

ESSA: New Law, New Opportunity

A BRIEF GUIDE TO EXCELLENCE FOR STATE LEADERS

Executive Summary

PUBLIC IMPACT



If you are a state or district leader, the 2016 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) provides a new opportunity. States can receive ESSA funds with fewer requirements and more flexibility on how they may be spent than in prior versions of the federal law. But decades of reform and school improvement efforts, beginning long before 2001's No Child Left Behind, strongly indicate that more freedom to spend federal funds is not enough. Achievement was lower before No Child Left Behind's spending directives than afterward.

Yet more jobs than ever will require post-secondary education and training, and job growth is high in STEM subjects, for which schools face some of the greatest teacher shortages. Students need advanced coursework and strong thinking skills in all subjects. But entry into teaching preparation programs is falling.

If you want learning outcomes that really prepare students for their future, you need a new approach. School designs, teacher and principal roles, and strategies for change in struggling schools must focus on achieving *excellence*. How can you get these elements right to build a culture of excellence, one that attracts even more talented people, keeps them for longer careers, and helps them excel?

Beyond the Requirements: Achieving Excellence Under ESSA

ESSA provides four key opportunities for state leaders to substantially increase the positive impact of federal funds on student learning and educator careers. The box below summarizes these opportunities.

Taking ESSA Beyond the Requirements: Four Strategies to Achieve a Culture of Excellence

- 1. Supporting Excellent Educators**—States **must** pursue students' equitable access to effective teachers and encourage more autonomy for educators. **For Excellence:** Establish strong incentives for LEAs to adopt team-based teaching models that extend the reach of *excellent* teachers to more students, with formal authority for those students' outcomes, pay team leaders more from sustainable sources, and ensure that *all* teachers have daily support to improve. Add paid residencies and multi-school leader roles for greater impact. These models can be used in all types of schools. Use Title II state set-aside funds to support LEAs in making these changes.
- 2. Academic Standards, Assessment, and Supports for Students**—States **must** establish challenging academic standards and aligned assessments. **For Excellence:** Help students achieve higher standards by ensuring that great teachers have accountable roles and time to lead all teachers toward excellence on the job, for higher pay that retains teachers. Use Title II for transition costs.
- 3. Accountability, Support, and Improvement for Schools**—States **must** set academic achievement goals and identify and support schools persistently struggling to meet them. **For Excellence:** Pursue turnarounds or restarts in the lowest-performing schools using methods that have worked best elsewhere: Build a pipeline of turnaround principals and schoolwide teams of teacher-leaders to help all teachers excel. Fund with the 7 percent of Title I A school improvement dollars.
- 4. State and District Reporting**—States **must** report the percentage of ineffective, unqualified teachers and the students they teach. **For Excellence:** Require LEAs to report the percentage of *students* who have *excellent* teachers formally accountable for their learning, to encourage roles that extend great teachers' reach and produce gap-closing learning gains for more students.

See the [full report](#) for concise summaries of requirements in each of these areas and details about exactly how to achieve excellence. Resources on [OpportunityCulture.org](#), [SchoolTurnarounds.org](#), and [SchoolRestarts.org](#) provide research and tools to help. These and more are linked on [PublicImpact.com](#). More tools are forthcoming to help teachers, principals, and administrators.

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