



Making the Most of ESSA:

20 Ideas for How to Leverage ESSA to Advance College
and Career Readiness and Equity

Catherine Holahan, Kathryn Young, Scott Palmer, Bethany Little

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Making the Most of ESSA:

20 Ideas for How to Leverage ESSA to Advance College and Career Readiness and Equity

As states develop their plans to implement the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), there are several big ideas emerging that states (and districts) should consider to maximize ESSA's value and impact.

We are at a critical moment in education. There is broad consensus that a core goal of our education systems must be to ensure that all students graduate from high school with the knowledge and skills necessary for success in college, career, and life. Research shows that this includes an array of deeper learning knowledge and skills, including rigorous academic content knowledge, the ability to think critically and solve problems, the ability to work collaboratively and communicate effectively, and the ability to direct one's learning with a strong academic mindset. Achieving these outcomes for all students – and closing gaps in opportunity and achievement – will require significant changes in teaching, learning, and supports. These changes must be informed by evidence and based on the science of learning and development to ensure our systems can best meet the needs and potential of each and every child, including through more student-centered approaches and academic and non-academic student supports. States have a key role to play in setting the vision, systems, and conditions that can help achieve this goal – particularly for historically underserved students – and promote continuous improvement over time.

ESSA can help advance these shifts, if states read and implement the law through the best lens to support them:

- First, ESSA sets two broad goals: It requires that state standards align with **college and career ready expectations**, and it maintains and expands the federal **focus on equity**, with a particular focus on state actions that improve educational opportunities and outcomes for students from low-income families, students of color, English learners, students with disabilities, and other marginalized groups.
- From there, ESSA **returns authority back toward states and districts** (relative to the No Child Left Behind Act) to design the systems and strategies necessary to best achieve these goals, with new room for leadership and innovation.
- However, ESSA also expects, in several ways, that state and local ESSA strategies be demonstrably **aligned with each state's college and career readiness and equity goals**; based on **research and evidence**, where available; developed and implemented through significant, ongoing **stakeholder engagement**; and **periodically reviewed and continuously improved** over time.

In this way, states have both the opportunity and responsibility to leverage ESSA as a forcing event to advance systems and strategies that can best advance and support deeper learning and equity in each state's context, including through more student-centered learning strategies and supports that meet all students' needs.

Further, the U.S. Department of Education's (USED) requirements for peer review of state ESSA plans make the opportunity for state leadership more pronounced. USED is requiring initial peer review on a narrow

set of issues, focused most on accountability. At the same time, states must meet and implement all ESSA requirements across many areas of education policy. Taken together, this means that states can use their own coherent, comprehensive format for ESSA planning, stakeholder engagement, and implementation while being subject to federal peer review and approval on a more narrow set of issues. Several states are following this “bifurcated” strategy of leading with their own state-facing plans and pulling out from that more comprehensive frame just the narrower sections required for federal peer review.

Finally, to make the most of ESSA, it is critical to understand ESSA implementation as an ongoing process, not an event. This year, the focus is on initial ESSA state plans (both federal- and state-facing). But 2017-18 could then focus on states and districts leveraging ESSA consolidated local plans. And 2018-19 will focus on schoolwide and particularly school improvement plans. This creates a potential through-line for deeper change – whether ESSA is the vehicle or just a forcing event to affirm, improve, and align existing state strategies.

The purpose of this memo is to inform ESSA state plans and implementation by outlining some of the key ideas that can provide states with the best leverage for advancing shifts toward college and career readiness and equity. This is meant to be a living document as state plans and efforts can evolve over time. There are further resources and state examples behind each idea, and there are likely other important levers that will emerge as ESSA implementation progresses through the sequence from state plans, to local plans, to school improvement, and then to periodic review and continuous improvement.

Key Ideas for ESSA Plans

The following are 20 opportunities to leverage ESSA across its core areas, which states should consider including in their federal ESSA plans submitted for peer review and/or their more comprehensive state-facing plans and strategies for ESSA implementation. For each of these ideas, we pose a key question for states to consider, and then provide a summary of relevant ESSA requirements and the related emerging opportunities that states should consider to truly achieve their college and career readiness and equity goals.

General

- 1. Vision: Does the state set a clear “North Star” across its ESSA plan and implementation strategies by defining college and career ready deeper learning outcomes the system must advance for all students including: rigorous academic content knowledge, the ability to think critically and solve problems, the ability to work collaboratively and communicate effectively, and the ability to direct one’s learning with a strong academic mindset?**



ESSA: With the increased authority and responsibility for states to design their own systems along with ESSA’s obligation that states establish challenging standards that align with college and career readiness, ESSA provides an opportunity for states to set an overall vision for their system and to define what college and career ready means, and what it will take to get there. This should guide state and local action, anchored in the law’s central tenets of college and career readiness and equity.

Opportunity: States should set and clearly communicate a vision of the college and career ready outcomes for students in their system to serve as a “North Star” and establish a clear line-of-sight to guide education efforts at all levels toward deeper learning outcomes, including through state and local ESSA plans. This should **include a robust definition** of college and career readiness that reflects the full array of “deeper

learning” knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are necessary for success, such as mastery of core academic content, critical thinking, complex problem solving, communication, collaboration, metacognition, and academic mindsets.

A framework for college and career readiness developed by the Council of Chief State School Officers’ (CCSSO) Innovation Lab Network, which is set out below, includes definitional elements within the domains of knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are most likely to have an impact on student success.¹

Knowledge	Skills	Dispositions
<i>Mastery of rigorous content and the facile application or transfer of what has been learned to complex and novel situations</i>	<i>The capacities and strategies that enable students to learn and engage in higher order thinking, meaningful interaction planning for the future</i>	<i>Socio-emotional skills or behaviors that associate with success in college, career and citizenship</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Common Core State Standards • Career & Technical Education • Other Content Areas & Essential Literacies • Global Competence • Applied Knowledge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical thinking • Problem solving • Working collaboratively • Communicating effectively • Metacognition & self-awareness • Study skills & learning how to learn • Time/goal management • Creativity & innovation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agency (Self-efficacy) • Initiative • Resilience • Adaptability • Leadership • Ethical behavior & civic responsibility • Social awareness & empathy • Self-control

Source: Council of Chief State School Officers, “Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions: The Innovation Lab Network State Framework for College, Career, and Citizenship Readiness, and Implications for State Policy” (2013).

State Examples:

Delaware

Delaware has established a vision through its strategic plan and articulated in its ESSA state plan that every learner is ready for college, career, and life. Delaware has set its mission to empower every learner with the highest-quality education through shared leadership, innovative practices, and exemplary services.

Oregon

Oregon’s ESSA plan includes the community’s vision for the education system, including that Oregon students should:

- Receive a rigorous, relevant, well-rounded, engaging educational experience founded on equitable access and opportunity;
- Benefit from individualized and personalized learning;
- Experience a school community that embraces partnerships with businesses, colleges, and community-based organizations in order to support a students’ academic and social-emotional growth.

Virginia

Virginia engaged in a process to develop the “Profile of a Virginia Graduate” which describes the knowledge, skills, experiences and attributes that students must attain to be successful in college and/or the work force and in life in a rapidly changing economy and provides a framework for revising the state’s diploma standards.² Through this process that included engaging with stakeholders, or “consumers,” the board determined that a life-ready Virginia graduate must:

- Achieve and apply appropriate academic and technical knowledge (content knowledge);
- Demonstrate productive workplace skills, qualities, and behaviors (workplace skills);
- Build connections and value interactions with others as a responsible and responsive citizen (community engagement and civic responsibility); and
- Align knowledge, skills and personal interests with career opportunities (career exploration).

2. Theory of Action: Does the state’s ESSA plan have a clear theory of action based on evidence that explains how its strategies in each section of the plan will advance college and career ready deeper learning outcomes, and particularly how it will close gaps in opportunity and achievement?



