

The State Education

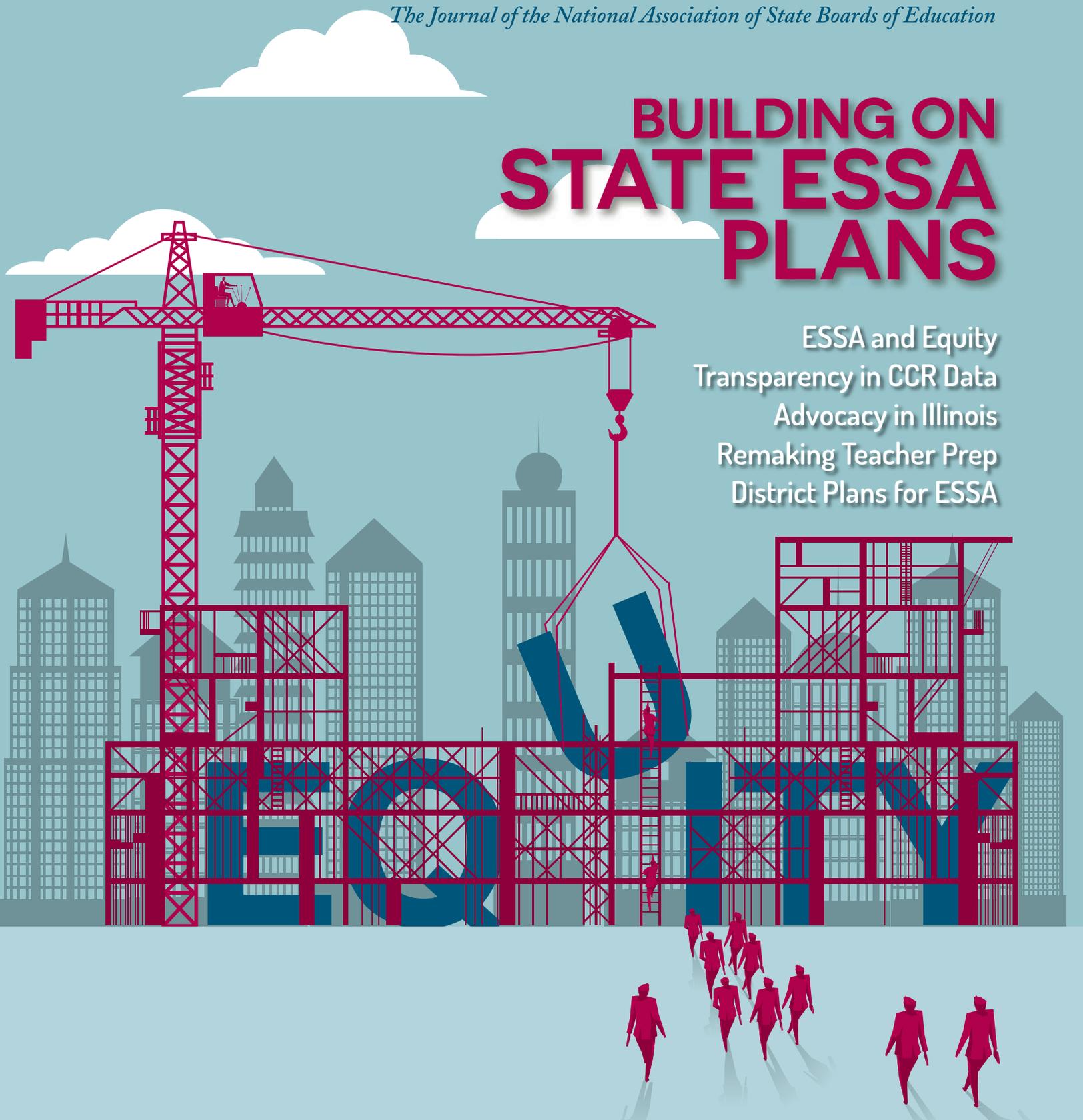
September 2017

Standard

The Journal of the National Association of State Boards of Education

BUILDING ON STATE ESSA PLANS

ESSA and Equity
Transparency in CCR Data
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Editor's Note

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Editorial Director

The State Education

Standard

Volume 17, Issue 3

September 2017

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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News & Notes

On July 19, the House Appropriations Committee approved (28-22) a Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education funding bill for fiscal 2018. The measure provides \$66 billion in discretionary funding for the Department of Education and represents a \$2.4 billion reduction compared with the current fiscal year. The bill provides level funding for Title I of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and extends a \$200 million increase for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act State Grants program. Perhaps the biggest surprise was the committee's elimination of over \$2 billion for educator and leader professional development (Title II), a cut that coincides with the Trump administration's request. Funding for other Department of Education (ED) and Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) programs are included in table 1, with proposed increases over the prior year in green, decreases in red, and level funding in the center.

The full House is unlikely to consider this legislation until later in the year and

then only as part of a larger omnibus package. The Senate Appropriations Committee has yet to take action on the ED or HHS budgets.

The House approved bipartisan legislation (H.R. 2353) to update the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, which supports students' academic and career and technical skill building. Although the bill does not depart substantially from current law, it simplifies the process for applying for federal funds and provides more flexibility. The legislation also strives to better align CTE programs with "in-demand jobs" and build stronger community and business partnerships.

The Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee's CTE work, however, is moving more slowly. Progress on a companion measure has been impeded by Chairman Lamar Alexander's call to significantly limit the secretary of education's regulatory authority over CTE and lingering partisan damage within the committee related to the secretary's confirmation. If health reform falls to the

wayside after the August recess, Chairman Alexander may have more time to allocate to Perkins and other education priorities.

ED's Office of Elementary and Secondary Education has been providing feedback to states that submitted plans this spring and in September begins reviewing plans from the remaining 34. Some Republicans, including Chairman Alexander, criticized the department for being too prescriptive, when, for example, it deemed Delaware's student achievement goals insufficiently ambitious.

The department also recently released a Dear Colleague Letter that gives states and districts until the 2018-19 school year to begin reporting ESSA's mandatory per-pupil expenditures on their accountability report cards. In a related note, at the end of July Secretary Betsy DeVos remained the only confirmed political appointee at ED.

For further information, contact Reg Leichy at Reg.Leichy@flpadvisors.com.

Table 1. Funding for Select Programs, House Bill for FY18 versus FY17 Appropriations

	-	FUNDING	+
Perkins Career and Technical Education		\$1.2 billion	
Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants		\$500 million	+\$100 million
State Assessments		\$369 million	
State Longitudinal Data Systems		\$32 million	
21st Century Community Learning Centers	-\$191 million	\$1 billion	
Charter School Grants		\$342 million	+\$27 million
Teacher and School Leader Incentive Grants		\$200 million	
Education Innovation and Research	-\$100 million	\$0	
Head Start		\$9.3 billion	+\$22 million
Child Care and Development Block Grant		\$2.8 billion	+\$4 million
Preschool Development Grant		\$250 million	

We, the Media

Working with the media and communicating with the public through the media are part and parcel of a public official's job—state board members included. It is a reciprocal relationship: Reporters depend on board members to be authoritative sources about state education matters. Board members in turn need the media to help relay important decisions and build public trust. Relationships with media are especially important as states finalize their accountability plans under the Every Student Succeeds Act and gear up for implementation.

Yet newsrooms are increasingly short staffed. As a result, reporters covering the state board of education may be working on multiple beats at once, and they are often younger or less experienced. This inexperience can be both a challenge and an opportunity for state boards. In responding to press inquiries, board members can educate reporters new to the beat on the intricacies of education policymaking while answering their specific questions.

Getting to know editorial boards and writers from your state's newspaper of record is also key, as op-ed pages affect and reflect public perceptions.

Reporters will ask difficult but usually fair questions. These 10 tips can help get you ready:

- 1. Ask yourself, "Am I the appropriate spokesperson?"** Many state boards choose only one board member to serve as spokesperson or have rules on member interactions with the media. Before agreeing to an interview, be clear about your board's policy.
- 2. Be responsive.** Reporters operate on deadlines, so timeliness is of the essence. Always ask when the deadline is and meet or beat it.
- 3. Check out the interviewer.** Knowing what your interviewer has written or their point of view can help in building rapport.
- 4. Be prepared.** A successful interview depends on your knowing the issue being covered. Read up and outline key points, messages, and facts you want to cover. Anticipate questions and compile talking points.
- 5. Be concise.** It's easy to say more than you mean to. Keep answers short, relevant, and jargon-free.
- 6. Accuracy and honesty are critical.** Never under any circumstances lie to a reporter. If you are caught in a lie, that will be the news. It is okay to refer a reporter to another expert or ask to double check a fact before you are quoted.
- 7. There is no such thing as "off the record."** Always assume that whatever you say will be used and attributed—even if your interview is "on background." It is easy for a reporter to misread her notes or decide that something you said is too good to omit.
- 8. Watch out for leading questions and hypotheticals.** Reporters may try to put words in your mouth or set up a quote they need. Avoid the temptation to "fill the silence" or speak out of turn.
- 9. Keep your cool.** Sometimes an interview elicits unexpected emotions. Breathe deeply and keep your tone, pace, and facial expressions even.
- 10. Repeat your main points.** At the end of every interview, slowly repeat two or three important points. You want to make sure the reporter has recorded—and understands—the most salient facts. ■



Renée Rybak Lang
Communications Director



Nicole Proesch
President, the National Council of
State Education Attorneys

NCOSEA Voice

The judge who always likes the results he reaches is a bad judge.

—Justice Antonin Scalia

Two cases during the 2016 term are particularly relevant to our work in education: *Fry vs. Napoleon Community Schools* and *Andrew F. vs. Douglas County School District RE-1*. Both addressed the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA).

In *Fry*, the parents of a child with severe cerebral palsy sought permission for her service dog Wonder to attend kindergarten with her. The school denied the request, finding it unnecessary because the student has a human aide provided for under her individual education plan (IEP). Her family began homeschooling her and filed a complaint with the Office for Civil Rights (OCR), claiming a violation of Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act and § 504. OCR agreed. Although the school invited her to return, the student and Wonder enrolled elsewhere. Her parents filed a complaint in federal court alleging violation of Title II and § 504 and seeking declaratory and monetary relief. The district court dismissed the complaint, holding that 20 U.S.C. § 1415(l) required the family to first exhaust IDEA administrative remedies. The appeals court affirmed the finding that § 1415(l) applies whenever a plaintiff's alleged harms are "educational" in nature.

The Supreme Court said that exhaustion of IDEA administrative procedures is unnecessary when the gravamen of the plaintiff's suit is something other than the denial of the IDEA's core guarantee of a "free appropriate public education" (FAPE). The case was remanded to the appeals court to determine if the

complaint represented denial of a FAPE.

In the second case, a child with autism received annual IEPs from preschool through the fourth grade, at which time his parents believed his academic progress had stalled. When the district presented an IEP for his fifth grade year similar to past ones, his parents enrolled him in a private school, where he made significant progress. Andrew F.'s parents filed a complaint under IDEA seeking tuition reimbursement from the Colorado Department of Education. The lower court interpreted *Rowley* to establish a rule that a child's IEP is adequate as long as it is calculated to confer a more than *de minimis* educational benefit.

In rejecting the *de minimis* standard, the Supreme Court held that a school must offer an IEP reasonably calculated to enable a child to make progress appropriate in light of the child's circumstances. The court vacated the lower court decision and remanded it. While the decision's full impact has yet to be determined, one takeaway is that adequacy of an IEP turns on the circumstances of the child for whom it was created.

Another case that attracted a fair bit of press was *Trinity Lutheran Church of Columbia, Inc. v. Comer*. The court held that the Missouri Department of Education's denial of a grant for a church-operated preschool's playground resurfacing violated Trinity's 1st Amendment rights by denying the church an otherwise available public benefit on account of its religious status. Thus, government entities can give money to religious entities, but it must be for a secular purpose. ■



Students Can't Wait: Promoting Equity and Improvement through ESSA

Beware of state plans for accountability that mask rather than reveal inequities.

Walker Middle School serves 320 students, about 70 percent of whom are white, 20 percent are African American, and 10 percent are Latino. About one-third of the students come from low-income families.

At first glance, Walker Middle seems to be a high-performing school. Eighty percent of its students are on grade level in math, according to the state assessment; 78 percent are on grade level in reading. When we peel back these averages, however, we see a more complex picture: While the school is getting 91 percent of its white students to grade level in math, for example, it's getting only 53 percent of black students to grade level. And while the school prepared 88 percent of higher income students to state standards, it did the same for only 60 percent of low-income students. Walker Middle nonetheless received an A grade from its state.

Walker is a fictional school. But the patterns are real and all too common. In schools and districts around the country, low-income students, students of color, students with disabilities, and English learners often face drastic inequities in resources and supports, which in turn lead to lower outcomes for these groups.¹ Yet these inequities are too often masked by overall averages.

