transitions from middle to high school PDE envisions career portfolio work, Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), and Student Assistance Program (SAP) models.

PDE's support for the transition from high school to college and career includes the "15 to Finish" campaign to encourage students to take 15 credit hours every semester to complete college; focused resources for school counselors around postsecondary planning, access, and success; and participation in the Pennsylvania College Application Campaign.

***Promoting positive school climate and social-emotional learning.*** Pennsylvania's Plan includes strategies to ensure that all students feel safe, respected, and valued in school. As part of these efforts, the Department will:

- Increase district participation in the PA School Climate Survey to collect more accurate

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<sup>2</sup> For more information on Pennsylvania's Future Ready Index, see PSEA's Advisory, [The Every Student Succeeds Act: Future Ready PA Index](#) or consult PDE's [Future Ready Index](#) webpage.

- and comprehensive data.
- Implement new professional learning programs, revitalize the Equity and Inclusion Toolkit, and increase bullying prevention work through the PA School Climate Leadership Initiative.
  - Embed culturally responsive and trauma-informed competencies in professional development programs.
  - Implement strategies to support schools and LEAs in preventing and addressing peer-to-peer harassment and violence.
  - Expand access to school-based behavioral and mental health services.
  - Oversee \$2.6 million in competitive grant funding for LEAs and schools to implement initiatives for improving school climate, violence prevention, crisis intervention, and promoting social/emotional wellness.
  - Participate in the Collaborating States Initiative to infuse social-emotional competencies in curriculum, instruction, professional development, and school climate initiatives.

### **For More Information**

For more information about the Every Student Succeeds Act, in, see [PSEA's ESSA Webpage](#). For specific information about student supports in ESSA, PSEA members may contact Brad Hull ([bhull@psea.org](mailto:bhull@psea.org)). PSEAS members with questions about student supports in their district should contact their UniServ Representative.