ESSA: ESSA requires states to align their efforts to advance student outcomes and close gaps in college and career readiness, as defined by their challenging state academic standards and their long-term and interim goals. ESSA anchors state systems of assessment, accountability, and school improvement and teacher and leader quality in these challenging state academic standards.

Opportunity: States should ensure a **clear theory of action** that demonstrates how the state’s plans (including uses of funds across titles) will advance toward the state’s standards, that are aligned with deeper learning knowledge and skills, and do so equitably and in a way that better engages students in learning. A clear theory of action establishes a logic chain through research, evidence, or at least reasoned ideas regarding how state (and local) actions will result in improved college and career ready student outcomes and decreases in achievement gaps. States should include such a theory of action in their state plans, and then **include in their local applications a requirement or expectation that local education agencies (LEAs) similarly articulate a clear theory of action** describing how their plans will do the same both within and across funding streams and systems.

State Example: Oregon

Oregon carries its vision through to its theory of action around its strategies. For example, part of Oregon’s vision is that students receive a well-rounded education in part through more individualized/personalized learning. Oregon’s plan defines a well-rounded education as providing the student-centered learning environment (including personalized learning), knowledge and skills, and student attributes and beliefs for all students to succeed in college and careers. For this reason, Oregon includes personalized learning as a lever across many parts of its state ESSA plan and broader education strategy to prepare students for college and careers. For example, its accountability indicator for school quality and student success will include a measure of personalized learning; professional learning in Oregon will include ensuring that educators have the skills to deliver more personalized learning; and its statewide initiatives to provide a well-rounded education are grounded in personalized learning (e.g. students’ personalized road maps to explore careers and set postsecondary education goals, Oregon Virtual School district, etc.).

3. Standards: Does the state establish and maintain challenging state academic standards that are rigorous and aligned with college and career ready expectations that reflect to the fullest extent the knowledge and skills necessary for success?



ESSA: Under ESSA, states are required to set challenging state academic standards in reading or language arts, math, and science. For the first time, states must demonstrate that such standards are aligned with entrance requirements for credit-bearing coursework in the system of public higher education in the state, and relevant state career and technical education (CTE) standards.

Opportunity: States should ensure that statewide standards are both rigorous and aligned as closely as possible to the full range of deeper learning knowledge and skills that students need to be successful in college, career, and life, such as those set out above in the CCSSO framework for college and career readiness. These standards should be continuously improved over time to ensure ongoing alignment with needed knowledge and skills.

Although states are not required to identify their state standards in the ESSA state plans, many of the plans submitted thus far reflect a general commitment to college and career ready standards, including Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in several states (e.g., Delaware, Vermont, Connecticut, DC, Illinois, and Oregon).

4. Long-Term Goals: Has the state set ambitious but achievable long-term goals aligned to college and career ready attainment for academic achievement, graduation rates, and English language proficiency at a minimum - and for other key indicators such as “9th grade on-track,” or postsecondary enrollment and/or persistence without the need for remediation? Do these goals include expectations for gap closure on each indicator?



ESSA: States must set long-term goals and interim progress indicators for, at a minimum, academic achievement on annual statewide assessments that are aligned with the breadth and depth of state standards, high school graduation rates (including extended-year rates, at the state’s discretion), and English language proficiency for English learners. These metrics must be developed for all students and separately for each subgroup of students, used to show progress on statewide indicators and gap closures over time, and reported on state and district report cards.

Opportunity: States should set ambitious and achievable goals to align efforts toward college and career ready student outcomes, as opposed to a lesser bar, and focus efforts specifically on promoting the greatest performance gains among historically underserved students and subgroups. Such goals should be connected to accountability expectations, and support and improvement plans for districts and schools. States should strike a balance between expected improvement based on current data and improvement needed to close gaps in college and career ready attainment and opportunity among all students. States should also ensure that, for these goals and for accountability purposes, the definition of proficiency on state assessments aligns with college and career readiness.

For example, the District of Columbia has a long-term goal of 85% of all students and subgroups demonstrating college and career readiness on the PARCC assessment, signified by a score of 4 or higher which aligns to college and career readiness. Additionally, the District of Columbia has a long-term goal of cutting gaps between subgroups in half over the next ten years.

5. **Summative Assessment:** Does the state have and maintain high-quality summative assessments that cover the full depth and breadth of knowledge, skills, and rigor needed for success in college and careers, with all appropriate accommodations and alternative assessments needed for students with disabilities and English learners? (This includes any locally-selected, nationally recognized summative high school assessments and may include assessments that are delivered in part through projects, portfolios, or extended-performance tasks.) Is the state taking steps to develop, pilot, and evaluate innovative, high-quality assessments – including competency-based and performance-based assessments – such as through the demonstration authority for innovative assessment pilots?



ESSA: ESSA maintains the requirement that states have annual assessments in grades 3-8 and once in high school, including measurements of higher-order thinking skills, which must include multiple up-to-date measures and may be partially delivered in the form of “portfolios, projects, or extended performance tasks.” ESSA also maintains the requirements that assessments are high-quality and approved through a peer review process. Generally these assessments must be the same statewide, except that ESSA permits local districts with state approval to use nationally-recognized high school assessments (such as PARCC, SBAC, or SAT) that meet the same quality and alignment requirements in lieu of statewide assessment. States must ensure that assessments provide for the participation of all students and appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities and English learners.

For states interested in developing new innovative assessments that are not yet ready to be used statewide for accountability, ESSA allows up to seven states (which may include consortia of states) to be granted **“demonstration authority” to implement innovative assessment system pilots** that can begin at the local level and scale over time, including competency-based, instructionally-embedded, or performance-based assessments that combine into annual summative determinations.

Opportunity: Summative assessment data provides important information to students, educators, and the public about whether schools are preparing students with the skills needed to succeed. States also use summative assessment data to determine what supports they should provide to each of their districts. In order to be useful and accurate, this information must capture the full range of college and career ready knowledge and skills students need to succeed, including for example, rigorous academic content knowledge, the ability to think critically and solve problems, and the ability to work collaboratively and communicate effectively.

To leverage this opportunity, states should:

- Ensure that summative assessments are **high-quality assessments** that reflect and measure the full depth of knowledge needed for success in college and careers, including items that assess higher order thinking skills and complex problem solving (e.g., SBAC and PARCC).
- **Incorporate student portfolios, projects, or extended performance tasks**, which – when aligned to rigorous college and career ready standards – are better measures of higher order thinking skills and understanding and which foster deeper learning outcomes through richer learning experiences.
- **Apply for demonstration authority**, individually or as part of a consortium to be part of a learning community, and work with leading districts to **develop, pilot, and evaluate innovative, high-quality assessments for accountability purposes** that advance deeper learning and provide more robust and actionable data and feedback to students, families, educators, and policymakers – particularly in ways that enable more personalized, student-centered learning, including through competency-based education.

- If not ready to apply for demonstration authority, **provide support to districts in developing these types of innovative assessments** in preparation for application in the future.³
- **Exclude time spent on portfolios, projects, and performance tasks from any restrictions in state law on the time spent on assessments**, so as not to deter use of these assessment and learning tools.
- **Ensure that the results from all assessments in the system are effectively connected to teaching and learning by providing timely information to educators, parents, and students.**
- Ensure that any **locally-selected, nationally recognized assessments that are approved by the state are aligned not only with state standards, but also deeper learning outcomes.**
- **Ensure that assessments offer a format, accommodations, and aligned alternative assessments (where needed) for students with disabilities and English learners** that can provide accurate information on college and career readiness and deeper learning outcomes for the entire student population.