Strong school accountability systems can be a powerful tool for turning these patterns around—for sending a clear message that achievement of all groups of students matters and that to be considered good, a school must serve all groups of students well. But in recent years, many states put in place accountability systems that do just the opposite. These systems mask disparities in opportunity and achievement rather than highlight them. Too often, these systems give A's to schools like Walker Middle

that might look just fine on average but that year after year underserve some groups of students.

By giving A's to schools with significant opportunity and achievement gaps, states are communicating to parents and communities that these gaps are OK. And they are depriving students in these schools of the attention they need and deserve.

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) offers states the opportunity to change this, to refocus accountability systems on improving achievement for *all* student groups, especially those that have been underserved for far too long. The law includes key requirements that push for a focus on equity in school accountability. States, for instance, have to measure how schools are doing for each group of students on each of the indicators in the system. And states must identify any school that is consistently underperforming for any group of students for support and improvement.

But the law also leaves many key decisions up to states: what to measure, how to communicate how schools are doing on those measures, and how to identify when a school needs to take action to improve for any group of students.

The decisions states made as they put together their ESSA plans over the past year signal whether they will continue on a harmful path of masking inequities or whether they will tackle them head on. As states move from designing their new accountability systems to implementing them, state boards of education will need to closely monitor the impacts of these policies and push for any needed course corrections to maximize improvement for all groups of students.

So what questions should state boards of education ask about the decisions reflected in state ESSA plans? Below, we

by Ryan Smith and Lillian Lowery

walk through three questions that are especially important for determining whether the state's accountability system is likely to prompt schools to focus attention on all groups of students. For each question, we highlight what to look for—and what to watch out for—in state plans.

Does the state keep student learning front and center?

ESSA provides states with more flexibility on what to measure as part of the school accountability system than did its predecessor, No Child Left Behind. The law requires states to measure state assessments results, graduation rates, and progress toward English language proficiency for English learners. These measures together have to count the most. But the law also requires states to choose at least one additional measure of school quality or student success. Importantly, all indicators must be measured for each group of students, meaning students from major racial/ethnic groups, low-income students, students with disabilities, and English learners.

What the state chooses to measure as part of its accountability system is critical because one of the key things accountability systems do is communicate expectations. If states measure the wrong things, they risk setting the wrong expectations. If states measure too many things, they risk setting too many expectations—and so having none of them matter. And if states measure things that cannot be measured for each group of students, they risk taking attention away from how the school is serving those student groups.

So what should state boards look for in their state plans? First, look for indicators that are focused on student learning and that research shows are related to preparing students for postsecondary success. Examples include chronic absenteeism, participation and success in advanced coursework, and other measures of college and career readiness.² Measures that are not focused on students—like teacher satisfaction—can be important for understanding how to help a school improve but should not affect the rating the school receives.

Make sure that all indicators can be measured for each group of students. What does this mean? Consider, for example, two potential indicators of access to advanced courses. One

is the number of AP classes offered in a school. The other is the percentage of students participating in at least one AP course. The number of classes offered is impossible to disaggregate—it cannot be measured separately for low-income students or for students with disabilities, for example. Participation in at least one AP course, on the other hand, can.

Based on our review of the first batch of state ESSA plans, indicator selection is an area where states seem to be excelling. Most of the states that submitted their plans in April selected solid measures that are focused on student learning. Many, for example, are supplementing assessment results and graduation rates with useful measures such as chronic absenteeism and college and career readiness.

Do school ratings reflect how schools are doing for all groups of students?

Whether they are labels—such as 1 to 5 stars, or “excellent” to “in needs of improvement,” or A-F grades—school ratings communicate to schools, families, and the public whether a school is meeting expectations. Ratings that are based on how schools are doing for low-income students, students of color, students with disabilities, and English learners can send a powerful signal that the achievement of all students matters and that schools have a responsibility to serve all students well.

Here are some key things to look for to make sure the accountability system communicates that the results of all students matter:

- Ratings should be based in large part on how schools are doing for each historically underserved group. One way to do this is to weigh all groups of students, including the all-students group, equally. In other words, if a school serves low-income students, African American students, white students, and students with disabilities, its results for each of these groups would count for 20 percent of the rating, with the all-student average counting for the last 20 percent.
- At minimum, if a school is consistently underperforming for any group of students, that school should not be able to get a high rating. A state can bar a school that is consistently underperforming for any group of students

If a school is consistently underperforming for any group of students, that school should not be able to get a high rating.

from earning A's or B's. Or it can lower the school's grade by one level.

Unfortunately, most of the states that have submitted their ESSA plans proposed rating criteria that do not pay much, if any, attention to schools' performance for individual student groups.

Here are some of the most common challenges in the spring batch:

- In many states, schoolwide averages carry all or the vast majority of the weight. Results of individual student groups don't count at all—or count for very little.
- Instead of looking at results of each individual student group, states are combining students from multiple historically underserved groups together into “supergroups.” In some states, for example, this means a “high-need supergroup,” which includes any student who is low-income, an English learner, or a student with a disability. Such supergroups not only allow the results of one group of students to mask those of another but ignore the different needs and civil rights protections afforded to each individual student group.³
- A school can get a high rating even when it is consistently underperforming for a group of students. In many states, there is no connection between school identification because of consistent underperformance for a student group and the rating the school receives.

Under many of these proposed systems, schools will likely be able to get high ratings despite low outcomes for one or more groups of students. Schools may get A's or B's even when they systematically underserve their low-income or African American students, for example, sending a dangerous message to educators, parents, and students that such inequities are perfectly acceptable. Instead of clearly signaling that all students matter, these states' rating criteria do the exact opposite.

State boards of education have a critical role to play in monitoring whether ratings reflect how schools are doing for all groups of students that they serve—and pushing their states to modify rating criteria if ratings are concealing disparities in student outcomes. When the state education agency releases new rating information for each school, board members should request an

analysis of how schools receiving each rating are doing for each group of students. If “high performing” schools systematically demonstrate lower outcomes for some groups of students and are not showing substantial improvement for those groups, state leaders should revisit the rating criteria.

Is the state being honest about which schools need to take steps to improve?

When is performance for a group of students so low that it requires attention and action? ESSA requires states to identify any school in which one or more groups of students is consistently underperforming for targeted support and improvement. States, however, get to decide what “consistently underperforming” means.

The definition matters because how a state chooses to identify schools for targeted support communicates expectations. Identification criteria define the minimum level of performance that is acceptable or high enough for a school not to require intervention.

Moreover, while the law leaves most decisions about supports and interventions up to states, it does require schools identified for targeted support and improvement to take certain steps—including putting together and implementing an evidence-based improvement plan with input from parents and the school community. If the school does not improve, its district has to take additional action. The state, too, has to examine its resource allocations to districts serving large numbers of schools identified for improvement. In other words, identification drives attention and support.

State plans ought to include a clear definition of what it means to be “consistently underperforming.” This definition should be rigorous and should capture any school that misses performance expectations for any student group. For example, a state could define “underperforming” as not being on track to meet the state's long-term achievement goals for a student group. Any school that is off-track for two years in a row could be identified for targeted support.

Unfortunately, many of the states that submitted their plans in April set their expectations too low, seemingly more concerned with identifying as few schools as possible than with making sure that any school that is underserving low-income

Many of the states that submitted their plans in April set their expectations too low.

Ryan Smith is executive director of The Education Trust–West, and Lillian Lowery is Education Trust's vice president for P-12 policy and practice.

Some states are identifying schools only if their performance for a student group is in the bottom 5 or 10 percent of results for that group.

students, students of color, students with disabilities, or English learners has to take steps to improve. Here are some of the common trends:

- Some states are identifying schools as consistently underperforming only if they are performing as badly for a group of children as the absolutely lowest performing schools (the bottom 5 percent) in the state are doing for all kids. Schools that are doing only slightly better are considered just fine.
- Even worse, some states are identifying schools only if their performance for a student group is in the bottom 5 or 10 percent of results *for that group*. This scheme does not just set very low expectations, it sets different expectations for each group of children. Under this definition of consistent underperformance, a school where only 20 percent of white students are on grade level could have to take action to improve, but a school where only 20 percent of black students are on grade level could not.

As states move from planning into implementation, state boards of education can help shift the conversation from how to minimize the number of identified schools to how the state will ensure that *any* school that is underserving *any* group of students is taking steps to improve. How will the state support schools that are struggling for all their students? And how will it prompt improvement in schools that are doing well on average but have for years underserved their low-income students, students of color, students with disabilities, or English learners? Many such schools have substantial resources at their disposal and face a far narrower set of challenges than the lowest performing schools in the state. How will the state ensure that these schools—and their districts—look carefully at how they can use their resources and capacity to eliminate disparities in opportunity and achievement?

The Education Trust identified key state levers for school improvement in its report “9 Ideas for Stimulating School Improvement under ESSA.” And it has joined with a range of partners from the business, civil rights, disability rights, and education reform communities to develop easy-to-use materials on a range of key questions related to school accountability and

improvement—from what indicators to select and how to ensure all groups of students matter in ratings to measuring and setting goals for English proficiency and beyond.⁴ These materials have served as the basis for a series of ESSA Boot Camps that Ed Trust and its national partners have hosted for over 190 state and local advocates. At these meetings, members of the business, civil rights, disability rights, education reform, teacher voice, and parent advocacy communities dug deep on key policy questions and discussed concrete steps to get involved in ESSA plan development and implementation.

We hope state board members will take advantage of these materials as they work to ensure that their state accountability system maintains a laser-sharp focus on equity and improvement. And we urge them to keep meaningfully engaging with diverse stakeholders, especially those representing the interests of historically underserved communities who have the most to gain—or lose—in this process. Low-income students, students of color, English learners, and students with disabilities should not have to wait any longer for schools and systems to set high expectations and support them in meeting those expectations. ■

¹Natasha Ushomirsky and David Williams, “Funding Gap 2015: Too Many States Still Spend Less on Educating Students Who Need the Most” (Washington, DC: The Education Trust, 2015); U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, “2013–14 Civil Rights Data Collection: A First Look,” <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/2013-14-first-look.pdf>.

²For more on these accountability indicators, see NASBE’s Fifth Indicator series of reports: Don Long, “Career and Technical Education,” *Policy Update* 24, no. 3 (2017); Kimberly Charis and Daniel Losen, “School Climate and Discipline,” *Policy Update* 24, no. 4 (2017); Sarah-Jane Lorenzo, “Social and Emotional Learning,” *Policy Update* 24, no. 5 (2017); Maya Boddie, “Chronic Absenteeism,” *Policy Update* 24, no. 6 (2017); Abigail Potts, “Access to High-Level Course Work,” *Policy Update* 24, no. 7 (2017).

³For more on the challenges with supergroups, see Lynn Jennings, “Trends in State ESSA Plans: The Problem with Supergroups,” *The Equity Line* blog (June 1, 2017), <https://edtrust.org/the-equity-line/trends-state-essa-plans-problem-supergroups/> and Allison Rose Socol, “NBER Study Makes Assertions about Supergroups without Proof,” *The Equity Line* blog (June 21, 2017), <https://edtrust.org/the-equity-line/nber-study-makes-assertions-supergroups-without-proof/>.

⁴These materials are available at www.studentscantwait.org.



Plotting a New Course on Teacher Preparation Reform

In early 2017, Congress used an obscure law called the Congressional Review Act to rescind two education regulations passed late in the Obama administration. One of those, which attempted to define and implement the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), received the bulk of the media attention at the time. It was the first crack at defining some of ESSA's vaguer passages, and it also was more urgent, with states busy

planning how to implement the new law in the 2017–18 school year.

But the second regulation that was rescinded, which would have redefined the way states held teacher preparation programs accountable, deserved more attention than it got. It would have defined legislative language originally inserted into the 1998 reauthorization of the Higher Education Act by asking states to design rating systems for their

State boards have at least three means for changing how they hold prep programs accountable.

**by Ashley LiBetti Mitchel
and Chad Aldeman**

■
State boards could push their state education agencies to design a public website that houses programs' completer data and allows potential teacher candidates and their employers to compare data by program.

preparation programs based on the outcomes of their graduates, including whether they found jobs, remained as teachers, and demonstrated effectiveness in classrooms.

The policy would have provided crucial information about the effectiveness of preparation program completers, and thus it could have nudged teacher preparation programs to improve and changed the way teachers get hired in schools. But it had no natural political constituency, and therefore few people fought to retain it when the Trump administration cut it. States (rightfully) pointed out that the regulation came with no new money, congressional Republicans called it a federal overreach, and national teachers unions disagreed with the premise that preparation programs were responsible for the student learning gains of their graduates.

With the regulation gone, and with states well under way in implementing their ESSA plans, what steps can state boards of education take to encourage teacher preparation programs to improve? We see at least three potential paths forward:

1. Execute the proposed regulation anyway.

Our first recommendation to state boards is to act as if the proposed teacher preparation regulation had not been rescinded. Despite being politically unpopular at the federal level, the proposed regulation was based on facts that are still true:

- Most states hold preparation programs accountable via inputs—things like admissions criteria and certain coursework. Historically, states relied on these inputs because they were thought to be predictive of teacher effectiveness and because the data were readily available and easily measured.
- There is very little evidence that these input measures actually affect student learning.

