

# State ESSA Plans Address Early Education

by Winona Hao

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) created opportunities for supporting early childhood education (ECE) and its workforce. For example, states' ESSA plans must describe how they will assist school districts and elementary schools that elect to use Title I funds to support early childhood education programs. In addition, Title I requires state report cards to include the number and percentage of students enrolled in preschool programs. For the first time, early childhood educators are included in the definition of professional development under Title II. Title III focuses on providing states and districts additional support for educating English learners and migrant students. Funds may be used to support strategies that promote school readiness of English learners and their transition from early learning programs to elementary school.

The U.S. Department of Education released nonregulatory early learning guidance on ESSA last year urging state education agencies and districts to take

advantage of the law's opportunities to support ECE—particularly through use of funds under Title I, II, and III.

By September 18, 2017, 50 states and the District of Columbia had submitted their plans for implementing ESSA. Some states expanded their early childhood agenda beyond the ESSA mandates. Seven states included ECE in their overall vision statements and created a long-term goal to provide high-quality early childhood programs and align ECE with their K-12 system (see map 1). Eleven states and the District of Columbia embed early education in accountability and assessment systems through indicators such as chronic absenteeism and English language proficiency. Twenty-four states planned some sort of development, retention, and advancement strategies for ECE educators. Twelve states proposed funding and supported professional development opportunities for the early learning workforce. ■

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**Map 1. Early Education in ESSA Plans**