State Example: New Hampshire

New Hampshire obtained authorization through its ESEA Flexibility Waiver and subsequent waiver from USED to undertake a similar process of developing and using innovative competency-based assessments for accountability in a subset of districts, the New Hampshire Performance Assessment of Competency Education (PACE), and thereby provides an example of one possible glide path for developing and rolling out local performance assessments as part of a state accountability system.⁴

6. **High-Quality System of Assessments: Is the state taking steps to build, and help districts build, a high-quality, balanced, and aligned system of assessments (including, for example, formative, interim, summative, and performance assessments) that can best support excellent teaching and college and career ready learning? Is the state planning to use assessment audits or other strategies to build and enhance system quality while also reducing burden?**



A high-quality system of assessments is important to ensuring that an array of assessments can coherently serve the full variety of purposes needed to capture deeper learning outcomes, inform and improve classroom teaching and learning in a timely manner, enhance students' understanding of and participation in their own learning trajectory, and inform systems of accountability and improvement. A summative assessment cannot be expected to play all of these roles in one test or project – multiple, aligned assessments are needed, including performance-based assessments, and interim and formative assessments that are embedded in the curriculum. These may include assessments that are teacher-developed and scored. States have opportunities to move towards such assessment systems under the law such as through the innovative assessment demonstration authority, audits of assessment systems, and other moves to innovative and more coherent sets of assessments.

It is also important that assessment systems include assessments in a format, accommodations, and aligned alternative assessments (where needed) for students with disabilities and English learners that can provide accurate information on college and career readiness and deeper learning outcomes for the entire student population, help inform instruction, promote inclusion, and close achievement gaps.

ESSA: ESSA allows for state assessment audit grants to be used for conducting audits of state assessment systems and for sub-grants to districts to conduct audits of local assessments to improve and streamline local assessment systems. ESSA planning and implementation can also serve as a moment in time to review, align, and improve upon state and local assessment systems.

Opportunity: States should **have a plan to build toward a system of assessment that reflects a full range of deeper learning knowledge and skills**, including communication, collaboration, and improved measures of critical thinking and complex problem solving.⁵ Such a system should support states, districts, and schools in providing more personalized learning opportunities for students. **States should also consider how they are supporting LEAs** to work toward including assessment of the full range of deeper learning competencies in the systems of assessment and how these are informing teaching, learning, and student engagement.

States should leverage available federal funds to audit their state assessment systems, and to provide grants to districts for assessment audits, with a primary focus on building high-quality systems of assessment that drive deeper learning and building better systems over time, rather than just reducing time on assessments.⁶ States should also leverage Title II funds to support teachers in developing and scoring assessments and effectively using data from those assessments to inform instruction and increase student achievement and engagement.⁷

Accountability, Support, and Improvement for Schools:

A key goal for accountability is to build a more balanced accountability system that prioritizes and measures the full array of deeper learning student outcomes and intermediate conditions necessary to achieve them, and can help inform and drive dramatic improvement in schools and in student achievement, with an explicit focus on reducing persistent achievement gaps. This type of balanced accountability system would advance deeper learning by recognizing approaches to teaching and learning and to school design that do not incentivize worksheet approaches or narrowing the curriculum.

Given that deeper learning is critical for advancing equity, increasing opportunities for deeper learning is an essential element to improving all schools, but particularly the lowest performing schools and schools with the achievement gaps among subgroups of students. **For schools that are identified for comprehensive support and improvement (CSI) or targeted support and improvement (TSI) due to low-performing subgroups, states and districts should ensure that school improvement plans are designed with effective strategies that promote deeper learning** in order to transform schools to support each and every student in achieving college and career ready outcomes.

States have been working together and with partners to define and refine over time “next generation” systems of accountability and have defined nine integrated principles that underlie these systems.

CCSSO’s Next Generation Accountability Systems: The Nine Principles^{8*}

1. Alignment of performance goals to college and career ready standards;
 2. Annual determinations for each school and district that meaningfully differentiate between schools and districts and direct the provision of supports and interventions;
 3. Focus on student outcomes on a variety of indicators including those of both status and growth;
 4. Continued commitment to disaggregation, including disaggregation of data by student subgroup (for both reporting and accountability);
 5. Reporting of timely, actionable, accessible data to all stakeholders, including outcome and richer data to drive continuous improvement;
 6. Deeper diagnostic reviews, used as appropriate, to better link accountability determinations to meaningful supports and interventions;
 7. Building school and district capacity for sustained improvement through supports and interventions;
 8. Targeting the lowest performing schools for significant interventions; and
 9. Innovation, evaluation, and continuous improvement in the accountability systems over time.
- *More detailed information and examples can be found in the full document on CCSSO’s website.*

7. Accountability Indicators and Measures: Does the state’s accountability system include multiple measures that are aligned with college and career ready outcomes and reflect a range of knowledge, skills, opportunities, and conditions that are important to success, including measures of school quality and/or student success?



ESSA: States must design and describe in their state plans new systems of accountability that are aligned to college and career ready expectations for students and based on multiple measures, including state assessment outcomes, other academic indicators for elementary and middle schools, graduation rates for high schools, English language proficiency, **and at least one additional indicator of “school quality or student success” (SQSS).** These indicators, including those of school quality and/or student success, must be valid, reliable, comparable, and statewide (at least by gradespan) and must allow for meaningful differentiation among schools.

Opportunity: For purposes of school accountability determinations, states should define, measure, and use a broader set of accountability and improvement **indicators that have evidence of advancing college and career readiness and deeper learning outcomes.** For example, states might include measures of college-level course completion in high school, Advanced Placement (AP) course enrollment or exam scores, International Baccalaureate (IB) assessments, college entrance without remediation, or measures of student engagement, such as chronic absenteeism and exclusionary discipline.⁹

Louisiana is incorporating a “strength of diploma” measure into its SQSS indicator for high schools by awarding heavier weight to the more rigorous diplomas in its system. The District of Columbia is using measures of AP/IB participation and AP/IB performance, among others. Other states, such as Delaware and North Dakota, are incorporating indicators of college and career readiness that demonstrate the percentage of students who meet certain criteria that are indicative of college and career readiness. In particular, a number of states are including some version of an indicator showing the percentage of students on track to graduation in 9th grade based on credits (e.g. Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Louisiana (credit accumulation), Nevada, Oregon). Several states are also measuring participation and/or performance in courses beyond math and English/language arts for a well-rounded curriculum, such as arts, science, physical education, and foreign language (e.g. Connecticut, District of Columbia, Illinois, Louisiana, Michigan, Vermont).

Given that there is a fairly limited set of measures of deeper learning outcomes currently ready for use in accountability systems, states could help **move further faster in developing and evaluating better indicators and instruments to advance deeper learning by creating and supporting high-capacity pilot districts or district innovation zones.** Testing out potential accountability indicators and instruments not yet ready for full-scale use in accountability could create an intentional glide path to more sophisticated deeper learning approaches over time. For example, states could support districts in identifying and developing indicators related to deeper learning on a small scale and for a specific purpose, such as for data collection and formative purposes, and gradually move to public data reporting. Louisiana, the District of Columbia, and Vermont, for instance, have indicated in their state plans that they will be incorporating certain measures over time, as ready – particularly indicators of college and career readiness that are still being refined or piloted.

States should ensure strong accountability for subgroup performance, in part by selecting an n-size that is low enough to meaningfully capture subgroup performance.¹⁰ States should also consider elevating subgroup performance in summative ratings for accountability and differentiation of schools to ensure a focus on equity as states make determinations on which schools are in need of support. For example, Tennessee includes in its school ratings for accountability a weight of 60% on overall school performance and a weight of 40% on subgroup performance. A number of other states take a similar approach, including Connecticut, District of Columbia, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and New Mexico.

States should include a mechanism for **rewarding performance and growth at the high and low ends of student achievement** in addition to recognizing proficiency. Recognition of growth is important for ensuring that schools, districts, and states focus on and consistently support students at all performance levels in improving their knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed for success, setting high expectations and helping each student reach their maximum potential. For example, Delaware is including in its growth indicator measures of progress in both the lowest and highest performing quartiles.

8. Data Dashboards and Reporting: Does the state plan to use (and encourage districts to use) a high-quality data dashboard or other matrix to report on an array of timely, actionable, relevant data - including for accountability and school improvement - that can be used by all stakeholders to inform the improvement of schools, strategies, and systems?



