

News & Notes



President Obama signs the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

On December 10, 2015, President Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the latest reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. This bipartisan bill makes significant changes in education governance that will dramatically affect the work of state boards of education. Here are five things you need to know about ESSA:

- **Testing will continue.** ESSA continues the requirement that states test all students annually in reading and math from grades 3 through 8 and that students are tested once in high school. As under No Child Left Behind (NCLB), results must be broken out into subgroups—English-language learners, students in special education, racial minorities, students living in poverty. The law will also require identification of students with a parent who is a member of active-duty armed forces so the progress of these students, who typically move more frequently than their peers, can be adequately measured.
- ESSA does not prescribe a certain set of college-ready standards but requires states to establish “challenging” academic content standards in mathematics, reading or language arts, and science for all students. **These standards must be**

aligned with real-world requirements in college and careers.

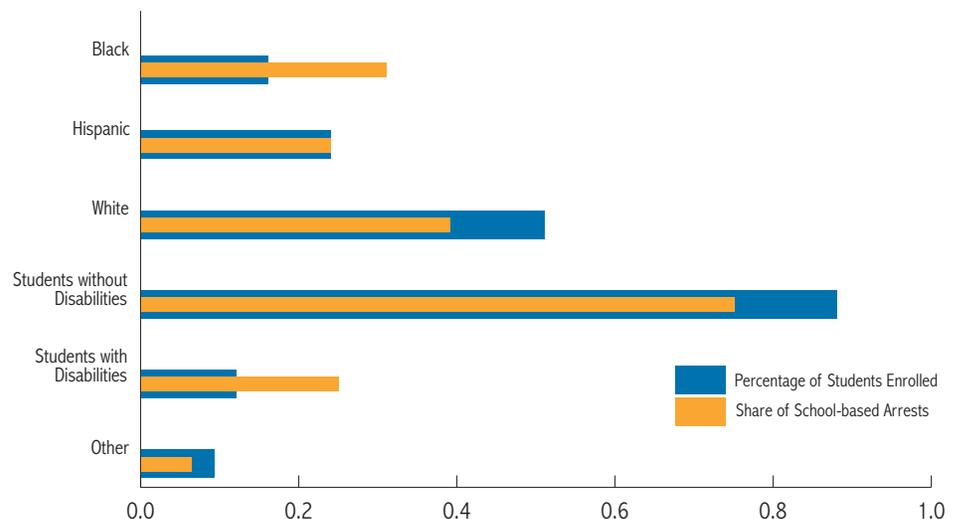
- **States will get much more discretion and authority in designing their state accountability systems.** They still must set goals, but they have greater flexibility. Goals must address proficiency on tests, English-language proficiency, and graduation rates. And the goals still must set an expectation that groups that are furthest behind close gaps in achievement and graduation rates. But Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) is gone. States must also include at least one additional student-performance measure as well as at least one measure

related to school success, such as student engagement or school climate.

- **States must identify and intervene in the lowest performing schools** (the bottom 5 percent on their accountability system) as well as schools where fewer than two-thirds of students graduate. The state can design the intervention, however.
- **States have more flexibility in evaluating teachers.** Gone is NCLB’s Highly Qualified Teacher requirement. So is the requirement that states link teacher evaluation to test scores, although states may do so if they want.

As recent headlines bear out, students of color and students with disabilities are more likely to be arrested or referred to law enforcement for nonviolent offenses compared with white peers (see figure). This national trend disrupts learning opportunities for many students of color and disabled students by criminalizing minor offenses. Ways that policymakers and educators can promote nondiscriminatory policies and practices are detailed in a recent NASBE report, “Advancing School Discipline Reform.” According to the American Institutes for Research, only a handful of states require training for school-based law enforcement. Such training could usefully cover child and youth development, implicit bias, trauma, and restorative justice.

Figure 1. Disproportionality in US School-Based Arrests (percent)



Source: US Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collections, 2011-12.