

Editor's Note

Valerie Norville
Editorial Director

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By the time this issue went to press, all states had submitted or were putting the final touches on their plans for implementing the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). It is an important milestone in the history of U.S. education policy. But there are many miles ahead.

As state plans are reviewed, revised, and rolled out, states will face challenges with implementation. The fifty-plus flavors of accountability those plans represent should prove a boon to policy analysts. Because ESSA is more flexible than its precursor, the states are not all following the same playbook. Consequently, there are bound to be interesting differences in outcomes and comparisons to be drawn. Over the long haul, the differences should prove instructive, enabling states to learn from each other.

In the meantime, state boards of education have a big job in making sure that implementation of the plans keeps faith with the spirit of ESSA. First and foremost, state boards should be able to discern whether all students in their states have access to an excellent education. The Education Trust's Ryan Smith and Lillian Lowery lay out some practical steps for keeping equity as the cornerstone of ESSA implementation.

Stakeholder engagement was a key theme for state policymakers over the past year. Ginger Ostro of Advance Illinois gives an advocacy organization's perspective on that process and how her organization put its imprint on Illinois's state plan. She also looks ahead to how groups such as hers plan to remain engaged during the implementation to come.

Achieve's Sandra Boyd takes up a key challenge: How will policymakers know whether they are achieving the goals they have set? How will schools know whether they are making real progress? How will parents and students assess whether their schools are improving? Public reporting of data is at the heart of the answer, and it must be transparent. Yet there are many means by which data can be used to throw shadows rather than shed light. Boyd tells state boards how to ask smart questions to keep data reporting honest.

Teacher preparation programs are a key component to successful implementation of state plans. Congress scuttled a 2017 federal regulation on this score, but that need not keep state boards from holding programs to high standards. Ashley LiBetti Mitchel and Chad Aldeman at Bellwether Education Partners detail three things boards can do to align teacher preparation with their ambitions for student achievement. Number one: Why not make use of the good work done in crafting and revising the federal regulation by implementing it anyway? Just because it isn't required doesn't mean you can't.

In the big push to complete ESSA state plans, there has been little talk about the law's requirement for districts to draft their own plans. With the benefit of experience, says the Opportunity Institute's Molly Mauer, states can help districts begin local conversations about what those plans should look like. She offers five principles to guide ongoing state and district engagement with their stakeholders. ■

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