ESSA: ESSA requires each state to use its accountability system to differentiate among schools, including identifying schools in need of supports and improvement, through a determination based on the indicators. ESSA prioritizes transparency of this and other data by requiring states and districts to produce annual report cards that are clear, concise, understandable, and accessible and to report data – for all students and by subgroups – with regard to accountability determinations, indicators used in accountability determinations, and other variables, such as the number and percentage of students enrolled in accelerated coursework.

Opportunity: A dashboard of more varied data help broaden the focus of current accountability systems toward deeper learning outcomes for all students across all schools and enhance the state’s ability to communicate key data to the public on the full array of knowledge, skills, resources, and conditions necessary for improvement and success. A data dashboard can display both accountability metrics and determinations as well as other important data on deeper learning outcomes in a comprehensive picture that is understandable and actionable, to inform continuous improvement. It can also provide important diagnostic data to inform gaps in access and the selection of the appropriate evidence-based intervention and support. And it can serve as an accountability mechanism itself to differentiate among schools without relying on a summative rating for schools like an overall letter grade or star system.

States can leverage this opportunity by:

- **Using data dashboards** to display a range of data, both required for accountability and additional indicators for reporting. States should ensure that their data dashboards are designed to be easily understandable and meaningful to parents, students, teachers, and others through both the content displayed (includes, for example, measures related to college and career readiness, growth data, and disaggregated extended graduation rates) and the format (i.e., uses color codes; contains summary data as well as a function to go deeper; and has ability to run comparison’s across schools (or districts)). Data dashboards can also be used with decision rules¹¹ for accountability to differentiate schools for supports and interventions, instead of only a numeric “index” or letter grade to ensure that schools (and all stakeholders) have a richer understanding of their performance on and across individual indicators and for subgroups of students.¹²
- **Implementing new reporting systems** with data beyond what is required for accountability to highlight deeper learning outcomes, present a more balanced and actionable set of data than index ratings, and to further inform data analysis and continuous school improvement. For example, these could include successful completion of advanced coursework; college credit accumulation; college entry, remediation, and persistence rates; career preparedness as measured by industry certifications or other measures; reading proficiency in early grades; and/or measures of students being “on track” at certain points (such as 9th grade transition).

For example, many states indicate in their ESSA state plans that they are using a broader set of measures for reporting purposes than for the school accountability system. These broader sets often include indicators that are related to advancing college and career readiness, but are not used for the identification of schools in need of improvement. Massachusetts plans to include the additional data points on school and district report cards such as access to courses beyond English language arts, mathematics, science, history and civics, (e.g. the arts, physical education, computer science, and community service), school climate survey results, and access to and participation in advanced coursework.

9. Diagnostic Review: Does the state have a system and capacity for deeper diagnostic review of data to inform continuous improvement in all schools and districts, with a particular focus on low-performing schools, districts, and subgroups?



ESSA: ESSA requires deeper diagnostic reviews in some instances, such as through needs assessments of schools identified for CSI and districts receiving grants under Title IV, Part A, to better connect accountability determinations and data analysis with the supports and approaches that are provided.

Opportunity: Diagnostic reviews can be valuable to all schools, not just those identified for additional support, facilitating the use of data to drive improvements in outcomes and systems. States should consider **establishing, or supporting districts to establish, systems of periodic deeper diagnostic review for all schools and districts**, in addition to more regular reviews for low-performing schools as part of the root cause analysis and improvement process. Diagnostic review processes can apply deeper root cause analyses at the school level to connect college and career ready accountability and reporting outcomes to clear plans for evidence-based improvement in areas of need, which is important to ensuring that strategies and interventions match unique student and school needs. The review process also should include looking at which evidence-based interventions fit areas of need, where resources exist and should be allocated to address these areas of need, and where more research and evaluation may be needed to build evidence for improvement strategies. States should also encourage districts, which should have a larger set of data measures than the state, to use additional relevant indicators for diagnostic reviews even if they are not being used statewide. States should consider engaging in reviews of district capacity and performance as a key strategy for improving school performance, particularly schools that are identified for CSI or TSI. States should also use these reviews to identify schools that have been successful in improving student performance on individual indicators, overall and for particular subgroups, to serve as, for example, model or mentor schools, pairing them with struggling schools or creating peer-to-peer school networks.

State Example: Vermont

The state of Vermont is now implementing a diagnostic system with “Education Quality Reviews” (EQRs) that include both data snapshots and integrated field reviews. The EQRs are being used to assess the degree to which state standards are being addressed, to identify bright spots and best practices, and to inform continuous improvement efforts in all schools.¹³ Within the EQR process for all schools, those schools identified for school improvement under ESSA will have particular improvement actions and next steps for review and monitoring aligned with ESSA requirements.

10. School Improvement Resources and Plans: Does the state have plans for a system to improve all schools, and particularly low-performing schools, including state levers such as model needs assessments, technical assistance to districts, funding criteria, performance management systems for school improvement plans, and continuous improvement strategies? Does the plan advance evidence-based elements for improving schools such as teacher and leader effectiveness strategies, strategies addressing the effects of adversity on students, accelerated learning opportunities, and teaching aligned to the full array of college and career ready knowledge and skills?



ESSA: For schools identified for CSI, ESSA requires districts to develop improvement plans – based on the needs assessments and including evidence-based interventions – that are then approved and monitored by states. Similarly, districts must ensure evidence-based plans are developed by schools identified for TSI. States must decide how to allocate school improvement funds, provide technical support services to districts with high numbers of CSI or TSI schools, and ultimately take “more rigorous action” for CSI schools that do not exit improvement status after implementing their plans. For schools receiving federal school improvement funds from their states, the improvement plans must include at least one intervention supported by evidence that meets Tiers 1-3 in ESSA.¹⁴

Opportunity: Engagement with school improvement plans can help schools and districts gain the understanding, resources, and support for what it takes to improve, using evidence-based approaches that have the greatest impact on improving student outcomes. Engagement in improvement planning can also give schools and districts the opportunity to explore and adopt the school structures, program designs, curriculum, and educator supports most likely to improve students’ college and career readiness and deeper learning knowledge and skills.

States could leverage this opportunity by:

- Ensuring that the **key components of school improvement plans under ESSA – the needs assessment, interim indicators, and improvement strategies – are aimed at enabling all students to achieve deeper learning outcomes.** For example, needs assessments might include availability of advanced courses; opportunities for learning experiences that build higher-order thinking skills, such as critical thinking, problem solving, and communication; and opportunities for learning that engage students through personalized learning and lead to deeper learning outcomes, such as project-based learning or internships. These needs assessments should look at student data across subgroups, grade levels, and where available, at the classroom level.¹⁵
- Providing technical assistance to districts and schools to be knowledgeable about “evidence-based interventions” that have been proven to increase deeper learning opportunities and outcomes for all students and that can be employed in school improvement strategies.

Example: New Tech Network

New Tech Network (NTN) works with schools and districts for comprehensive school change to create innovative learning environments with a project-based learning platform. Their project-based approach is designed to engage students, develop authentic problem-solving and critical thinking skills, foster communication and collaboration skills, and require demonstration of mastery of knowledge. NTN reports graduation rates higher than the national average in 84% of its schools, with college enrollment at 70% and a college persistence rate in 4-year colleges at 92%. NTN’s success is also seen in lower income schools in its network, reporting that NTN schools eligible for schoolwide Title 1 had higher graduation and enrollment rates for the class of 2014.¹⁶ Partnership with an entity like New Tech Network, with demonstrated success in deeper learning, could help a state or district turn around low-performing schools.

11. Direct Student Services: Will the state leverage up to 3% of Title I funds for “direct student services” in ways that will support students in becoming college and career ready, such as accelerated and personalized learning opportunities, rigorous career and technical education, and student academic and non-academic supports?



ESSA: States, after meaningful consultation with districts, may also reserve up to a three percent set aside of Title I funds for awards to districts for direct student services, such as dual enrollment and other college-aligned coursework. In awarding these funds, states must prioritize districts with high numbers of schools identified for CSI and/or TSI.