Taken together, these facts suggest that states need to change the way they hold preparation programs accountable. The proposed regulation offers an alternative—one that mirrors work already happening in more than a dozen states. **Louisiana** and **Tennessee** were some of the first: As early as 2000, Louisiana started assessing teacher preparation programs based on the

outcomes of their graduates. In recent years, other states shifted to outcomes-focused accountability frameworks to capitalize on their access to a multitude of data on program completers.

State boards, especially those with explicit authority over teacher preparation programs, could push to adopt rules that look similar to the proposed regulation and work done in other states. Specifically, state boards should collect and publicly report program completer data and use those data to foster continuous improvement at the program level.

State boards could also work to amend educator preparation program standards to require that the state collects and publicly reports data on program completer placement rates, retention rates, and classroom effectiveness. Rhode Island, for example, rewrote their state standards in 2013 to explicitly assess programs on their evaluation and employment outcomes, including placement, retention, and measures of professional practice.¹

Florida takes this work one step further: Its state board annually analyzes statewide data to identify critical teacher shortage areas, habitually high-need content areas, and high-priority locations.² The state then assesses programs on their production of teachers in those critical areas.

Further, state boards could push their state education agencies (SEAs) to design a public website that houses programs' completer data and allows “consumers”—potential teacher candidates and their employers—to compare data by program. Of the states currently doing this work, almost all of them make these data publicly available but not necessarily in a way that lets the end user glean the information they need. For example, a state may publish provider-level reports in PDF format. If a teacher candidate wanted to determine which program produces graduates with consistently high evaluation scores, they would have to manually toggle to compare a single data point across multiple PDFs for multiple programs and years. It would not be impossible, but it would be tedious.

There are real barriers to finding the right teacher preparation program, but data formatting should not be one of them. Massachusetts provides a good example of how one could design a format to compare data across potential providers.³

Collecting and publishing outcome data will likely have only some effect on preparation

programs' practices, however. To foster significant and continuous improvement, state boards should urge their SEAs to ask strategic questions about program quality and practice and to analyze program data. How effective are specific program practices? Under what circumstances? For whom? By looking at program data across the state, the SEA could identify programs that consistently perform well on state metrics and then work to determine which elements of the program's practice produced those effects.

If the SEA cannot conduct those analyses at the state level, state boards should encourage programs to do this work as a smaller networked learning community. Where programs are in the driver seat and intentionally using data to inform continuous improvement rather than solely providing data for use as an accountability tool, sustainable improvement becomes possible.

2. Help districts make better decisions.

Even if states decide not to collect new information on their teacher preparation programs, they could still benefit from shifting their thinking away from a primary focus on licensing initial teachers. Instead, they should turn to helping their school districts make smarter decisions about whom to hire in the first place. Under this strategy, states should consider how to expand district access to actionable data that already exists.

This recommendation bucks against recent trends, where states have tried to “raise the bar” on the teaching profession. Counterintuitive though it may seem, states would be better off acknowledging the limits of setting hard barriers to entry and instead turn toward softer strategies to influence teacher recruitment efforts.

Why not just raise the bar? State leaders must recognize that it is almost impossible to know in advance, based on paper credentials, who will be a good teacher. In this context, all metrics that states use to set barriers to entry suffer from similar flaws. Today, 46 states and the District of Columbia require teacher candidates to pass some form of ETS's Praxis assessments, which focus on math and reading content knowledge.⁴ A 1999 analysis found that its questions were roughly as difficult as what we ask of most high schoolers.⁵ Still, lots of would-be teachers cannot pass it. But that does not necessarily mean they will be bad teachers.

A recent report from the Arkansas Center for Research in Economics was able to approximate the effect of raising the passing score on Praxis by comparing results in Arkansas and Louisiana, two states with different cut scores in 2010.⁶ The study found that, from a statistical perspective, teachers who performed better on the Praxis math test on average were better math teachers. But the differences were tiny, and there was wide variation at nearly every score. Some great teachers scored poorly on the Praxis, and some poor teachers scored well.

If Arkansas were to raise its Praxis cut score to match Louisiana's minimum, it would effectively block some lower-performing teachers from ever becoming teachers, but it would also lose many teachers who could have performed at similar levels—or even better than average. Rather than weeding out bad teachers, the policy change would mostly just limit the supply of new teachers.

The Arkansas study mirrored findings from an earlier one looking at Praxis test-takers in North Carolina,⁷ as well as another one looking at principal candidates taking a common licensure exam in Tennessee. The Tennessee⁸ study had another troubling finding: Although white test-takers tended to score higher than nonwhite candidates, they performed no better on measures of job performance like evaluation ratings or surveys of teachers' perceptions of school leadership. In effect, the state's licensure exam was screening out minority candidates, even though the exam had no ability to distinguish between good and bad prospective principals.

More recently, a number of states have moved beyond the multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blank Praxis test for teachers, requiring assessments tied to specific subject areas. There are now multiple Praxis II tests, all pitched to a particular content area or pedagogical skill set. These should produce more discerning results, but the same Arkansas study found that they do not.

Even the edTPA—a portfolio-based assessment based on videos of teacher candidates delivering actual lessons, teacher lesson plans, student work, and candidate reflections—had similar results. A study of teacher candidates in Washington State found that the edTPA was not much better than the Praxis as a policy tool.⁹ There was no clear-cut point at which a state

Opening up the edTPA videos to future employers would allow districts to evaluate potential teachers based on performance.

State boards, with the support of state legislatures, can create a bucket of money to expand high-quality programs—based on completer performance data, specifically in shortage areas.

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would want to set its passing score, and every point higher they raised the bar meant they would lose teachers, some of whom would have been good and some not so good.

Instead of continuing down this policy path, states should shift their gaze to helping school districts make better hiring decisions. They could start by opening up existing information to school districts. States have a unique role in providing access to teacher data, or at least allowing districts to request it, and a district choosing between two otherwise identical teachers should want to give the edge to the teacher with the better credentials, assuming they have access to that information. This is true of traditional licensure test scores and whether candidates are able to meet a state's expectation on their first try as well as newer requirements like edTPA.

EdTPA in particular has a host of information that would aid districts' hiring efforts. Any edTPA state could explicitly allow districts to request the same teacher videos that were scored as part of the edTPA. While not all districts can require teacher candidates to do an in-person practice lesson, opening up the edTPA videos to future employers would allow districts to evaluate potential teachers based on performance. States could also build websites to help match teacher candidates with prospective employers and include dedicated space for candidates to upload their performance videos.

There is evidence that these types of activities can boost the quality of incoming teachers. In Spokane, Washington, for example, the district uses a screening mechanism that helps identify future teaching ability.¹⁰ And as part of sweeping reforms to its recruiting process, the **District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS)** now requires all candidates to either conduct in-person lessons or submit a video of actual teaching. Those mock teaching lessons strongly predict future classroom effectiveness and have enabled DCPS to significantly improve the caliber of its incoming teachers. Districts may not necessarily pursue these reforms on their own, but states can help create the conditions for more districts to do so.

Helping districts improve their hiring practices could have other positive benefits. It could help districts recruit more candidates per opening, hire candidates earlier in the year,

and land a higher percentage of their preferred candidates, leaving fewer unfilled openings at the start of the school year. All this would, in turn, lead to more effectively run school systems and to better teachers coming into schools.

3. Spur innovation among high-performing programs.

Finally, state boards should explore how they can encourage innovation among high-performing preparation programs. Boards involved in the state's program approval process can offer high-performing programs the option to forgo some of the more arduous program approval requirements in exchange for developing and piloting innovative, evidence-based practices.

Only programs with a history of complying with program approval requirements and evidence of producing effective program completers should be given this opportunity, but doing so will create the space for high-performing programs to innovate and incentivize other programs to focus on their completers' performance data. The types of flexibility that states can offer programs depend on a state's approval process, but two options are shorter, lighter touch program approval visits and longer approval timelines. State boards, with the support of state legislatures, can also offer programs financial incentives to innovate. They can create a bucket of money to expand high-quality programs—based on completer performance data, specifically in shortage areas. Additionally, states can encourage high performers to adopt innovative program models through use of the 5 percent of Title II funding set aside for this purpose.

Boards involved with their states' program approval processes can also encourage innovation by approving certain alternative pathways to teacher licensure. Most, though not all, states allow alternative certification programs, but the requirements for program approval—and the degree to which they allow innovation—varies by state. State boards must carefully balance program approval requirements for alternative certification pathways; requirements that are too stringent and prescriptive stifle innovation, while lax requirements encourage low program quality. (Our first recommendation—to execute the proposed Higher Education Act regulation—can also serve as the foundation for a new, more

cont'd on page 34



Advancing Equity in Illinois’s ESSA Plan

East St. Louis, Illinois, has seen its share of struggles. The Gateway Arch stands in clear sight, just across the Mississippi River. But the endless possibilities and hope for the future that the monument inspires can feel many miles away.

Ninety-nine percent of students in East St. Louis rely on the free and reduced-price meal program. That means that nearly all families in the community earn less than \$44,000 per household. Students in East St. Louis, like those in many low-income school districts in Illinois, trail students in wealthier districts when it comes to achievement. East St. Louis students face a 29 percentage-point gap in proficiency compared with their wealthier peers.

Yet the statistics do not tell the whole story. Students are making progress in

school and toward their dreams. “You shouldn’t really judge a book by its cover,” says Cynthia Taylor-Cutler, a seventh grader at Mason-Clark Middle School. “Although East St. Louis may not be the best place, some of the best people come out of here.”

Clearly, East St. Louis had a stake in Illinois’s efforts to create a state plan to implement the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). How would the community’s voice be heard? And what ongoing role would education advocates in the state play in maintaining the engagement mobilized in the months leading up to the final plan?

Illinois’s state superintendent launched a transparent, collaborative approach in April 2016 that continued throughout

Advocacy organizations aim to build on processes and relationships created during the plan’s development as implementation begins.

by Ginger Ostro

The rigorous engagement process included four draft plans publicly available for comment and a statewide listening tour to over 50 sites.

the year. In Illinois, the governor appoints the members of the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), who in turn hire the state superintendent. The governor also appoints a secretary of education to work in his office, and this secretary leads the state's P-20 Council. The state board and the state superintendent's rigorous engagement process included four draft plans publicly available for comment and a statewide listening tour to over 50 sites. The meetings from the listening tour emphasized input from community members on a variety of ESSA topics, very much in the spirit of the new law.

But this process did not settle the question of how to best integrate advocates' input. Local voices would be heard, but would traditional advocates and technical experts respond only through written responses to draft plans? How would organizations like mine, Advance Illinois, contribute their expertise to the development of the biggest education policy change in decades?

Advance Illinois is an independent, objective voice for a healthy public education system that prepares all students in Illinois for success in college, careers, and civic life. Our advocacy efforts have focused on securing equitable funding for schools, Common Core State Standards, high-quality assessments, and teacher quality efforts. As advocates for the building blocks of Illinois's education system, we saw ESSA's passage as a generational opportunity to develop a more robust, refined accountability system and improve results for students—especially students of color and low-income students—and to ensure that the state's system of supports and assistance truly helps struggling schools.

While No Child Left Behind shined a light on student outcomes and inequity, it fell short in providing a true measure of student progress, especially for the students most at risk. It used proficiency measures that were biased by demographic factors and was often seen as punishing rather than supporting schools.

Advance Illinois saw ESSA as a new day for education. It was an opportunity to evaluate schools fairly by uncovering true academic growth and reinforcing the belief that all students can learn. With ESSA, the state could develop new mechanisms to assist schools and lift achievement for every student.

Advocates Seek Deeper Role in Illinois Plan

Advance Illinois regularly collaborates with ISBE on an array of issues, providing data and analysis to help inform its approach. We always strive to understand the board's vision, and we work with partners to provide input on how to implement that vision in a way that best supports all students in the state. We are a critical friend.

The fact that we had an existing relationship with ISBE proved important as we sought to provide input to the ESSA plan. Ours was one of many voices pushing the state education agency to establish a process in which education stakeholders could help define the accountability measures to be used and provide technical expertise in building the accountability system. Advocates were specifically concerned with technical aspects of metric selection and the weights to be given to each. Along with other advocates, we wanted to ensure that those measures and values would support a balanced system. We did not want to sit on the sidelines.

Soon after ESSA's passage, a group of our partners convened to better understand the law. They, among others, became integral to influencing the state plan—the Latino Policy Forum, the Ounce of Prevention Fund, Real Learning for Real Life, Educators 4 Excellence, Stand for Children Illinois, and Teach Plus Illinois, to name a few. Each partner brought a wealth of expertise on issues addressing English learners, early childhood, and teacher quality. In addition, all the partners understood how accountability systems had affected students and families over the preceding 15 years and saw ESSA as an opportunity to change the conversation.

