



**Social and Emotional Learning and
Development, Conditions for Learning, and
Whole Child Supports in ESSA State Plans**

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and Whole Child Supports in ESSA State Plans

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INTRODUCTION

States' federally-approved plans for implementing the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) illustrate an emerging focus on social and emotional learning and development, strengthened conditions for student learning, and whole child supports in education systems¹. States are beginning to include language, measures, and supports around these areas of work in their ESSA state plans, many for the first time. This emerging shift is important because it signals a move away from focusing mainly on academic performance for purposes of accountability and supports for schools and districts. It reflects a broadened theory of action that social and emotional learning and development, learning conditions, and whole child supports are key to providing more equitable learning environments and improving outcomes for students, and are worth measuring. This is in line with increasing research on the science of learning and development that shows the importance of students' contexts and learning environments for their success in school and beyond.^{2 3}

This brief will examine key opportunities or "levers" that ESSA presents to states and their communities to specifically advance social and emotional learning and development, positive conditions for learning, and whole child supports. States include varying degrees of detail and take advantage of a variety of opportunities in their ESSA plans to advance these supports and learning environments. We recognize that states may have taken advantage of opportunities outside of ESSA to prioritize social and emotional learning and development, conditions of learning, and whole child supports. For purposes of this brief, we are solely focusing on the levers states have used under ESSA. The brief will then provide highlights from several federal ESSA state plans that illustrate how states are leading in specific areas.

1 States differ in terminology for social and emotional learning and development and in what is meant by "social and emotional." Some states use terms like "non-cognitive skills," "non-academic skills," "social and emotional learning," or "mindset." For purposes of this brief, we will use the term "social and emotional learning and development" to encompass skills and competencies such as those listed above. We will also use the term "conditions for learning" to refer to the environment in which teaching and learning takes place (e.g. physical learning space and school supplies; preparation and quality of teachers, leaders, and other staff; whether the environment is supportive, inclusive, collaborative, engaging, relevant to learners, and rigorous, etc.) Relatedly, many states use the term "whole child supports" to mean those that support both the academic and non-academic needs of students (e.g. nutrition, physical health and mental health supports, tutoring, mentoring, safe places to learn, etc.); and other states use the term "wrap-around supports." For the purposes of this brief, we will use the term "whole child supports" to mean all of these. There is some overlap between social and emotional learning and development, conditions for learning, and whole child supports, but each also encompasses a slightly different and important aspect of fostering student success.

2 Osher, D., Cantor, P., Berg, J., Steyer, L., & Rose, T. 2018. Drivers of human development: How relationships and context shape learning and development. *Applied Developmental Science*, 1-31. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/citedby/10.1080/10888691.2017.1398650?scroll=top&needAccess=true>.

3 Cantor, P., Osher, D., Berg, J., Steyer, L., & Rose, T. 2018. Malleability, plasticity, and individuality: How children learn and develop in context. *Applied Developmental Science*, 1-31. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10888691.2017.1398649>.

OPPORTUNITIES IN ESSA

ESSA presents several opportunities for state plans to incorporate social and emotional learning and development, positive conditions for learning, and whole child supports. While states must implement all provisions in the ESSA statute, the federal ESSA state plan template sets the topics and sections within the law to be addressed in writing, and generally states wrote in the most detail on the questions required by the template. This initial analysis focuses on what states wrote in their ESSA plans and the leverage points that exist within the ESSA plan template to advance social and emotional learning and development, positive conditions for learning, and whole child supports. The key opportunities in the ESSA plan template include:

- **Vision or theory of action:** Some states crafted a vision statement or theory of action that guides their state educational system and their ESSA plan components and strategies. The strongest theories of action around social and emotional learning and development, conditions for learning, and whole child supports are outlined in an introduction to the plan and then woven throughout key sections of the plan to drive strategies, actions, and resources.
- **Accountability indicators:** ESSA requires states to outline a statewide system of accountability and differentiation between schools that relies on multiple measures of student outcomes and opportunities, as well as school conditions and quality. Many states included measures *related* to social and emotional learning and development in these accountability systems. Some also included “opportunity to learn” measures⁴ (e.g., suspension rates, school climate, chronic absenteeism, extended-year graduation rates, and access to a college- and career-ready curriculum), which sometimes encompass whole child supports for learning. Some states attached stakes to the measures by including them in calculations that determine categories of schools for support (school ratings) and levels of support—typically after piloting these measures for some time before including them. Other states include the measures in their publicly reported data without attaching them to school identification.
- **School improvement:** ESSA requires states to identify low-performing schools and schools with student groups that are not meeting their potential, and then support and monitor school improvement strategies in those schools. Some states include social and emotional learning and development strategies, whole child supports, and improved school climate or learning conditions as key strategies within the school improvement and continuous improvement processes.
- **Title II educator development:** ESSA’s Title II, Part A requires states to develop plans to prepare and develop quality teachers and school leaders in order to receive formula funds; and some states incorporate into these strategies a focus on recruiting, preparing, and supporting teachers and leaders to foster social and emotional learning and development and supportive learning environments in their schools.
- **Title IV Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants and other Title IV programs:** ESSA provides states and districts with a flexible set of formula and competitive funds to help meet the safety, health, physical, and academic needs of students in schools (and during out-of-school programs). Many states plan to use Title IV funds to support strategies that improve

⁴ “Opportunity to learn” refers to a type of measure that provides information on the resources, student supports, school conditions, curriculum, and instructional and school leader quality to which students have access.

school climate, enhance whole child supports, and advance social and emotional learning and development in schools. States harness both Title IV, Part A formula funds (Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants) and other discretionary funds under Title IV such as 21st Century Community Learning Centers. States may be using other Title IV funds for these purposes as well, but generally did not discuss these in their federal ESSA plans.