Opportunity: Direct student services may be an important way to maximize opportunities under ESSA to promote deeper learning outcomes through evidence-based strategies, particularly in low-performing schools serving students with the highest needs. Direct student services might include providing access to personalized learning, dual enrollment in credit-bearing college courses and other rigorous college-aligned work like AP or IB, including for students who are currently off-track for graduation or who are facing other academic challenges.

Example: New Mexico Direct Student Services Plan

New Mexico’s ESSA state plan indicates that the state will use the optional 3% set-aside of Title I funds for direct student services and will preference activities that most closely align to the state’s priorities, including:

- *Extended learning time opportunities for identified students*
- *AP Course Access through both NM’s virtual platform (IDEAL-NM) and other online course providers*
- *Other Course Access (CTE, dual credit, credit recovery)*
- *K-3 Literacy and Mathematics*
- *Pre-K Services*
- *Personalized Learning (Linking to Title II and IV funds to support opportunity culture)*
- *Student transportation (school choice)*

Supporting Excellent Educators

Education systems must develop, support, and retain effective educators with the knowledge and skills necessary to create learning environments that foster deeper learning if we are to achieve college and career readiness for all students. Such effective educators should be accessible to all students, but particularly to students in low-performing schools or low-performing subgroups, and be supported by school leaders committed to deeper learning for all students. Over the long-term, ensuring this capacity likely requires changes to the infrastructure of existing educator development and support systems to ensure that deeper learning is integrated and embedded in teacher and school leader preparation, certification and continuous professional learning.

12. Educator Preparation: Has the state engaged educator and leader preparation programs and other partners and will it leverage Title II funds to align educator and leader preparation programs and/or certification and licensure with expectations that lead to deeper learning outcomes among all students?



ESSA: ESSA allows for state funding through Title II to support reforming teacher, principal, or other school leader certification, recertification, licensing, or tenure systems or preparation program standards and approval processes to ensure that teachers and leaders are prepared to support students in meeting the state's challenging academic standards.

Opportunity: It is important to align preparation and standards for entering the profession with the deeper learning outcomes the system should be designed to advance. Teachers and leaders need specific classroom- and school-level strategies for teaching and assessing for the knowledge and skills students from diverse backgrounds need for success in college and careers. To improve educator preparation, **states should analyze and address the standards and frameworks and related oversight processes that regulate teacher and school leader preparation** to ensure they are designed to promote educator capacity to support students in meeting the challenging academic standards, with particular focus on the deep content knowledge, critical thinking skills and learning environments needed to promote deeper learning. States should also consider ways to assist programs in strengthening these focus areas through identification of best practices and model programs, facilitating partnerships among preparation programs and local school districts, and intervention with individual programs to correct deficiencies.

13. Systems of Professional Learning: Is the state leveraging Title II funds to develop school-level learning systems that align to ESSA's new definition of professional development? Do they particularly promote continuous improvement for teachers and leaders to improve their practice and further advance college and career ready student outcomes?



ESSA: ESSA includes a new definition of professional development that emphasizes providing educators “with the knowledge and skills necessary **to enable students to succeed in a well-rounded education and to meet challenging State academic standards.**”¹⁷ This explicitly sets an expectation that commits to deeper learning outcomes and supports teachers and leaders in improving their practice so that all students are college and career ready. All federal funds used for professional development must align with this definition.

Opportunity: States should ensure a cohesive and coherent strategy for supporting educators that prioritizes allowable uses of funds that will help teachers and school leaders help their students achieve college and career readiness. This requires transforming systems of professional learning that are grounded in a shared vision, use data to set goals and drive improvement, align resources to maximize impact, build leadership capacity, and sustain implementation through effective change management with continuous improvement processes.¹⁸ In order to ensure a “line of sight” to districts, states should also ensure that the local applications ask districts to describe their systems of professional growth and improvement and how they will ensure activities are aligned with the new definition. States should support districts and schools in ensuring that systems of professional learning are designed to build the competencies teachers need to foster deeper learning outcomes. In particular, states should analyze their data on the equitable distribution of teachers and where there are gaps in teacher quality, focus resources on building educator capacity. States may also want to use Title II funding to support teacher training around implicit bias, or other efforts, to ensure a culture of high expectations for all students in demonstrating deeper learning outcomes. One such framework of teacher competencies for learner-centered teaching which has been set out by Jobs for the Future and CCSSO includes educator competencies in the cognitive, intrapersonal, interpersonal, and instructional domains.¹⁹

14. School Leadership. Has the state expressly focused on improving the quality of school leaders in ways that promote deeper learning, and improving access to high-quality school leaders across districts and the state, particularly for low-performing schools, such as through use of the 3% Title II set aside or other Title II activities?



ESSA: ESSA has a clear focus on principals and other school leaders, in addition to teachers, and allows for specific options for funding activities to build their capacity and ensure they are most effective in supporting teachers to help students become college and career ready, including an optional set aside of up to three percent of Title II, Part A sub-grant funds.

Opportunity: In order to establish school environments that drive and support deeper learning outcomes, it is critical to have effective school leaders who understand and value deeper learning and will create the conditions necessary to that end. States can use the Title II funding, including funds reserved for state activities and/or the three percent set aside, to specifically focus on supporting school leaders to be more effective in advancing deeper learning, and ensuring that teachers are prepared to support students in developing critical deeper learning knowledge and skills. This could include supporting professional learning or school leader network opportunities to establish a shared vision to advance deeper learning outcomes, an understanding of the kinds of school and classroom learning environments, and instructional supports, necessary to do so, and development of a plan to drive and sustain that change.

Supporting All Students

For students to be successful in college, career, and life, our education systems must provide access for all students to the courses and learning environments that enable them to reach their full potential. This includes access to high-quality courses and programs that provide students with the opportunity to be well-rounded, develop critical deeper learning knowledge, and skills, and be engaged in and direct their learning. Rigorous courses for a well-rounded education include high-quality courses in STEM and computer science; accelerated learning programs, such as dual enrollment courses to earn college credit; and music, art, and foreign language. To truly engage students, these courses should be personalized so that students are able to have input into their learning and their needs and so that they develop the autonomy needed in college, careers, and life. And school systems should include academic and non-academic supports that meet student needs so that all students have the opportunity to reach their potential. This includes establishing a high-quality system of early learning that can ensure that students develop the learning readiness that is foundational to later developing deeper learning knowledge and skills. These systems should also ensure successful transitions into kindergarten and between elementary, middle, and high school, and postsecondary education. ESSA contains a number of opportunities to help support all students towards success in college, career, and life.

15. Student Supports and Academic Enrichment: Will the state target its Title IV Student Support and Academic Enrichment grants towards strategies that best advance college and career ready deeper learning and equity? For example, will the state use these funds to provide equitable access to a rigorous well-rounded education, student-centered learning experiences leading to mastery of deeper learning knowledge and skills, and student supports that meet their unique needs?



ESSA: ESSA provides the opportunity through Title IV, Part A, Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants for states and districts to obtain additional funding to improve students' academic achievement by (1) providing all students with access to a well-rounded education, (2) improving school conditions for student learning, and (3) improving the use of technology. This may include a host of activities that are geared toward engaging students in learning and supporting students in preparing for college and/or career. States may reserve up to five percent of these funds for state activities to support districts and must allocate at least 95 percent of funds to districts.

Opportunity: States should prioritize funding through Title IV Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants for **activities at the state level, and for grants to local districts, that are intentionally designed to increase and support student opportunity and college and career readiness, including deeper learning knowledge and skills.** This could include, for example, prioritizing activities as increased access to a well-rounded education such as access to postsecondary and AP/IB coursework, and other rigorous coursework (including project-based learning, interdisciplinary curriculum), achievement in STEM and other areas, and accelerated learning programs (including cost of exams for low-income students). For example, Illinois plans to increase both access to and success in AP and IB courses to promote equity, rigor, and a well-rounded education.

This could also include access to more personalized rigorous learning. For example, Tennessee plans to pilot a blended learning pilot program in math and explore competency education and predictive analytics in high need schools for more personalized learning experiences towards college and career readiness; while Arizona plans to use Title IV funds to increase access to personalized, rigorous learning experiences supported by technology.