Together, we created three principles to pursue through our advocacy around ESSA: Illinois's plan should be fair, clear, and supportive:

- *fair*: not significantly biased against schools just because of their demographics;
- *clear*: simple enough for parents and educators to understand; and
- *supportive*: intervening and providing resources to high-need schools.

Despite clear goals for the outcome, these groups, like others, lacked a formal way to

participate in ESSA plan development other than by attending the listening tours the state board was already hosting. So we did that. But it still seemed to us that ISBE would be missing important voices and a richer conversation with experts if they relied only on the listening tours. Through discussion with the board and the governor's office, we worked to help create other opportunities for formal and technical input.

And the state board responded. ISBE created working groups to provide technical expertise and included legislators who had pushed for more engagement so that they could better understand the eventual plan. These working groups helped identify measures for the accountability system and to prioritize the measures eventually chosen. These initial working groups, along with the listening tours, heavily informed the first draft of the plan, which by design included a number of open questions. Rigorous discussion was still needed to inform a robust final state plan.

Another factor complicated the ESSA process. Prior to the U.S. Congress's passage of ESSA, the Illinois legislature had unanimously passed a bill to create the Illinois Balanced Accountability Measures (IBAM) system. Many groups of educators across the state, including teachers' unions and management organizations, had provided input to this legislation. The law emphasized best practices for school improvement.

The law established a committee, which had already begun its work on accountability before the listening tours and working groups began. This committee had a statutory responsibility to provide feedback to the state board on the state's accountability system. Given the work of the IBAM committee, listening tours, working groups, and the early release of draft plans, it was abundantly clear that many people wanted to get the ESSA plan right but also that there were many venues for input and no single place to convene everyone to discuss and debate the plan.

Coordinating Discussions

The Illinois P-20 Council is a governor-appointed education advisory body, and Advance Illinois has had a seat on it since its inception. Chaired by Illinois's secretary of education, the P-20 Council fosters

collaboration among a diverse set of stakeholders: state agencies, education institutions, local schools, community groups, and school management groups, teachers' unions, academic experts, and stakeholders. Many P-20 participants were also part of the committee created in statute to design IBAM. Although the P-20 Council was not as engaged at the outset, many stakeholders turned to it as a natural place to help coordinate the myriad ESSA discussions occurring throughout the state.

While the state board needed to make sense of the input it received from local stakeholders during its listening tour, the P-20 Council provided a venue for the Governor's Office to gather technical recommendations from statewide education leaders prior to the governor signing off on the state plan. P-20 served as an intersection point among stakeholders, the Governor's Office, and ISBE, as the state superintendent has a seat on the council. P-20 ultimately prepared a presentation of its recommendations to the state superintendent and the Governor's Office following the listening tour.

With philanthropic support for staffing, P-20 Council committees held multiple meetings, received and reviewed research, learned what other states were doing, and discussed, debated, and ultimately voted on key recommendations. The P-20 committees' detailed recommendations for the state plan were formally presented to the state superintendent and the full P-20 Council.

There were and continue to be real tensions among partners in the approach to the plan. For example, there was not consensus on how academic measures should be weighted versus school quality/student success metrics. While most council members acknowledged that student success metrics such as attendance and grades are extremely powerful indicators of postsecondary success, which was a fundamental goal of the plan, they vigorously debated the best approach to including these metrics and at what level.

Working with the Governor's Office, ISBE was able to take these multiple inputs and integrate them into successive drafts of the plan, engaging the public and asking open questions along the way. For example, growth ultimately was included as 50 percent of academic and school quality metrics in the final draft. ISBE

It was abundantly clear that many people wanted to get the ESSA plan right but also that there were many venues for input and no single place to convene everyone to discuss and debate the plan.



As the council and the state board acknowledge, the submitted plan is a starting point, not an end point.

was able to strike a balance on the accountability system, even though not everyone supported it fully. And while the federal law complicated use of IBAM’s school quality review system, there was significant agreement that this system should be a gateway to services for schools needing support.

As the council and the state board acknowledge, the submitted plan is a starting point, not an end point. Too much is still unknown about the impact of this plan, including how student growth is used and how the final scoring and school identification system will actually work. For these reasons, it will be important to simulate the plan before it goes live and keep partners together to continue the conversation.

On the eve of ISBE’s presentation of its final draft plan to its members in March 2017, Advance Illinois hosted a legislator forum in Springfield, Illinois. The state superintendent, Dr. Tony Smith, was a featured speaker at the event, as was panelist Cynthia Taylor-Cutler, the East St. Louis seventh grade student council president who so impressed us with her understanding of the accountability system—and how to provide supports to students—during a school tour. A keynote was given by Ryan Smith, executive director of the Education Trust affiliate Education Trust–West, a California-based education advocacy organization with a platform similar to Advance Illinois’s (see his article with Lillian Lowery on page 6).

The forum was an opportunity to recognize Illinois’s progress toward an ESSA plan and the close collaboration between advocates and the state board and to reiterate its core principles. But it also positioned all parties for their ongoing roles in the implementation ahead.

More than two dozen legislators attended, as well as members of the state board and 35 other partnering organizations.

Tony Smith made clear that the board had focused on how the state plan would advance equity. “Our State Board has asked, ‘How and in what ways can we support all of our children, in particular the kids who are the least well served and in the most marginalized districts?’” the state superintendent said in his remarks. “How can we create a system that both says all kids need our support and we need to be held accountable for their improvement?”

Equity and accountability were also at the heart of Taylor-Cutler’s concerns. “About 80 percent of students in our school are not ready academically when they start high school,” she said. “How will we make sure our students are ready and prepared? If we’re not PARCC ready, how will you know if we’re not progressing and not ready? How can we work toward that?”

Ongoing Work on School Supports

Advance Illinois is still identifying potential challenges and proactively researching solutions. In addition, we’re working with our community of stakeholders, including the Real Learning for Real Life coalition, to establish our next set of priorities for implementation, including supports/assistance for schools.

While the ISBE formal processes and the work of the P-20 Council debated many aspects of Illinois’s ESSA plan, we noticed that supports and assistance for struggling schools received less attention. This is crucial for us—what will happen on the ground in communities to help schools improve and students succeed?

Advance Illinois leveraged its strong

partnerships with communities throughout the state to get direct feedback from school districts and community partners on how the state could best support student progress. We launched pilot listening sessions on this topic in diverse school districts including East St. Louis and involved superintendents, teachers, curriculum heads, and stakeholders.

We facilitated a consensus-style workshop to answer the fundamental question: How can the state best support your students' progress? Each educator started by listing their top ten answers and then worked in pairs to refine their lists down to eight. As a group, we created themed clusters that clearly describe the barriers and aids to improvement facing Illinois schools and pointed toward policy changes for state board adoption.

Advance Illinois staff toured two schools in East St. Louis School District 189, a high-poverty district that is currently under state control. The community has experienced the deepest intervention a state can take within a school system but also demonstrated remarkable resilience. Millions of dollars in college scholarships to seniors and strong district leadership are just two of the visible signs of success coming from District 189. Student council members led our tours and told us about their classes, new technology, and supports for struggling students. The highlight of these tours was the PARCC practice room at one of the schools, where Taylor-Cutler proudly told us students go to practice the hardest questions so they can demonstrate their understanding on state assessments. All our student tour guides beamed as they talked about their academic achievements and plans for the future.

The state board is in the midst of further developing the IL-EMPOWER system, which will provide support not only to schools identified through the state's accountability system but is intended to be a warehouse of best practices for all schools in Illinois. Through the Real Learning for Real Life coalition, we hope to continue to work with ISBE to strengthen the supports that our schools receive.

Not the End

ISBE's final ESSA plan ultimately adopted many of the recommendations proposed by

Advance Illinois and the array of partners that came together through the P-20 Council, IBAM, and ISBE meetings. Yet all agreed the work was not over when the plan was submitted. The partnership, trust, and working relationships built during the ESSA planning process will be the foundation for work going forward as the plan is refined and implementation begins.

As an example, the state's accountability system still needs to be refined. When the state board convened additional working groups over the summer of 2017 to work out additional details of the plan, coalition partners were given a central role.

We intend to tap into our relationships with the field to help strengthen the system to provide support and assistance to schools. This part of the plan is still being flushed out. The Real Learning for Real Life coalition, the P20 Council, IBAM, and many ongoing conversations with schools, communities, educators will be central to these efforts. But now, unlike when ESSA planning began, there is better understanding of the law, and partners' roles are more clearly established.

Although Illinois's process likely differs in important respects from that of other states, advocacy groups across the country will no doubt look to their state boards of education to continue engagement during ESSA implementation. State boards everywhere should keep strong lines of communication with schools and continue to receive their feedback. School accountability measures are sensitive topics, and state boards should ensure data are thoroughly analyzed before being released publicly. While a system may appear strong on paper, its true test will come when it is applied in the real world. State boards should be responsive to their schools' unique needs, continuing to hear from groups on the ground to understand the system's implications. Coalitions and advocate groups are important allies in these implementation efforts, as we learned so powerfully in Illinois.

In the end, the truest measure of success is student improvement and a system that helps every kid see the future as brightly as Cynthia Taylor-Cutler does. ■

Now, unlike when ESSA planning began, there is better understanding of the law, and partners' roles are more clearly established.

Ginger Ostro is executive director of Advance Illinois.



Districts can benefit from the lessons states have learned so far in stakeholder engagement around ESSA.

by Molly Mauer

Helping Districts Build Great Schools through Great Engagement

This year's submission of consolidated state plans for implementing the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) revealed two things: New ideas made it to the table, and many people—including those who had not before engaged in education policy conversations—contributed to the process. But what is still hazy as the dust settles is whether this once-in-a-decade opportunity for states and districts to engage stakeholders will help move the needle toward equity and toward giving every child an excellent education.

Undergirded by a firm belief in the power of democratic decision making, local control, and the expertise of families, educators, practitioners, and advocates to solve challenges that schools face, ESSA required stakeholder engagement. It requires it first of states and then of the districts. The law explicitly directed states to engage constituents, mentioning it at least 95 times compared with the 15 instances in No Child Left Behind. The challenge for state boards of education now is to help districts leverage this required engagement into meaningful local conversations that can ensure that every child has equitable access to a great school.

Defining Great Schools and Equity

If you ask a room full of people to describe a great school, you'll get similar responses. Great schools have caring and smart teachers, engaging classrooms, and opportunities for curiosity, laughter, and fun. They are places where kids feel seen, safe, and appreciated, and teachers love their jobs, co-workers, and students. Families and teachers and principals communicate often and respectfully. Teachers feel valued. Great schools expect much from students, but they are also rich with valuable assets—academic and nonacademic—for student success and achievement, and they are responsive to student needs. They offer students rigorous coursework and prepare them for their next steps in the adult world.

You might also hear, "You'll know it's a great school when you feel it." Although that quality can feel powerful and near intangible, parts of it can be measured. Parents and teachers alike are able to use data to solve problems in great schools.

Everyone wants to teach in such a school, go to one, or send their child to one. The reality is, great schools are not equitably distributed. They are usually part of the

infrastructure and amenities of well-resourced, affluent communities. Such communities also often have easy access to resources to support students' mental and physical health, enrichment classes, and activities.

More than six decades since *Brown v. Board of Education*, it is clear that equity does not just happen based on people's good intentions. Equity requires courageous, vigilant disruption of the way education has historically been done. These habits and practices cannot remain solely within the confines of education professionals but should allow for broad, meaningful distribution of responsibility and accountability for a shared goal of excellence.

Educational equity means that every student has access to the resources and educational rigor they need at the right moment in their education, regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, language, disability, family background, or family income. Put simply, an equitable system is one where "historic barriers of racism, class, and discrimination don't determine any student's opportunity to succeed."¹ To dismantle these barriers, there must be strong accountability, meaningful engagement, accessible information and data, and equitable distribution of resources based on student need. Such facets are not only essential, they are wholly interdependent, and together make up the critical infrastructure needed to pursue educational equity.

Developing New Accountability Systems

Under ESSA, rewriting and reengineering accountability systems—and developing clear processes for school improvement—has been a 50-state undertaking. A strong, equity-centered accountability system rests on the ability to clearly identify schools and districts that are struggling, especially those in need of targeted support, and then to allocate resources and devote data-driven processes to making that system work in favor of kids and the adults that support them.

With this accountability infrastructure in place at the state level, school and district leaders can meaningfully engage parents, families, and teachers on how they might work together toward improving schools. Parents and caregivers want this accountability. Nearly 7 in 10 black parents and families said that the school's rating from the state is an important piece of

information in determining if the school is effectively educating their child.²

Parents, students, educators and school leaders, community members, elected officials, civil rights and advocacy groups, and many others must all be engaged in building accountability systems and share in the challenge of ensuring educational equity. And the conversations that take place in the districts is where the rubber meets the road.

What Is Next?

