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THE EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT (ESSA): PENNSYLVANIA'S CONSOLIDATED PLAN

In 2015, Congress reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and titled the new law the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Like all versions of ESEA in the past, ESSA focuses federal resources on policies and programs that the federal government believes are most likely to improve achievement, particularly among the country's most vulnerable students. In addition, ESSA returns some flexibility and decision-making authority to states; the previous version of ESEA, the No Child Left Behind Act, established unprecedented authority for the federal government in state education policy decisions.¹

In order to receive billions of dollars in federal funds tied to the ESSA, each state must submit a plan to the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) detailing the ways in which the state proposes to meet the requirements of the federal law. [Pennsylvania's Consolidated State Plan](#) was submitted in the fall of 2017 and approved by USDOE on January 18, 2018.

Pennsylvania's ESSA Plan

In its Consolidated State Plan, the Pennsylvania Department of Education proposed several changes to the Commonwealth's student assessment and school accountability systems, set new statewide long-term goals for student achievement, and defined new supports for both students and teachers.

Pennsylvania's Long-Term Student Achievement Goals: Pennsylvania's Consolidated State Plan defines the state goal to reduce the number of non-proficient students as measured by state assessments by half, and to do so by the end of the 2029-30 school year.² This goal applies to all students in public schools in the Commonwealth as well as to each disaggregated subgroup of students defined by ESSA in schools.³ The Consolidated State Plan also includes annual interim goals that distribute expected progress evenly over each of the 13 years between the publication of the Consolidated State Plan and 2029-30.

Academic Assessments: Pennsylvania's Consolidated State Plan maintains the Commonwealth's current system of standardized assessments. This means the state will continue to use the Pennsylvania System

¹ For a more detailed overview of the Every Student, see PSEA's Advisory, [The Every Student Succeeds Act](#).

² The Department selected a 2029-30 deadline because it reflects a cohort of K-12 students that entered Kindergarten in 2017.

³ For accountability purposes, ESSA requires student achievement measures to be disaggregated by school for the following student subgroups: white, African American/black, Hispanic, Asian, American Indian or Alaskan Native, multi-racial, English learner, economically disadvantaged, and student with a disability. ESSA also requires states to report student achievement results for students by homeless status, students with a parent in the military, and students in foster care, but these disaggregated results do not need to be included in the accountability system.

of School Assessment (PSSA) and Keystone Exam for purposes of federal accountability. The Consolidated State Plan does, however, affirm Pennsylvania’s commitment to reduce the state testing window from three weeks to two weeks this spring, and to shift that window to later in the school year beginning in 2019.

Accountability:⁴ ESSA requires states to collect accountability data from all schools on several indicators to produce an annual “ESSA School Report Card.”⁵ In Pennsylvania, six data elements from the ESSA School Report Card will be used to determine a subset of Title I schools that fall within the bottom 5 percent of Title I schools.⁶ In addition to the bottom 5 percent of Title I schools, high schools that have a graduation rate below 67 percent will also be identified to receive Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI)⁷. Schools identified to receive CSI will have four academic years, including the creation of an improvement plan, to improve their performance on the accountability indicators. After four years, PDE will determine if the school has made sufficient progress to meet the criteria outlined in the improvement plan and exit CSI status.

Schools in which one or more student groups performs below the CSI thresholds for academic proficiency, academic growth, and either: 1) one or both substantially weighted indicators (graduation rate and progress in achieving English language proficiency); or 2) both school quality/student success indicators (chronic absenteeism and career readiness) will be identified for Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI) annually. Schools receiving TSI also must develop an improvement plan and demonstrate growth within four years. Schools in TSI that do not make progress in closing gaps may be placed in CSI.

Because of strict deadlines established in ESSA, the Comprehensive State Plan sets an ambitious timeline for producing the ESSA School Report Card and administering the new school accountability system. Schools will be identified for the first round of CSI/TSI in fall 2018. After developing improvement plans through the remainder of the school year, schools in CSI/TSI will begin implementing their school improvement plan at the start of the 2019-20 school year.

Supporting Excellent Educators:⁸ Pennsylvania’s Consolidated State Plan proposes specific interventions to increase the supply, improve the quality, and promote equitable distribution of educators across the Commonwealth. It focuses specifically on the recruitment, preparation, induction, and ongoing development of teachers, principals, and superintendents. Supports for teachers include an online portal to connect educators with open positions, partnerships between teacher preparation programs and LEAs to increase training in high needs school environments, strategies to meet workforce needs in underserved communities, clinical residency programs for teacher also includes new initiatives designed

⁴ For detailed information on how schools are identified for CSI and TSI, see PSEA’s Advisory, [The Every Student Succeeds Act: Pennsylvania’s Plan to Identify Schools for Support and Improvement](#).

⁵ For detailed information on PA’s school report card, see PSEA’s Advisory, [The Every Student Succeeds Act: Future Ready PA Index](#).

⁶ These schools will be re-designated every three years, based upon the most recent data in the ESSA School Report Card.

⁷ The six indicators used to determine which Title I schools fall within the lowest 5 percent are: percent of students who demonstrate proficiency on state standardized tests, student growth as measured by state standardized tests, growth for English learners, high school graduation rate, chronic student absenteeism, and student career readiness.

⁸ For more detailed information on the plan’s support for excellent educators, see PSEA’s Advisories, [The Every Student Succeeds Act: Supporting Excellent Educators](#).

to increase the K-12 educator pipeline by working with secondary school students' career awareness and creating a paraprofessional pathway to teacher licensure.

Supporting All Students:⁹ Pennsylvania's Consolidated State Plan includes multiple supports to help all students attain college and career readiness. In general, these supports fall into four categories:

- *Ensuring well-rounded, rigorous, and personalized learning experiences for all students.* The Department will develop initiatives to increase student participation in advanced coursework for all students (particularly in high-need districts), improve low-income and minority student participation in advanced coursework, and increase postsecondary enrollment (particularly among students of color). The Consolidated State Plan also promotes equitable access to education in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) by supporting Pennsylvania's STEM Coalition and its efforts to increase STEM opportunities statewide from early childhood to career entry. Finally, the Consolidated State Plan delineates strategies to increase awareness and opportunities for student-developed career pathway exploration.
- *Addressing the needs of students through school-based supports and community partnerships.* To foster community schools in high poverty areas, the Department will provide technical assistance to specific schools in planning, developing, and scaling up partnerships between schools and community organizations. Additionally, the Department will establish a statewide community schools support network.
- *Promoting successful transitions in early childhood through postsecondary education.* Pennsylvania will create programs to focus on key student transition points from early childhood to elementary school, elementary to middle school, middle to high school, and high school to postsecondary.
- *Building positive school climate and social-emotional learning.* The Department commits to increase school participation in the PA School Climate Survey. These data will be used to implement new professional learning programs, revitalize the state's Equity and Inclusion Toolkit, and increase bullying prevention work through the Safe Schools Office.

For More Information

For more information on every aspect of ESSA, visit PSEA's [ESSA Resource Page](#) and the [Pennsylvania Department of Education's ESSA webpage](#). PSEA members may address additional questions about the federal law and state plan to Brad Hull: bhull@psea.org. PSEA members with specific questions about local implementation of ESSA requirements should contact their UniServ Representative.



⁹ For more detailed information on the Consolidated State Plan's support for all students, see PSEA's Advisory, [The Every Student Succeeds Act: Supporting All Students](#).