Additionally, Title IV uses could include academic and non-academic student supports such as college and career guidance counseling, mental health counseling, financial literacy coaching (including for postsecondary financial aid). For example, Michigan intends to use its Title IV funds to provide student supports including college and career counseling, dropout prevention supports, health programs, school-based mental health counseling in schools, and supports for student safety. Connecticut plans to design a next-generation system of tiered supports through Title IV funds, including promoting trauma-informed practices, social emotional learning systems, and bullying prevention to support schools in college and career readiness regardless of background.

States can demonstrate and advance this commitment to the use of Title IV funds through:

- Planned state activities to support districts in implementation of their plans and to take steps, such as through audits, to ensure that state funds are prioritized to advantage low-income students and to address opportunity gaps;
- The design of local applications for Title IV funds to connect use of funds to overarching purpose of increasing student opportunity, college and career readiness, and engagement through personalization; and
- The design of comprehensive needs assessments (which must be completed by all districts receiving over \$30,000) to help districts assess their deeper learning capacities.

16. High-Quality Early Learning: Has the state identified strategies throughout the ESSA plan and implementation to improve access to high-quality early learning as part of an integrated, equitable continuum of education towards college and career success? Does the state leverage strategies and resources to accomplish this such as professional development, support to programs, aligned standards, data sharing, school improvement, and a focus on transition?



ESSA: ESSA provides opportunities interwoven throughout the law in Titles I, II, III, IV, and IX that can be leveraged to establish or improve high-quality systems of early learning.

Opportunity: Systems that improve and expand access to high-quality early learning opportunities for young children are critical to ensuring that students develop the skills necessary to later be successful in mastering deeper learning knowledge and skills, and that their teachers have an understanding of child development to help build and sustain these skills. States should **include a long-term goal that includes early learning in the state theory of action, and identify strategies throughout ESSA, including in Titles I, II, III, IV, and IX, to meet these goals and build deeper learning skills in young children.** These might include, for example:

- Incentivizing the use of Title I funds to improve the quality and availability of early childhood programs that support deeper learning at the district level and implementing high quality early learning as an intervention for schools receiving comprehensive support;
- Improving state and local coordination between and across early childhood and K-12 agencies to ensure that there are common expectations and shared knowledge around deeper learning strategies;
- Creating coordinated systems of professional development through Title II to ensure that the knowledge needed to help children develop deeper learning skills are available to all children; and
- Structuring applications for Title IV resources to prioritize the quality of early learning and ensure instruction and supports for deeper learning skills for young children.

Consultation, Continuous Improvement, and State-to-District Through Line

In order to ensure that all schools are providing the opportunity to each and every student to be prepared and successful in college and career, we must put improving student outcomes as the core purpose of education systems so that they are designed with structures (processes, capacity, etc.) to continually assess progress through data and stakeholder input and to make purposeful shifts for improvement in response. This must be a multi-faceted process that connects to and is informed by stakeholders in an ongoing way and is aligned from the state to districts to schools.

17. *Stakeholder Engagement: Does the state have and maintain robust systems of stakeholder engagement in place (including ongoing “grassroots” engagement, and structures for regular “grasstops” engagement embedded in state implementation) that inform state decisions and also foster public understanding of and support for college and career ready strategies and equity as part of ESSA?*



ESSA: ESSA requires states, in developing and revising state plans, to engage in timely and meaningful consultation with specified stakeholders. This process can lead to greater awareness and engagement of groups in state education decisions, creating an opportunity for states to harness that interest and engagement to help inform the state’s improvement of education systems over time.

Opportunity: For stakeholders to fully understand and potentially support the theory of action behind strategies to advance equity in access and outcomes in terms of college and career ready knowledge, skills, and dispositions, and the strategies themselves within the ESSA plan, the state’s stakeholder engagement processes should **clearly outline for all stakeholders: what deeper learning means, why it is important to advancing college and career readiness and equity, and how it can be leveraged through ESSA** (for example through goals, standards, innovative assessments, uses of funds to prepare educators and to raise expectations and provide a well-rounded education or all students).

In addition to engaging in authentic consultation with stakeholders during the development of the plan, states should **set up systems of ongoing consultation with key stakeholders that will sustain over time** and ensure input on a regular basis.²⁰

Example: Colorado Stakeholder Engagement Process and Structures

Colorado has established a “hub and spoke” grass roots architecture that has allowed it to reach a wide array of stakeholders, including those that are traditionally under-represented in the education engagement process. The “hub” ESSA committee oversaw the development of the overall draft ESSA plan, informed by the work of the “spoke” committees on specific ESSA topics such as accountability, teachers and leaders, and school improvement. The organizations that make up these committees (a total of 130 members) have reach into communities to represent a range of stakeholder groups. Colorado ensured, at the request of stakeholders, that meetings could be livestreamed with remote participation in the conversations to reach those who work full time or who were unable to participate in-person. The hub and spoke architecture provides a structure that could evolve or continue on in some format throughout ESSA implementation.

18. State Continuous Improvement Processes Based on Evidence: Has the state established clear systems, processes, and capacity for ongoing evaluation, review, and continuous improvement across all parts of its plan, based on data and evidence?



ESSA: States are required to periodically review and revise their approved state plans and submit revisions to USED for review and approval. Titles I, II, and IV also include explicit expectations (1) for states to periodically review and use data to improve their state activities and (2) for districts receiving grants under these titles to continuously review and improve their activities (such as for schoolwide programs under Title I, professional learning activities under Title II, and Promise Neighborhoods and Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants under Title IV).

Opportunity: There is an opportunity to shift from a compliance frame toward learning systems that can better advance deeper learning systems, opportunities, and outcomes over time among all groups of students and across all schools, through the use of review and improvement mechanisms and evidence-based actions. Ensuring that state agencies themselves have these review and evidence-based improvement mechanisms built into their operations is key to system and plan improvement. States should **expressly commit to regular review and continuous improvement in systems of accountability and diagnostic review and to be continually working toward the development and implementation of additional measures of deeper learning**, whether for diagnostic, reporting, or accountability purposes. This sets the vision and plan for the state and actors in it that the approach at every level is not to “name and shame” but to use multiple data points and evidence-based strategies for review and continuous improvement.

For example, Massachusetts will use its Office of Planning and Research to lead an approach to ESSA implementation focused on evaluation at the local and state level for review and improvement of activities and plans. Tennessee also has a research practice partnership with Vanderbilt University to support review and evaluation of key implementation issues that can help improve implementation of strategies toward college and career readiness based on evidence and data.

19. Local Plans: Does the state have a state-to-local strategy that advances the dual goals of college and career ready outcomes and equity at the district level? For example, do the state’s plans for designing, reviewing, approving, and monitoring local educational agencies’ ESSA plans and providing differentiated technical assistance to LEAs create a clear through-line that advances deeper learning at the state and local level?



ESSA: ESSA requires states to design, review, and approve local ESSA consolidated applications to ensure the local plans are designed to support students in meeting the challenging state academic standards.

Opportunity: States have an opportunity to create alignment and consistency between state and local plans to focus on advancing college and career readiness, including deeper learning outcomes, and equity through their LEA plan designs and their technical assistance to LEAs in this regard. This would include ensuring that district plans and strategies: are designed to advance college and career ready, deeper learning goals for all students; include a clear theory of action; and include systems for periodic review and continuous improvement over time. This is important for more effectively and efficiently affecting changes in teaching and learning, assessment, and overall learning systems that can improve deeper learning outcomes and close gaps over time.

20. Innovation Zones and Waivers: Has the state considered establishing innovation zones across ready districts that accelerate development of new models and systems advancing college and career readiness and equity such as improved assessment systems and additional accountability measures for deeper learning? Where needed and educationally sound, does the state have a strategy to use ESSA waiver authority to implement educational strategies that go above and beyond the statute in advancing college and career readiness and equity?