After more than a year of planning around ESSA, some states worked hard to include many voices in education policy decision making. Some not so hard. For instance, despite 69 percent of teachers saying it was very important for teacher voice to influence education policy development and implementation, only 23 percent agreed that their state education agency (SEA) had sought adequate teacher input in the state ESSA plan.³

State plans are important. But the extent to which ESSA succeeds in advancing equity and excellence rests with the actions of those closest to students. At the local level, community leaders, parents, advocates, and others should be ensuring that the statewide plan is implemented in ways that meet the needs of the community. As local education agencies develop and implement their local ESSA plans, they must engage stakeholders to think about how ESSA will play out locally.

Most often, when faced with a mandate to "collaborate," "partner," or "consult," agencies and officials have tended to rely on a standard set of easily accessible constituency groups and advisers as part of a communications or public relations strategy. And systems typically lack the incentives, resources, or consistent leadership to do more than comply with a bureaucratic mandate. Yet meaningful engagement requires more: intentional commitment, dedicated resources, and explicit work. To that end, SEAs and local educational agencies (LEAs) need to develop background information and preliminary thoughts about key decision points as well as implications for program resource allocation, assessment, and accountability.

As schools and districts plan and implement ESSA, state support will be essential to encourage collaboration on a local level. To create a

As local education agencies develop and implement their local ESSA plans, they must engage stakeholders to think about how ESSA will play out locally.

permanent culture of engagement, districts can learn from the promising practices and cautionary tales that have emerged in my organization's work over the past year in support of efforts at the state level. I offer the following five guiding principles and examples of these principles in action from the work of Partners for Each and Every Child in Illinois to guide state policymakers' ongoing efforts to strengthen their own stakeholder engagement and to encourage districts to mirror these practices at the local level.

1. Reach the Unreached, the Left Behind, and the Left Out

Fundamental to the advancement of equity in schools is the purposeful, targeted distribution of resources to meet and counterbalance the needs of students and families. Similarly, prioritizing the needs of those who have historically been least able to participate meaningfully in policy decisions means creating systems that ultimately work better for all stakeholders. For example, gathering parents can mean inviting PTA members and their well-staffed policy departments. But it also means meeting with church groups, local community representatives, family and youth groups, civil rights groups, and other student and parent advocacy organizations. And it means working hard to make outreach meaningful, engaging, and accessible. At a minimum, such engagement means ensuring that translation and interpretation are available at public meetings, online materials are accessible, and meetings are held with access to food and childcare.

District officials must also reach out to where people live and work, in schools, and at community centers. Groups that do attend must regularly be asked whether there are voices absent from the discussion and what might be done to support their inclusion. Partners for Each and Every Child collaborated with the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) and Illinois advocacy organizations to support participation of underserved groups. This meant ensuring these groups had a seat at the table, but it also encompassed creating a reader's guide for each draft plan so community members could digest the materials and provide meaningful feedback in statewide roundtables. Our work with ISBE focused on ensuring that the community could engage actively in plan implementation. This

past spring and summer, targeted districts and their community leaders joined all-day workshops on the ESSA plan and its impact.

2. Show Your Work

The articulation of a public, transparent, well-defined decision-making process is critical for advancing educational equity. If their interests are to be honestly weighed, those who are not intimately familiar with state education governance must be able to discover how, when, and to whom they must make their voices heard. Simply sharing lists of meeting dates and invitees is only a small step toward transparency. But capturing and posting feedback, showing how decisions did or did not reflect stakeholder discussion, and providing a rationale for decision points allow stakeholders to follow the logic of policymaking instead of preserving it as a black box of requirements minted somewhere far away. An extensive drafting process (five public drafts!) of Illinois's plan allowed for iterative cycles of feedback and incorporation that ultimately produced a new accountability system. For each draft, ISBE highlighted areas that had been strengthened or modified explicitly because of public comment, providing the community with a clear sense of how the plan was evolving and who had participated in that work. Each draft included direct questions for the public about important topics and areas for further development. ISBE repackaged the final plan it submitted in one-page formats and guides so schools and communities could clearly understand the new accountability system and the process by which supports and interventions would take effect.

3. Show Some Grit

Policy wonks, lobbyists, and career civil servants understand how to register their opinions and advance their interests within an administrative bureaucracy. The broader population often does not. It is incumbent upon SEAs and LEAs to make a deliberate effort to authentically capture input from as broad a community of educational stakeholders as possible. Identifying staff who will organize outreach and respond to feedback is key.

Stakeholder advisory committees or official work groups reflect an investment in authentic, ongoing dialogue and provide a clear point of

access for families and community members who otherwise cannot attend scheduled events. Such a structure for gathering input additionally helps insulate individual stakeholders from retaliation for expressing unpopular opinions. It also yields more granular, actionable feedback compared with submission of letters or online comments.

Even as budgets in Illinois remained tight and hotly debated in the capitol, the state board dedicated staff to engagement planning and outreach. Listening tours, parent workshops, hundreds of meetings, and thousands of emails helped organize and guide the work and clarify expectations around implementation. Working with Partners for Each and Every Child, ISBE significantly repackaged the ESSA plan to include clear timelines and roadmaps for the upcoming school year and developed an ESSA implementation toolkit to support districts and communities in realizing the plan.

4. Maximize Resources, Leverage Partners

Meaningful, authentic, ongoing engagement with a diverse set of people and constituent groups can identify not only community-specific areas of concern but also areas of limited capacity within districts and state infrastructure. Honest acknowledgment of inequities and resource gaps can spur deeper, richer engagement with stakeholders and can also help to indicate areas where the expertise of state and local groups, including nonprofit and private sector groups, can extend and enrich the capacity of SEAs and LEAs. States and districts will bear a greater range of formal responsibilities under ESSA, in many cases without receiving more money to fulfill them. In such cases, time spent building external partnerships can be well spent.

Illinois's leaders recognized early on that instead of creating an adversarial process with constituent groups, they would need as much support as was on offer for planning and execution of engagement efforts and as much background knowledge and experience as the groups could provide. My own organization and that of others ensured that community members had additional context and external resources to inform their feedback.

5. Double Down

America's multilayered governance systems provide ample, diverse opportunities for

individuals to provide input to education decision makers. Particularly in states with significant political divides, separate efforts to engage stakeholders by the governor's office, state board of education, and a state-based "think tank" can be beneficial. When all these inputs are reported and aggregated, they can surface core issues of bipartisan interest and help identify the distinct roles and comparative strengths of community-based groups and the different branches of state government.

Illinois's leaders made successful, repeated use of input from existing advisory boards, including the multisector P-20 Council and the IBAM group. Both offered feedback on the state's student growth metrics as part of the broader accountability system, thereby providing a clearer sense of areas of consensus and areas for further exploration and research. A technical advisory committee will continue to advance the impact of the growth metric.

As in Illinois, the goal of all of these efforts is not to make plans for their own sake. It is to ensure that strong, reliable processes are in place so that communities working together can make great schools. So again, state board members, state education agency officials, and district officials should ask a room full of people what they consider a great school. And then they should return and ask again. They should share what they heard and what they are doing about what they heard. They should share data about great schools—and the less than great schools—and make the commitments necessary to continue to work together.

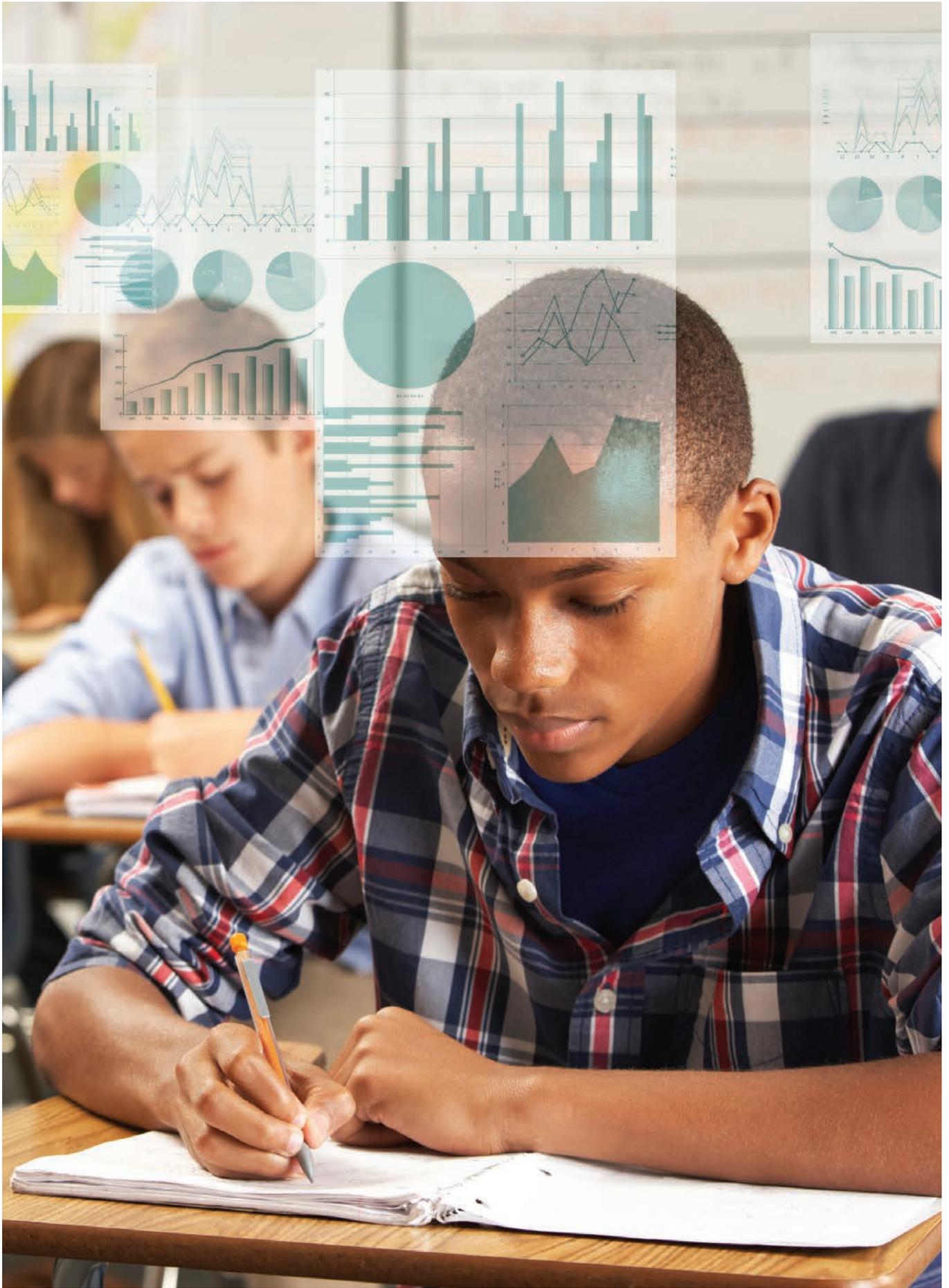
State boards and organizations like mine must build the capacity of state and local education agencies to advance evidence-based, equity-focused, pragmatic change, and include their communities in the process. We are all stakeholders. We all have work to do. ■

¹Leadership Conference Education Fund, "Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Guide for Advocates: How You Can Ensure ESSA Implementation Helps to Build More Equitable Schools" (December 2016).

²Leadership Conference Education Fund, "The New Education Majority Poll: Black and Latino Parents and Families on Education and Their Children's Future," <http://civilrightsdocs.info/pdf/education/new-education-majority/New-Education-Majority-Quick-Facts-AA.pdf>.

³Educators for Higher Standards, "Teacher Engagement and Perspectives on ESSA: An Eagerness to Engage and Be Heard," survey conducted in November 2016, <http://www.educatorsforhighstandards.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/educators-every-student-succeeds-act-essa-survey-report.pdf>.

Molly Mauer is senior vice president for the P-12 equity and excellence program area at The Opportunity Institute and the founder of Partners for Each and Every Child, a public school advocacy group. Read more about the group's work and perspectives on engagement in its new report on ESSA plan development in the states: "Process and Protest: Have State Engagement Efforts Been Meaningful?"



Transparency on College and Career Readiness: How Does Your State Measure Up?

Over the past two decades, college and career readiness became a priority in K-12 education. And while graduation rates have been rising, far too many high school graduates are not ready to succeed in college or a job. Employers note that freshly minted employees too often need additional training to perform their roles, many are ineligible for military service because they fail to get adequate scores on the entrance exam, and first-year college students across the country must pay to take no-credit remedial classes on content they should have learned in high school.¹ The U.S. economy depends on these graduates, so it is urgent that state boards of education figure out why so many students remain unprepared.

Many states are ill equipped to do so. There is an astonishing lack of publicly reported data on student performance in grades K-12, and the information that is reported varies widely across states. The fact is that state policymakers cannot make good education policy and practice decisions—and ultimately cannot improve student performance—without basic information about how students are performing along the way. To fix this problem, state boards and state education agencies (SEAs) must know their starting point and be able to measure progress and change over time.

Qualities of Transparent Data

Transparency in education data reporting is critical to improving student outcomes.² Needless to say, data should also be easy to find and be displayed in a manner that stakeholders—students, families, educators, and policymakers, among others—can easily understand. It is not enough that states merely report data on one or more indicators of college and

career readiness. To be fully useful in facilitating change, data must be broken down by student subgroups such as income status and race/ethnicity, reported in a timely manner (preferably from the most recent school year), and reported in a way that ensures all students are counted.