ESSA: ESSA allows for mechanisms to create innovation zones, potentially including through waiver of some ESSA requirements for states or districts and/or through the demonstration authority for innovative assessment pilots. Waiver of requirements must be for the purpose of advancing student outcomes and must include systems for periodic review and evaluation for continuous improvement.

Opportunity: States should consider how to best promote innovation and continuous improvement in ESSA areas and strategies, including through work with leading districts or schools that serve a diverse set of learners. For example, states could seek to establish innovation zones in one or more districts or schools by requesting the Secretary of Education to waive requirements that would otherwise be restrictive. States should consider leveraging this mechanism to establish their own small-scale pilot programs in a set of leading districts or schools to test deeper learning-related approaches that require further evaluation before statewide implementation, such as, for example, using different measures of deeper learning²¹ or assessment of deeper learning outcomes, and implementing particular personalized learning strategies and “whole child supports”. Specifically related to assessment and accountability for deeper learning outcomes, states should also consider moving toward applying for the demonstration authority for innovative assessment pilots, which is more fully described in Section 6 on high quality systems of assessment. Even if not immediately seeking to apply for the innovative assessment pilot, states should begin to support at the local level the development and use of assessments that measure deeper learning, such as through performance tasks, particularly for formative purposes. This will help to build capacity among educators and school leaders to design, interpret, and use performance-based measures to inform instruction – and increase learning about these types of measures.

Conclusion

States have a critical window of opportunity to set an aspirational vision of ensuring that all students are prepared fully to be successful in college, career, and life and to design systems to move toward achieving that vision. As states are engaging with stakeholders and making critical decisions in developing and implementing their ESSA state plans, they should consider at each point how they might leverage those choices to promote deeper learning outcomes and advance equity for all students in their states. This tool identifies some specific opportunities with

concrete examples and resources to support states in these decisions. Overall, states should set high standards by defining college and career readiness to encompass the full range of knowledge and skills and ensure a line-of-sight through their systems of assessment and accountability so the system is aligned toward those standards. States should ensure that their systems of supports and interventions are specifically designed to support students in schools identified for improvement to achieve college and career readiness for all. States should ensure that systems of professional learning at the state and district levels are designed to build capacity of educators to foster deeper learning. States should provide all students with access to a well-rounded education, particularly through strategies aimed at increasing college and career readiness. Finally, states should design learning systems to leverage evidence for continuous improvement, including of the systems set out in the state plan itself.

ESSA establishes certain requirements with which states must comply, but also **creates far more opportunities that state, district, and school leadership can, and should, leverage to go farther, faster in transforming education systems for greater deeper learning outcomes and equity for all students.**

Endnotes

¹ Council of Chief State School Officers, “Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions: The Innovation Lab Network State Framework for College, Career, and Citizenship Readiness, and Implications for State Policy,” (2013).

² “Virginia Profile of a Graduate,” Virginia Department of Education, <http://www.pen.k12.va.us/instruction/graduation/profile-grad/index.shtml>

³ CCSSO released a tool to assist states in considering leveraging the demonstration authority opportunity which includes steps that can be taken before application for full demonstration authority. Council of Chief State School Officers, “Critical Area Outline: Innovative Assessment Pilots,” (March 2016).

⁴ “Performance Assessment of Competency Education (PACE),” New Hampshire Department of Education, <http://education.nh.gov/assessment-systems/pace.htm>.

⁵ For resources regarding high-quality systems of assessment, see Linda Darling-Hammond, Joan Herman, James Pellegrino, et al. “Criteria for High-Quality Assessment,” (Stanford, CA: Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education, 2013); and Council of Chief State School Officers, “Comprehensive Statewide Assessment Systems: A Framework for the Role of the State Education Agency in Improving Quality and Reducing Burden,” (2015).

⁶ Achieve developed an assessment inventory tool to help guide districts in the audit process and to inform states’ support of districts performing an audit. See Achieve, “Student Assessment Inventory for School Districts,” (2015). <http://www.achieve.org/publications/student-assessment-inventory-school-districts>.

⁷ Every Student Succeeds Act. Pub. L. 114-95. 129 STAT. 1928. December 15, 2015. <https://www.congress.gov/114/plaws/publ95/PLAW-114publ95.pdf>.

⁸ Council of Chief State School Officers, “Roadmap for Next Generation Accountability Systems, 2nd Edition.”

⁹ Since the passage of ESSA, there has been much research and consideration of potential indicators to support and inform states’ decision-making for initial ESSA state plans and for improvement and amendment over time. See Chad Aldeman, “Grading Schools: How States Should Define ‘School Quality’ Under the Every Student Succeeds Act,” (Bellweather Education Partners: 2016); Ryan Reyna, “Overview of Proposed Accountability Systems,” (CCSSO: 2016); Linda Darling-Hammond, Soung Bae, Channa Cook-Harvey, et al., “Pathways to New Accountability Through the Every Student Succeeds Act,” (Palo Alto: Learning Policy Institute: 2016); Jessica Cardichon and Linda Darling-Hammond, “Advancing Educational Equity for Underserved Youth: How New State Accountability Systems Can Support School Inclusion and Student Success,” (Palo Alto: Learning Policy Institute: 2017).

¹⁰ Alliance for Excellent Education. “Ensuring Equity in ESSA: The Role of N-Size in Subgroup Accountability,” (2016).

¹¹ Since the performance data presented in data dashboards do not culminate into a single summative rating, states that choose this route may need to develop a set of decision rules in order to be able to designate schools for federally required classifications. For example, Illinois, which uses a multi-measure data dashboard, outlines its methodology for determining school classifications in its ESEA waiver. See <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/eseaflex/secretary-letters/ilrequest42014.doc>. Illinois’ data dashboard can be found here: <https://illinoisreportcard.com/>.

¹² The CORE districts in California use a School Quality Improvement System that employs a data dashboard-style report card. The dashboard includes student success indicators such as chronic absenteeism and suspension and expulsion rates, in addition to academic indicators such as the four, five, and six year cohort graduation rates. The dashboard also indicates the change in performance for each indicator from the previous year’s mark. For additional examples of data dashboards in practice, such as in Alberta, Canada, see Linda Darling-Hammond, Soung Bae, Channa Cook-Harvey, et al., “Pathways to New Accountability Through the Every Student Succeeds Act,” (Palo Alto: Learning Policy Institute: 2016).

¹³ “Education Quality Reviews.” State of Vermont Agency of Education. <http://education.vermont.gov/vermont-schools/education-quality/education-quality-reviews>.

¹⁴ “Non-Regulatory Guidance: Using Evidence to Strengthen Education Investments.” U.S. Department of Education. <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/guidanceuseseseinvestment.pdf>.

¹⁵ For a more in-depth look at how needs assessments can be implemented and leveraged effectively, see Alliance for Excellent Education and Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy. “School Interventions That Work: Targeted Support for Low-Performing Students,” 2017.

¹⁷ The new definition of professional development under ESSA: “The term ‘professional development’ means activities that— (A) are an integral part of school and local educational are an integral part of school and local educational agency strategies for providing educators (including teachers, principals, other school leaders, specialized instructional support personnel, paraprofessionals, and, as applicable, early childhood educators) with the knowledge and skills necessary to enable students to succeed in a well-rounded education and to meet the challenging State academic standards; and (B) are sustained (not stand-alone, 1-day, or short term workshops), intensive, collaborative, job-embedded, data-driven, and classroom-focused, and may include activities that— (i) improve and increase teachers’— (I) knowledge of the academic subjects the teachers teach; (II) understanding of how students learn; and (III) ability to analyze student work and achievement from multiple sources, including

how to adjust instructional strategies, assessments, and materials based on such analysis; (ii) are an integral part of broad schoolwide and districtwide educational improvement plans; . . . (vi) advance teacher understanding of— (I) effective instructional strategies that are evidence-based; and (II) strategies for improving student academic achievement or substantially increasing the knowledge and teaching skills of teachers; (vii) are aligned with, and directly related to, academic goals of the school or local educational agency; . . . (xiii) include instruction in the use of data and assessments to inform and instruct classroom practice.” ESSA Sec. 8001 (42).