Student Subgroup Reporting. While aggregate figures are useful in painting an overall picture of student performance in a particular state, data are more directly impactful if they are broken down and reported by student subgroups. Important subgroups include race/ethnicity, English learner status, students with disabilities, and low income status. This additional layer of data detail empowers decision makers at the state and local level to know which groups of students are struggling, which are succeeding, and where resources should be targeted (see Ryan Smith and Lillian Lowery’s article in this issue for more on this point). These data can also reveal “bright spots,” which policymakers and educators might want to replicate.

Timely Reporting. Data are only as useful as they are accurate, and old data cease to be directly relevant to current students. To the extent possible, states should prioritize the sharing of data from the most recent school year. Timely data releases also help policymakers consider the impact of proposed changes in state education policy.

Counting All Students. Denominators matter. To present a complete picture of college and career readiness in a state, data must not be calculated in a way that leaves some students out of the equation. The adjusted ninth grade cohort is the ideal denominator to use in these calculations, as it captures all students who entered ninth grade in a particular year.³

Measuring progress on state education policy goals is possible only with good data on student outcomes—which are often in short supply.

by Sandra Boyd

Public education data reporting varies widely across the country, and many state policymakers face yawning information gaps.

However, putting all 11th graders, graduates, or completers as denominators can also be useful in calculating certain data.

Using denominators that are more selective—such as only those who enrolled in AP courses or those who took AP exams—creates the appearance that more students are earning college credit in high school than really are. These denominators take into account only a percentage of the adjusted ninth grade cohort when determining student outcomes.

Public education data reporting varies widely across the country, and many state policymakers face yawning information gaps. Some are even using multiple denominators to report student data—meaning that the state’s own data are not comparable. Yet there are hopeful developments. As the importance of reporting becomes clearer and as some states become more sophisticated in their data systems, best practices and state exemplars have begun to emerge.

Achieve, which is an education nonprofit, recently released a new set of transparency reports examining data reporting in every state, and it has identified indicators of college and career readiness that states should report beyond

a simple graduation rate (see map).⁴ Some states are already setting strong examples for transparent reporting in many of these indicators.⁵

Every state that is serious about preparing students should include these indicators of college and career readiness in its public reporting system:

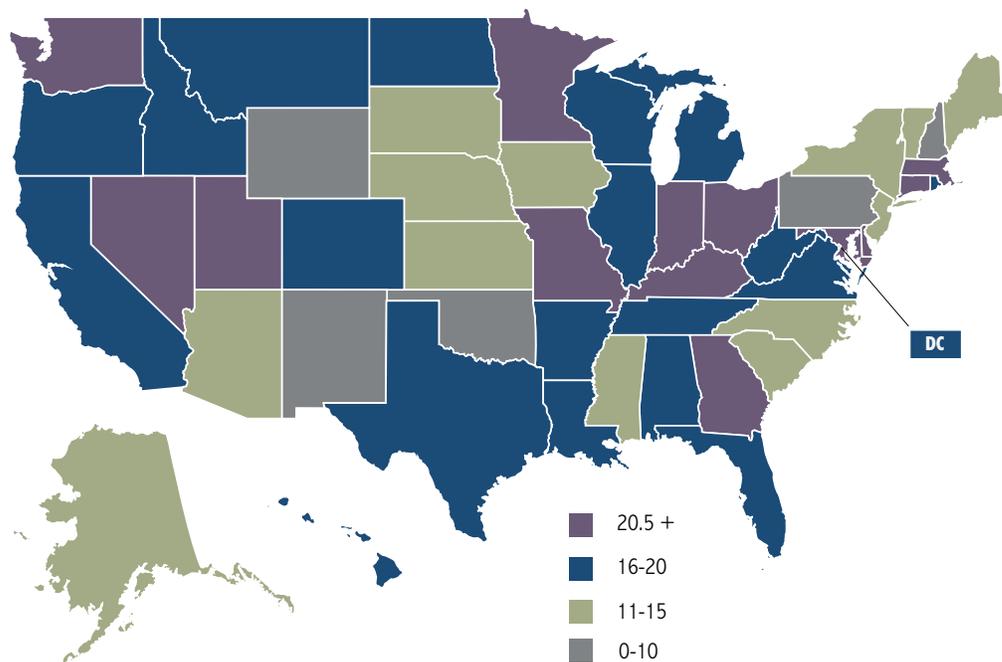
- college- and career-ready assessment scores
- college- and career-ready course of study completion
- on track to graduate, based on credit accumulation
- earning college credit while in high school
- postsecondary enrollment/remediation/persistence of high school graduates

States can collect more measures of college and career readiness, but they should use at least these.

College- and Career-Ready Assessment Scores

One of the clearest signals of student readiness is scoring well on high school assessments

How Transparent Are States in Their Reporting of College and Career Readiness? (scored 0-32)



Source: Achieve, “State Transparency on College and Career Readiness,” 2016. Achieve rated states’ public reporting on eight indicators of college and career readiness. A total of 32 points were possible for the overall score, with 8 possible points awarded each for transparency of reporting indicators, reporting subgroups, timeliness, and counting all students. The average score for the 50 states and the District of Columbia is 17.

anchored to college- and career-ready academic standards. These assessments include a performance level or cut score that lets high school students know they are ready for first-year mathematics and English courses at postsecondary institutions, and two- and four-year colleges and universities use them for placement into first-year, credit-bearing courses. While many more states have college- and career-ready assessments in place than did a few years ago, the quality and transparency of results reporting vary. Nonetheless, a handful of states have emerged as good examples of quality and transparency in reporting:

New Jersey, which administers the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), reports the percentage of PARCC test takers earning each of the performance levels by test taken. The state also presents these data by race/ethnicity, special populations, income, and gender. New Jersey's reporting is different from other states that administer end-of-course assessments in that the state reports student outcomes by grade level by test. The state also clearly reports the denominator, and data are available at the district and school level. New Jersey officials have a strong understanding of when students are succeeding on the assessment by grade taken, and they can begin to understand the relationship between course grades and success on the assessments. Thanks to this type of data reporting, New Jersey is well positioned to answer questions about how course content is delivered in the lower grades versus the upper grades (for instance, by examining the results for students who took Algebra I in eighth grade versus those who took it in ninth grade) and thus whether these differences could be leading to the discrepancies in outcomes. They can also follow how the demographics of course enrollees changes over time.

California reports the percentage of the 11th grade cohort earning a 3 or 4 on the Smarter Balanced Assessment in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics. The state also reports these data by subgroup.

In 2015–16, **Delaware** and **Michigan** both reported the percentage of 11th grade students meeting the redesigned SAT's College and Career Readiness Benchmarks in

Evidence-Based Reading and Writing (EBRW) and mathematics. All students in the cohort of enrolled 11th graders took the test, and the states report data by subgroup.

College- and Career-Ready Course of Study Completion

Achieve considers states' mathematics and ELA/literacy high school graduation requirements to be at the college- and career-ready level if students are expected to complete a course of study aligned with state-adopted college- and career-ready standards, which typically includes at least three years of mathematics that covers content through Algebra II and four years of rigorous, grade-level English. Readiness for college and careers depends on more than the mastery of ELA/literacy and mathematics content and skills, but these two content areas serve as a foundation for the study of other academic disciplines and contextualized learning.

In too many states, earning a high school diploma is not a signal that a graduate is ready to enter postsecondary education, the military, or the workforce. Rigorous course-taking is one of the strongest indicators of postsecondary success, yet many states do not expect graduates to take the classes or learn essential skills that will open doors to their next steps. In all but a handful of states, the college- and career-ready completion rate is much lower than the adjusted cohort graduation rate.

New York, for example, offers a college- and career-ready course of study to all students in the state, and it publicly reports the percentage of students in the adjusted ninth grade cohort who graduate having completed that course of study. Additionally, New York is clear in its reporting about how the graduation rate of Regents with Advanced Designation diploma earners compares to the overall graduation rate, as well as to the graduation rates for those who earned the state's Regents Diploma or the Local Diploma. The state then goes one step further and provides outcomes data for students who did not graduate—whether they are still enrolled, earned a “nondiploma credential,” a GED transfer, or dropped out. The state also presents these data by race/ethnicity, special populations, income, and gender.

In all but a handful of states, the college- and career-ready completion rate is much lower than the adjusted cohort graduation rate.

Making Dashboards Clear for All Education Drivers

State and local governments are developing online dashboards to increase transparency and improve communications between schools and their communities. A key challenge is making the data accessible and comprehensible to the average community member.

Michigan's dashboard includes a comprehensive set of indicators, including six primary metrics: proficiency, growth, graduation rate, English learner progress, assessment participation, and school quality/student success. There will be six more: postsecondary transition and readiness, access/equity, school climate/culture, student factors, educator engagement, and achievement gaps. Slated for completion in fall 2019, the dashboard presents values relative to the state average and an average from a set of peer schools. The state is surveying parents and other stakeholders, as well as hosting workgroups and doing usability testing, to make the information as clear as possible.

California is field testing its own dashboard. Unlike Michigan's, California's tool shows district as well as school performance. It differentiates indicators based on how they are collected. State-level metrics include academic performance, English learner progress, chronic absenteeism, graduation rates, suspension rates, and college- and career-readiness; local metrics include basic services, implementation of state standards, parent engagement, and school climate. Districts can use self-reflection tools to display chosen strengths on the dashboard. Guides on the homepage help acquaint users with the dashboard. There are also glossary and translation features to help users who are unfamiliar with education policy terms and nonnative speakers.

Dashboards have also been created locally. Launched in June 2016, New York City's includes student population, percentage of high-need students, framework scores, citywide percentile rank, impact and performance, student achievement metrics, and multiyear data tables. Like Michigan's, data are contextualized by use of comparison groups of similar students across the system, as well as comparison to other districts and cities. The site's layout is simple, and reports are a short two pages. A tutorial appears when users first visit the site, and there is an accessible form for comments.

—Grace Hill

On Track to Graduate

It is important to know how students are faring early in high school, in hopes that educators can intervene to help struggling students before it is too late. State boards and SEAs should be paying attention to the performance of eighth and ninth grade students and not only of juniors and seniors. Timely credit accumulation is a leading indicator of students' progress toward high school graduation.

For instance, **Ohio** reports the percentage of students who have five or more high school credits in ELA/literacy, mathematics, science, social studies, world languages, or fine arts by the end of grade 9 as an indicator of whether students are on track to graduate. The state reports several other on-track measures for eighth, ninth, and eleventh graders, including earning at least one high school credit in Algebra I by the end of grade 9 and the percentage of the cohort earning at least one high school credit in Algebra II by the end of grade 11. Importantly, Ohio reports results against the most comprehensive denominator, the adjusted ninth grade cohort. The state also presents these data by race/ethnicity, special populations, income, and gender.

Earning College Credit While in High School

The rates at which students are earning college credit in high school—whether through Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) classes or dual enrollment programs—are another useful indicator of the readiness of students for success after high school. Students who earn college credits while in high school become familiar with

postsecondary expectations, academic behaviors, and habits of mind. Evidence also points to an impact on postsecondary enrollment, performance, persistence, retention, and attainment.

As part of **Ohio's** Prepared for Success measure, the state reports the percentage of students in the adjusted ninth grade cohort who scored a 3+ on an AP exam, a 4+ on an IB test, or who earned three or more dual enrollment credits, and it does so discretely for each indicator. Ohio is the only state to report their results on college credit attainment against the adjusted ninth grade cohort. The state also presents these data by race/ethnicity, special populations, income, and gender. Aggregate data are also available at the school and district levels as part of the state's school report cards.

Indiana publicly reports the percentage of the state's high school graduates earning early college credit through dual credit, AP, or both dual credit and AP. The state offers a quick-glance one-pager with these data and a number of additional compelling data points and visuals, and its commission for higher education reports a breakdown of college readiness measures by students' dual-credit status, in addition to AP exam status.⁶ This report takes an in-depth look at dual-credit students, specifically those who earn only dual credit and not AP exam credit as a way to better understand dual-credit student characteristics. The following questions are addressed: How many and what types of students are earning dual credit only? How do the dual-credit-only students compare? The data also look at postsecondary outcomes associated with earning college credit in high school (postsecondary enrollment, GPA, persistence). Indiana is one of only three states that reports subgroup results for dual enrollment.

Enrollment, Remediation, Persistence

Of course, one of the clearest ways to understand how well a state's K–12 education system prepared students for life is to look at their actual performance after high school. Postsecondary enrollment, remediation, and persistence are all useful ways to quantify how students have fared.

Colorado's reporting of these three measures is noteworthy. The state has a law that requires

the reporting of these three on a yearly basis, and the reporting includes the results of the preceding six high school graduating classes. The state also presents these data by race/ethnicity, income, and gender. The state reports all data as an aggregate state number but then disaggregates by two-year institutions and four-year institutions. Further, in the cases of postsecondary enrollment and persistence, Colorado's reporting also includes graduates who attend out-of-state institutions; the reporting is therefore more comprehensive than most states' reporting. The reports also include district- and high school-level outcomes for postsecondary enrollment, remediation, and persistence, along with outcomes data by higher education institutions.

While states are beginning to publicly report a more nuanced, useful picture of college and career readiness, much work remains. Simply reporting the statewide data for a particular indicator is not always useful. Instead, states should strive to break data down by subgroups, release it in a timely manner, and report it in a way that includes all students. Students, families, educators, and policymakers need transparent information. Without it, there can be no informed decisions about policy and practice. Transparency is especially critical for state board members. They need to know—in real time—how students are performing and whether their state is meeting goals that have been set around college and career readiness. Only with good data can board members promote policies that will ensure that students graduate from high school ready for postsecondary success. ■

¹Achieve, "Rising to the Challenge Survey, Part Two: Employers and College Faculty" (Washington, DC, 2015); Christina Theokas, "Shut Out of the Military: Today's High School Education Doesn't Mean You're Ready for Today's Army" (Washington, DC: Education Trust, December 2010); Complete College America, "Remediation: Higher Education's Bridge to Nowhere" (Washington, DC, 2012).

²See Data Quality Campaign, "Show Me the Data" (Washington, DC, December 2016), <http://dataqualitycampaign.org/showmethedata/>. This online resource offers analysis of the information that is easily findable on state report cards from all 50 states and the District of Columbia, how it was displayed, and whether it was accessible to and understandable by a broad public audience.

³The adjusted cohort graduation rate indicates the percentage of ninth graders who graduate from high school in four years or less with a regular high school diploma. This percentage is calculated by dividing the number of graduating students by the number of students who entered high school four years earlier, adjusting for transfers in and out, émigrés, and deceased students.

⁴Achieve, "The State of American High School Graduates: What States Know (and Don't) about Student Performance"

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Sandra Boyd is chief operating officer at Achieve.

The NASBE Interview

State boards of education have an obligation to build relationships with education stakeholders and ensure their voices shape education policies. Board members can leverage the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to not only bolster relationships with current partners but to seek out new ones. Many have done so, particularly searching for those who feel disconnected or who have not been engaged in a public education dialogue before. Such voices provide input that is essential to achieving ESSA's central goal of advancing equity and excellence for all students.

The process to create an ESSA state plan has proved just as important as its content. Successful engagement creates a sense of buy-in and shared ownership of the state's vision and strategic plan for education. This shared responsibility paves the way for implementation in schools and districts. States that deeply engaged stakeholders in plan development have built relationships and fostered a dialogue that will also inform implementation.

Several state board leaders are doubling down on stakeholder engagement as they translate their plans into policy and practice at the district and school level. NASBE retrospectively and prospectively collected several state leaders' thoughts on the role of engagement in their states.¹

How did you begin engaging stakeholders and when?

Illinois State Superintendent Tony Smith: In September 2015 at our board retreat, we were fortunate to have engaged deeply about our vision, mission, and goals, which created a new direction for the states' work. Once ESSA was reauthorized, our federal liaison set to work almost immediately to understand what those 1,100 pages meant. In January 2016, we started a conversation about how we could use this new federal opportunity to strengthen the journey that Illinois was on to repurpose the state agency around service, goals of high performance for all students, and eliminating inequity in the state. The requirement and expectation of this board was that we would be aggressive in engaging stakeholders. In April, we started a series of listening tours and committed to creating multiple drafts of the plan. By August, we brought the first draft of the plan to the board. After their review, we did another round of listening

tours and came back to the board with another draft in November. At every turn, there were discussions and individual meetings to keep board members engaged and meet the needs of stakeholders across the state. In January, Illinois created another draft that the board reviewed and forwarded to the governor on February 1. The board voted in March on the fourth draft after over 100 stakeholder meetings and student focus groups. We tried to engage deeply to get feedback, and the board voted unanimously in March to submit the plan to the department.

District of Columbia State Board Member Jack Jacobson: As soon as we knew ESSA was coming, we started to engage by working closely with our superintendent. The superintendent works directly for the mayor in Washington while the board is independently elected. Our goal as a board was to make sure there was stakeholder engagement from all levels at every step in this process. From winter to spring of 2016, we started with

The requirement and expectation of this board was that we would be aggressive in engaging stakeholders.

listening tours, and at our board meetings we held panels specifically on ESSA regarding what needed to go into a state plan, what could go into a state plan, and what cannot and should not go into a state plan. We held expert conversations early to frame what we would ultimately include in the plan. Our superintendent developed a set of very tight and clean policy principles that had input from the state board that drove all of our actions and all of the provisions that we included in our state plan. Once we had a draft plan, we shopped it around to every ward of the city. In fact, one colleague went to every school in her ward and went to her PTA meeting to get individualized input on what could be improved and what was already strong. From the feedback, we made tweaks to the plan, which led to a successful vote with a super-majority of our board.

Mississippi Superintendent Carey Wright:

To design Mississippi Succeeds, we sought broad input from stakeholders over an 18-month period to craft a plan tailored to the needs of our students. During those 18 months, we conducted a listening tour that included 15 public meetings throughout the state. We hosted targeted meetings with specific stakeholder groups and collected feedback through an online survey. Among our most active participants were advocates for the underserved, majority African American communities and rural, low-income areas of the state, parents of students with disabilities, and teachers of English language learners. Mississippi has a small but growing population of English learners, and most of the teachers of English learners who participated in our feedback sessions were the only people in their schools whose work was dedicated to English learners.

Throughout these meetings and an online survey, we gathered 7,300 feedback points. We established working groups, and we established an ESSA advisory committee made up of stakeholders to provide us feedback and input throughout the entire development of our plan. We intend to keep all of our partners engaged in our implementation of the plan through regular meetings with our stakeholders as well as with the ESSA advisory committee. The robust participation of stakeholders helped Mississippi

develop a strong plan to meet the requirements of ESSA.

How deeply were state board members engaged in ESSA plan development?

Illinois Chairman James Meeks: The key to our ESSA program success was that we established the superintendent as the quarterback. He was the person handling most of the policy direction. However, the board was clear: It was not the superintendent's plan; it was the board's plan. We knew the board would have to have the final vote on the ESSA plan. At each draft, each board member had a chance to meet and review every point of our plan to make sure we were in agreement and that we understood what was being presented.

The over 100 listening tours were key. Stakeholders and board members felt comfortable when they saw their recommendations included in initial drafts of the plan. We knew we were going to have to reach some conclusions, and everyone was not going to get all of what they wanted. I think people started breathing comfortably once they knew one thing—they knew that their voices were being heard. There were parent ideas and regional superintendent ideas that ended up coming to the second draft of the plan, and that made all the difference. By the time we reached the final draft, our board was so comfortable that we had stakeholder input that it was not difficult to get to a unanimous decision.

How did you ensure that all stakeholders had a chance to inform ESSA plan development?

Illinois Board Member Lula Ford: I am a member of several organizations that work closely with Chicago Public Schools, and they demanded a piece of this action. They are vocal advocates for children. We made sure, in the 100 listening tours, that we would take back whatever criticism or compliment they wanted to give us to make sure it would be a part of the discussion. Advocates would call me directly to ensure they were a part of the process. One group that was very strong was the Arts Council. The Arts Council will definitely hold us accountable for

People started breathing comfortably once they knew that their voices were being heard.

We are all the advocates for the students who are voiceless, faceless, and cannot defend themselves.

the commitment to develop an arts access indicator for 2018–19.

Parents also had chances to have their voices heard through the listening tours and other various engagement activities. Literally everyone had a chance to get their voice heard before we voted on the plan. Equity certainly has been the mantra, and that's what we want for children in our great state of Illinois. Equity was what parents and every advocacy group we worked with wanted to see in the plan—equity for our children.

Chairman Meeks: You mentioned low-income students and their parents may not have the opportunity to come to many meetings and advocate on their behalf compared to organizations with lobbyists. In Illinois, the board is the advocate for low-income students. That is one thing that we stress. We are all the advocates for the students who are voiceless, faceless, and cannot defend themselves. When we considered what went into the plan, we thought about these students. Was it going to lift and help them? We wanted to protect those that could not protect themselves.

State Superintendent Smith: When we hosted listening tours, we provided childcare and food during evening meetings to create conditions where people could contribute. We worked in partnerships with other nonprofit organizations across the state. I think those partnerships helped make the conditions for all stakeholders to engage possible.

District of Columbia Board President Karen Williams: Our ESSA lead convened monthly ESSA panels, and during public board meetings we would have up to 30 people testify to give us feedback. This group of people ranged from parents to teachers, students, and other educational stakeholders. We heard a lot of voices. During our listening tour, we held meetings in every ward and meetings with teacher unions and other organizations. We got a lot of input. We brought it back, synthesized it, and gave it to the superintendent to incorporate it into the plan.

State Superintendent Wright: We scheduled meetings around the state, and we scheduled them at two different times. We scheduled

a total of 15 initially, but that does not count all the other specific stakeholder groups that we met with. We scheduled our first regional meeting typically in the afternoons, somewhere around 3 p.m. so that those people who were available could be there. We scheduled that second one in the same area typically starting at 6 or 6:30 p.m. so that we could ensure that our parents who were working would have an opportunity to get there after they got off work. We made sure that we tried to cover all areas of the state. Our ESSA advisory group is one that has a diverse group of individuals on it. We met with them on a regular basis. I have a superintendent's advisory committee that I meet with on a monthly basis. I meet with my teachers every other month. So it gave us an opportunity to really hear from a lot of people.

How did your state's vision for education guide plan development?

State Superintendent Smith: We are always essentially asking, how does the plan support outcomes and vision for children in the state? It was essential to get clear about guiding principles and the core vision to manage the process towards plan submission. Coming back to the guiding vision for kids, and using the role of the board, helped to guide decision making. It was not simple. But having that vision and principles to come back to made sense.

State Superintendent Wright: Our plan is called Mississippi Succeeds, and we are proud that it builds upon our state board's strong strategic plan to prepare students for college and careers. This strong foundation includes rigorous academic standards for all students, aligned assessments to track student achievement, and an accountability model that clearly measures the performance of our schools and our districts. Our ESSA plan also builds on the significant investments that Mississippi has made in early childhood education, literacy, career and technical education, and advanced coursework opportunities for students and for professional development for all teachers. All of these initiatives have broad stakeholder support and have resulted in improved student outcomes.

How did you involve students?

State Superintendent Smith: Listening to students' voices is important. Illinois had specific meetings with students.

Board Member Jacobson: Involve your student voice in this process. Talk to students and involve them. In DC, we are very fortunate to have two student representatives on our board. If your board does not have one, you should.

What state strategies were essential to foster robust engagement?

State Superintendent Smith: I would not change the struggle at the very beginning. When we announced that we were going broad and engaging people across the state, there was significant pushback. There are many statutory committees and councils with very strong representation of statewide groups that essentially said we already have the required stakeholder representation. We fought pretty hard to take the board's direction to honor the idea of being in and with communities. All the reasons given that we would fail—we could not do this work in a state the size of Illinois, limited staff, and a lack of capacity at the state agency—were reasons we needed to do this work. Now, one year later, having done this work, there is deep credibility and a different belief in the capacity of the state agency.

How did you weigh diverse, divergent recommendations?

State Superintendent Wright: I think it is really important that everybody's voice is heard. I am a big believer in advocacy, and I think that anyone who is in front of you who is advocating, they are advocating for a reason. We have been very forthright about what we can and cannot do. We went through a series of three different assessments in three different years. That kind of drove my teachers and superintendents a little crazy. So I said we are going to hold tight on an accountability system at least for three straight years under the same assessment so they did not feel I was continuing to change the target. When we have stakeholders saying we would love to

have a school climate survey embedded into our accountability system, I've said if you can just press pause, we are putting a task force together now at the end of our third year to take a look at our entire accountability system, any unintended consequences, [and whether there are] other things we can add. We acknowledged what they wanted, but we also tried to provide a reason why we can or cannot include that in our plan.

State Superintendent Smith: As we got feedback, we had to weigh the different opinions. We had a lot of community conversations that made the plan much more durable. By clarifying and releasing drafts, some people saw their own feedback in the plan. Others came back and asked why their feedback was not in the plan. That allowed for real dialogue.

Chairman Meeks: Try to reach a unanimous decision on every single point, but be okay if you cannot. You will not reach unanimous decisions on every point; that is why we have a majority rule society. Don't hold the plan up waiting for everyone to agree on everything.

Board Member Jacobson: Not everything needs to go in this plan. We as state boards and state agencies have another bite at the apple in school report cards. Not all provisions need to be high-stakes and part of an accountability plan. Some measures are good for reporting and good for government transparency that can go in a school report card.

Will your state board institutionalize engagement?