¹⁸ For a resource designed to help states assess how their vision for a professional learning system aligns with the new definition of professional development in ESSA through a specific tool that includes these principles, see Learning Forward and EducationCounsel, “A New Vision for Professional Learning: A Toolkit to Help States Use ESSA to Advance Learning and Improvement Systems,” (January 2017).

¹⁹ Council of Chief State School Officers and Jobs For the Future, “Educator Competencies for Personalized, Learner-Centered Teaching,” (2015).

²⁰ For resources related to successful stakeholder engagement, see Council of Chief State School Officers, “Let’s Keep the Conversation Going,” (2016); Joan Cashman, Patrice Cunniff Linehan, Luann Purcell, et al., “Leading by Convening: A Blueprint for Authentic Engagement,” (Alexandria, VA: National Association of State Directors of Special Education, OSEP, the IDEA Partnership, and WestEd: 2014); and Council of Chief State School Officers, Learning Heroes, and National PTA. “Guidelines for SEAs on Engaging Parents,” (Washington, D.C. 2016). The Opportunity Institute’s Partners for Each and Every Child also has developed a rubric for assessing stakeholder engagement in states. See http://partnersforeachandeverychild.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/P4_StatePlanRubric_PDF_2.17.pdf.

²¹ As an example, see Hanna Melnick, Channa Cook-Harvey, and Linda Darling-Hammond, “Encouraging Social and Emotional Learning In the Context of New Accountability,” (2017). <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/encouraging-social-emotional-learning-new-accountability-brief>.

Making the Most of ESSA:

20 Ideas for How to Leverage ESSA to Advance College and Career Readiness and Equity

State Implementation Checklist



General

- ☐ **1. Vision:** Does the state set a clear “North Star” across its ESSA plan and implementation strategies by defining college and career ready deeper learning outcomes the system must advance for all students including: rigorous academic content knowledge, the ability to think critically and solve problems, the ability to work collaboratively and communicate effectively, and the ability to direct one’s learning with a strong academic mindset?
- ☐ **2. Theory of Action:** Does the state’s ESSA plan have clear theories of action based on evidence that explain how its strategies in each section will advance college and career ready deeper learning outcomes, and particularly how it will close gaps in opportunity and achievement?
- ☐ **3. Standards:** Does the state establish and maintain challenging state academic standards that are rigorous and aligned with college and career ready expectations that reflect to the fullest extent the knowledge and skills necessary for success?
- ☐ **4. Long-Term Goals:** Has the state set ambitious but achievable long-term goals aligned to college and career ready attainment for academic achievement, graduation rates, and English language proficiency at a minimum - and for other key indicators such as “9th grade on-track,” or postsecondary enrollment and/or persistence without the need for remediation? Do these goals include expectations for gap closure on each indicator?

Academic Assessments

- ☐ **5. Summative Assessment:** Does the state have and maintain high-quality summative assessments that cover the full depth and breadth of knowledge, skills, and rigor needed for success in college and careers, with all appropriate accommodations and alternative assessments needed for students with disabilities and English learners? (This includes any locally-selected, nationally recognized summative high school assessments and may include assessments that are delivered in part through projects, portfolios, or extended-performance tasks.) Is the state taking steps to develop, pilot, and evaluate innovative, high-quality assessments - including competency-based and performance-based assessments - such as through the demonstration authority for innovative assessment pilots?
- ☐ **6. High-quality System of Assessments:** Is the state taking steps to build, and help districts build, a high-quality, balanced, and aligned system of assessments (including, for example, formative, interim, summative, and performance assessments) that can best support excellent teaching and college and career ready learning? Is the state planning to use assessment audits or other strategies to build and enhance system quality while also reducing burden?

Accountability, Support, and Improvement for Schools

- ☐ **7. Accountability Indicators and Measures:** Does the state’s accountability system include multiple measures that are aligned with college and career ready outcomes and reflect a range of knowledge, skills, opportunities, and conditions that are important to success, including measures of school quality and/or student success?
- ☐ **8. Data Dashboards and Reporting:** Does the state plan to use (and encourage districts to use) a high-quality data dashboard or other matrix to report on an array of timely, actionable, relevant data - including for accountability and school improvement - that can be used by all stakeholders to inform the improvement of schools, strategies, and systems?
- ☐ **9. Deeper Diagnostic Review:** Does the state have a system and capacity for deeper diagnostic review of data to inform continuous improvement in all schools and districts, with a particular focus on low-performing schools, districts, and subgroups?
- ☐ **10. School Improvement Resources and Plans:** Does the state have plans for a system to improve all schools, and particularly low-performing schools, including state levers such as model needs assessments, technical assistance to districts, funding criteria, performance management systems for school improvement plans, and continuous improvement strategies? Does the plan advance evidence-based elements for improving schools such as teacher and leader effectiveness strategies, strategies addressing the effects of adversity on students, accelerated learning opportunities, and teaching aligned to the full array of college and career ready knowledge and skills?
- ☐ **11. Direct Student Services:** Will the state leverage up to 3% of Title I funds for “direct student services” in ways that will support students in becoming college and career ready, such as accelerated and personalized learning opportunities, rigorous career and technical education, and student academic and non-academic supports?

Supporting Excellent Educators

- ☐ **12. Teacher and Leader Preparation:** Has the state engaged educator and leader preparation programs and other partners and will it leverage Title II funds to align educator and leader preparation programs and/or certification and licensure with expectations that lead to deeper learning outcomes among all students?
- ☐ **13. Systems of Professional Development:** Is the state leveraging Title II funds to develop school-level learning systems that align to ESSA’s new definition of professional development? Do they particularly promote continuous improvement for teachers and leaders to improve their practice and further advance college and career ready student outcomes?
- ☐ **14. School Leadership:** Has the state expressly focused on improving the quality of school leaders in ways that promote deeper learning, and improving access to high-quality school leaders across districts, particularly for low-performing schools, such as through use of the 3% Title II set aside or other Title II activities?

Supporting All Students

- ☐ **15. Student Supports and Academic Enrichment:** Will the state target its Title IV Student Support and Academic Enrichment grants towards strategies that best advance college and career ready deeper learning and equity? For example, will the state use these funds to provide equitable access to a rigorous well-rounded education, student-centered learning experiences leading to mastery of deeper learning knowledge and skills, and student supports that meet their unique needs?

- ☐ **16. High-Quality Early Learning:** Has the state identified strategies throughout the ESSA plan and implementation to improve access to high-quality early learning as part of an integrated, equitable continuum of education towards college and career success? Does the state leverage strategies and resources to accomplish this such as professional development, support to programs, aligned standards, data sharing, school improvement, and a focus on transition?

Consultation, Continuous Improvement, and State-to-District Through-Line

- ☐ **17. Stakeholder Engagement:** Does the state have and maintain robust systems of stakeholder engagement in place (including ongoing “grassroots” engagement and structures for regular “grasstops” engagement embedded in state implementation) that inform state decisions and also foster public understanding of and support for college and career ready strategies and equity as part of ESSA?
- ☐ **18. State Continuous Improvement Processes Based on Evidence:** Has the state established clear systems, processes, and capacity for ongoing evaluation, review, and continuous improvement across all parts of its plan, based on data and evidence?
- ☐ **19. Local Plans:** Does the state have a state-to-local strategy that advances the dual goals of college and career ready outcomes and equity at the district level? For example, do the state’s plans for designing, reviewing, approving, and monitoring local educational agencies’ ESSA plans and providing differentiated technical assistance to LEAs create a clear through-line that advances deeper learning at the state and local level?
- ☐ **20. Innovation Zones and Waivers:** Has the state considered establishing innovation zones across ready districts that accelerate development of new models and systems advancing college and career readiness and equity such as improved assessment systems and additional accountability measures for deeper learning? Where needed and educationally sound, does the state have a strategy to use ESSA waiver authority to implement educational strategies that go above and beyond the statute in advancing college and career readiness and equity?

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