Board President Williams: We realize the importance of engagement. We have the power to convene, and we are going to use that power. We have initiated a new engagement committee in our state board that will work on every issue. We are going to focus on ESSA, but we realize that we have to have stakeholder input to do good policy work.

Chairman Meeks: Illinois is continuing to work with stakeholders, especially around the arts. We know how important it is and are continuing to engage in discussions. They know their voices have been heard and we are not going away.

Others came back and asked why their feedback was not in the plan. That allowed for real dialogue.

What are your expectations for ESSA plan implementation?

State Superintendent Smith: At the beginning, there were people who did not really believe that their input would show up in the plan. But we kept showing up, and the drafts changed based on stakeholder input. We were trying to change the relationship between the field and the state agency to build trust and relationships so that we could do the real work of implementing. Conversations are ongoing on how the plan works, and it is going to take feedback from the field to implement this plan. How we are going to eliminate performance gaps and pay attention to equity are going to take dialogue. We believe we have built some relationships to be a part of that dialogue. It is the relationship that makes it possible to transform outcomes so we can create more opportunities for kids.

Board Member Jacobson: Next steps are really important to D.C. We know our plan is not perfect and plans should evolve over time. At our immediate meeting after the approval of the state plan, we considered a resolution to set up a task force that is broader than the board's previous committee. We started our work on ESSA with just board members around the table. Although we did go out into our communities, we did not involve some communities as robustly as we could in the crafting of the plan and in our daily engagement. Our board set up a working group that will include members of the public charter sector and traditional schools, parents, students, business groups, teachers, and others. We are going to start conversations immediately about technical changes that need to be made to the plan and how we can think bigger. We wanted to start small and grow over time. There are big ideas out there, and we want to try those out. This working group will be our mechanism to conduct our work in a really targeted and thoughtful manner over the next year. ■

¹Comments from state leaders were collected from NASBE's May 9, 2017, webinar on ESSA state plans and from the U.S. House of Representatives Workforce and Education committee hearing on ESSA Implementation held on July 18, 2017.

Plotting a New Course... cont'd from page 14

flexible program approval strategy that ensures high program quality standards while encouraging innovation.)

States boards have a number of options for encouraging teacher preparation programs to improve, even in the absence of federal requirements. These recommendations, in their most basic forms, propose that state boards pursue a simple strategy: Figure out how preparation programs are performing, help program “consumers”—specifically districts—make better “purchasing” decisions, and give high-performing programs flexibility to innovate. ■

¹Rhode Island Department of Education, “Rhode Island Standards for Educator Preparation,” http://www.ride.ri.gov/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Teachers-and-Administrators-Excellent-Educators/Educator-Certification/Becoming-an-Educator/RIPA_Standards_2013.pdf.

²Florida Department of State, “Educator Standards, Preparation and Performance,” Florida Administrative Code Rule 6A-5.066, <https://www.flrules.org/gateway/ruleNo.asp?ID=6A-5.066>.

³Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, “Educator Preparation Employment by Program,” School and District Profiles database, http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state_report/eppempratebyprogram.aspx.

⁴ETS, “State Requirements,” <https://www.ets.org/praxis/states>.

⁵“Not Good Enough: A Content Analysis of Teacher Licensing Examinations,” *Thinking K-16* 3, no. 1 (Washington, DC: Education Trust).

⁶James Shuls, “Can We Simply Raise the Bar on Teacher Quality?” (Arkansas Center for Research in Economics, 2016), http://uca.edu/acre/files/2014/11/Shuls_RaisingtheBar_05312016.pdf.

⁷Dan Goldhaber, “Everyone’s Doing It, but What Does Teacher Testing Tell Us about Teacher Effectiveness?” *Journal of Human Resources* 42, no. 4 (fall 2007): 765–94.

⁸Jason A. Grissom et al., “Principal Licensure Exams and Future Job Performance: Evidence from the School Leaders Licensure Assessment,” *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 39, no. 2 (2017): 248–80, <https://doi.org/10.3102/0162373716680293>.

⁹Dan Goldhaber et al., “Evaluating Prospective Teachers: Testing the Predictive Validity of the edTPA,” Working Paper 157 (Washington, DC: National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research, American Institutes for Research, November 2016).

¹⁰Dan Goldhaber et al., “Screen Twice, Cut Once: Assessing the Predictive Validity of Teacher Selection Tools,” Working Paper 120 (Washington, DC: National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research, American Institutes for Research, December 2014).

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(Washington, DC, 2017), <https://www.achieve.org/state-profiles>.

⁵Achieve, “State Transparency on College and Career Readiness,” State CCR Database (2015), <https://states.achieve.org/transparency-report>.

⁶Indiana Commission for Higher Education, “College Readiness at a Glance, 2016,” http://www.in.gov/che/files/2016_CRR_AtGlance_Final.pdf; Indiana Commission for Higher Education, “College Readiness Report Supplement: A Closer Look at Dual Credit Students” (May 2016), http://www.in.gov/che/files/College_Readiness_Report_Supplement_A_Closer_Look_at_Dual_Credit_Students.pdf.

We are going to start conversations immediately about technical changes that need to be made to the plan and how we can think bigger.



Sarah-Jane Lorenzo
Research Associate

On the Agenda

State Boards Showcase Innovation

With the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), states and schools have new opportunities to innovate. As NASBE's State Board Insights database attests, one of the most powerful ways state boards of education promote innovation is by sharing schools' successful strategies in their monthly meetings.

The Kansas State Board of Education, for example, often features schools' solutions to pressing problems at its meetings. Kansas State Board Secretary Peggy Hill credits board members' frequent school visits with seeding the monthly agendas. Members ask to add presentations to board agendas based on the innovations they observe while on the road.

"It's important as policymakers that we remain in touch with students, with schools, and with the teachers to see their successes and their struggles," said Kathy Busch, the Kansas state board's vice chair. Presentations in Kansas have inspired board members to support and promote initiatives such as Educators Rising, a group for high school students interested in teaching careers.

Kansas State Board Chairman Jim Porter said presentations on innovative practices help the board better understand how students can build the skills they need for individual success. Porter recalled a May 2017 presentation from students who participated in a tiny-house project. The students learned construction skills, used geometry during design, and practiced public speaking to raise funds for the project. "We want to expand opportunities and find creative ways to meet the academic requirements," Porter said. "This is a way of showcasing how to do that."

Sharing school successes can have

transformative benefits beyond the boardroom. Michigan's state board highlights examples that can spark partnerships and district-level learning.

"We do a lot of things on beating the odds," said Marilyn Schneider, Michigan's state board executive. "We're trying to show the people in Michigan how some schools have found ways to address their challenges." By providing air time for best-practice presentations, the state board fosters connections between districts while showcasing what schools can do within the state's initiative to make Michigan a top 10 state in education within 10 years, dubbed Top 10 in 10.

Board members can do more. Busch said the presentations members hear at Kansas board meetings help them make connections for their districts. When they visit a school with a particular challenge, for example, members can refer school officials to another school in a different region that has found solutions to similar struggles.

In another twist, board meetings in Oklahoma and Hawaii feature monthly reports specifically on innovation, organized by their state education agencies. Regular updates keep creativity foremost on the minds of board members. This sharing also increases stakeholder engagement, as it draws a parade of students, educators, and administrators to the boardroom each month.

How does your state board learn about innovation at schools across the state, and do you play a role in sharing them?

To learn more about the innovations presented to state boards at their meetings, visit stateboardinsight.nasbe.org and browse the Innovation category. ■

from the President's Pen



Kristen Amundson
President/CEO

“You can observe a lot by just watching,” Yogi Berra once pointed out. Since NASBE launched our State Board Insight database earlier this year, that’s just what we’ve been doing.

Each month, we study the agendas of every state board of education to see what pops up. How are boards spending their time? What issues appear regularly on many agendas?

Armed with that information, we can develop programs and services to help state boards. We noticed, for instance, that charter schools absorb boards’ time and energy. Since the start of 2017, 65 percent of state boards have discussed or acted upon charter school issues. Roughly a third of state boards on average are considering charter school items each month. Sometimes that share is higher or lower: More like half addressed the issue in January and just a quarter in March. But month after month, in state after state, charter decisions take up time.

In particular, decisions about individual schools seem to be some of the most contentious and time-consuming. In 15 states, the state board is the “court of last resort”—getting the last word on whether a school remains open and the conditions under which it may do so.

The January issue of the *Standard* was devoted to charter schools. That was the first association publication on the subject since 2004, but it won’t be the last.

And as is clear from examining board agendas, there are many other ways NASBE can help. In August, we launched a partnership with the National Association of Charter School

Authorizers to build the capacity of state boards to make sound charter decisions. Funded by the Walton Family Foundation, this initial grant will clarify the kinds of support that state boards need. Working collaboratively, we will create resources to address those needs: perhaps model authorizing policies, in-state training, best practices.

We identified a second need: to support boards as they search for new executive talent. Today, the average tenure of a chief state school officer is about two years. Consequently, at any given time one or more boards is likely to be searching for a new chief.

We noticed that boards had to put a fair bit of time and effort into finding chief replacements, so we recognized this as another area where we could make a difference. We are pleased to be leading the search for the Georgia State Board of Education’s chief turnaround officer and hope to be able to support other boards as they search for senior-level leaders.

One goal for NASBE’s searches will be to create a set of shared understandings before the candidate comes on board. We believe that if boards and state chiefs begin with the same goals in mind, they are more likely to build a productive working relationship. By getting everyone on the same page, perhaps we can lengthen the tenure of new chiefs.

State Board Insight is still in its first year. We will continue to use this valuable tool for signs of the critical needs that state boards face, and then we will determine how best to assist boards in addressing them. ■

POPULAR FIFTH INDICATOR: CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

A review of 2017 ESSA plans submitted this spring and a preview of states' fall ESSA plan submissions reveals chronic...

EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION: ON THE RADAR OF STATE BOARDS OF EDUCATION

In the first quarter of 2017, state boards of education in 11 states discussed topics related to early care and...

ROOM FOR BOARD ACTION ON STUDENT DATA PRIVACY

A handful of states addressed issues related to student data privacy and education data generally since the beginning of 2016...

TRENDING ON STATE BOARD AGENDAS: JANUARY AND FEBRUARY 2017

In January and February 2017, state boards of education and made meeting materials available for State Board Ins...

STATES WEAVE TITLE II INTO PLANS FOR SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

A recent review of 28 draft plans for implementing the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) found that 20 states plan [...]

STATE BILLS PRESCRIBE STATE BOARD ACTION ON DRUG ABUSE

State legislatures across the country are advancing bills to address and prevent drug addiction and abuse, and a handful of [...]

WHAT'S TRENDING ON STATE BOARDS OF EDUCATION?

DATA

FILTER

Year

2017

Month

All Available Data

State

All States and Territories

Alabama

Alaska

Arizona

Hold down ctrl (Windows) / command (Mac) to select multiple options.

BROWSE (BASED ON 2958 RECORDS)

TOPIC -

Academic Enrichment

Academic Policy

Accountability

Accreditation

Administration

Alternative Education

Assessment

Charters and Choice

Civic Readiness

2016 data includes only items related to the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

INFO

1

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STATE FREQUENCY

33

44

39

23

43

21

44

30

7

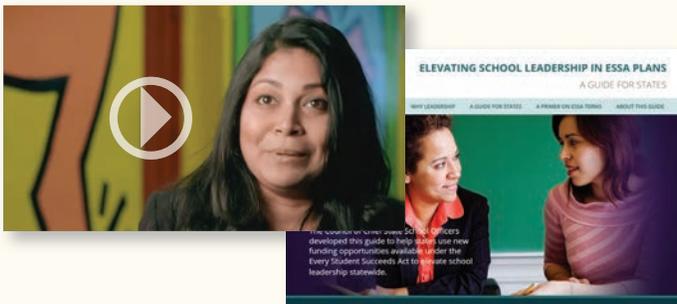
- Data culled from state board agendas monthly can be filtered by topic, state, and timeframe.
- Trend analyses highlight compelling state stories.
- State profiles detail governance structures and demographics.

Visit State Board Insight:
<https://stateboardinsight.nasbe.org/>

RESOURCES ON EDUCATION LEADERSHIP FOR STATE EDUCATION BOARD MEMBERS

Principals cannot succeed without effective training and support. So, how can states take action to ensure that principals get both in order to enhance teaching and learning?

Find out in these and other resources from The Wallace Foundation.



A Bold Move to Better Prepare Principals: The Illinois Story

A video series about how one state worked with universities, nonprofits and districts to change the way principals are trained and licensed.

An Online Field Guide for Elevating School Leaders

Resources states can use as they construct their plans to improve school leadership under ESSA:

www.ccsso.org/ESSAElevatingSchoolLeaders

Improving University Principal Preparation Programs: Five Themes from the Field

Educators' perceptions of the state of university programs that train future principals.

Developing Excellent School Principals to Advance Teaching and Learning: Considerations for State Policy

Considerations for state policymakers looking to boost principal effectiveness.

The Making of the Principal: Five Lessons in Leadership Training

Five steps that could help improve training for future principals and those new to the job.