VISION

States can include a vision or theory of action statement to provide framing for their ESSA state plans and the education strategies within it. States often choose to align this with their vision and theory of action for the statewide education system as a whole for maximum coherence and impact. A few states thread their vision and theory of action throughout the sections of their ESSA plans so that there is a clear, consistent rationale for the strategies and supports the state selects in each section.

For example, **Illinois'** state plan vision centers upon "whole, healthy children" a foundational aim. The state plan underscores the view of the Governor's Cabinet on Children and Youth, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), and other stakeholders that each child possesses multiple developmental domains (e.g., cognitive, social and emotional, physical, etc.) and resides in multiple environments (home, school, community, etc.). These developmental domains and environments are interconnected. The Illinois' ESSA state plan is "one part of coordinating and improving systems in Illinois" as part of its vision for "whole, healthy children" and "whole, healthy systems." In its vision, ISBE notes that the state and school districts cannot achieve these outcomes alone, but rather they see the school districts as a hub for the community to improve whole child outcomes. As such, focusing on the whole child requires the empowerment of districts working toward equitable outcomes for all students. This focus on the whole child is also present in Illinois' strategy around accountability measures and goals, as well as in uses of Title IV funds to support progress toward this vision (pp. 12-13 of ESSA plan).⁵

Rhode Island's ESSA plan references the state's strategic plan for public education, including its commitment to outcomes in the area of "Social and Emotional Learning and Wellness," and it describes the actions the state is taking to support these outcomes. Rhode Island's goals stipulate that the state's "graduates possess the social and emotional skills necessary to persevere through challenging circumstances, to work in partnership with others, and to develop a growth mindset." The state also set a goal to "Increase the percentage of students and families who describe their school and their educators as welcoming and culturally respectful." To accomplish this, the plan notes that the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) is developing standards for social and emotional learning (SEL) and has joined the [Collaborating States Initiative](#) of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) to support the development and implementation of these standards. RIDE also notes that it has established a large community of practice on SEL to share best practices and shape resources

5 Illinois State Board of Education. 2017. *Illinois consolidated state plan under the Every Student Succeeds Act*. Springfield, IL: Author.

to improve school climate and SEL. The plan states that RIDE has developed resources to help reduce the need for disciplinary action, data opportunities and mechanisms to track and report on school climate and out-of-school suspensions, supports for implementing multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS), and state policies and guidance to help create safe and supportive environments for students. Lastly, the plan notes that RIDE is continuously improving its new learning environment survey for students, parents, and educators to help improve school safety and school climate. Each of these actions ties to Rhode Island’s stated goals around social and emotional learning and wellness (pp. 63-64 of ESSA plan).⁶

ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES, DATA REPORTING, AND IDENTIFICATION OF SCHOOLS

ESSA opened the door for states to use measures of student and school opportunities, conditions, and outcomes beyond traditional academic measures to inform their categories and ratings for schools, paired with requirements to report data on these and other measures—disaggregated by student group. States can include statewide valid, reliable, and comparable measures of school quality and student success (SQSS) that look beyond English/Language Arts and mathematics performance and growth on assessments to inform school ratings and identification for school improvement. States can also report on other data without using it to determine ratings and school improvement. While researchers generally agree that direct measures of social and emotional learning and development are not appropriate for inclusion in state accountability systems⁷, states are instead including *related* measures that are considered more valid and reliable proxies, such as chronic absenteeism, discipline rates, school climate, and student access to supports and opportunities. States are also seeking other ways outside of accountability and data reporting, such as diagnostic needs assessments and other formative tools, to incorporate measures of social emotional learning and development, understanding that these measures are still very much in development.⁸ Therefore, this brief looks at a spectrum of ways that states are incorporating measures related to social and emotional learning and development, learning conditions, and whole child supports, often including pilot testing these new measures to facilitate possible future use.

School Climate

School climate surveys are one way that states, districts, and schools can understand the extent to which their schools are providing for physical safety and meeting the social and emotional learning and development needs of their students; whether the schools are culturally responsive to all students’ and educators’ contexts; and how students, families, and educators generally experience school. School climate and social, emotional, and academic development are deeply inter-

6 Rhode Island Department of Education. 2018. *Rhode Island’s Every Student Succeeds Act state plan*. Providence, RI: Author.

7 Holahan, C and Batey, B. 2019. [Measuring school climate and social and emotional learning and development: A navigation guide for states and districts](#). Washington, D.C.: Council of Chief State School Officers and EducationCounsel.

8 Holahan and Batey.

connected and mutually reinforcing. The conditions of a learning environment establish the setting and the context in which social and emotional learning and development can occur, and students and staff need to have social and emotional competencies to create positive social environments.⁹ In turn, this allows students to start taking academic risks, building trusting relationships, and becoming more self-aware.

A number of states are including surveys of school climate as an accountability metric that factors into school ratings and identification for improvement. These states include **Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Maryland, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, and South Carolina**. States will report data on these metrics for all students and each student group on state and district public report cards, per ESSA statute.

Illinois, for example, includes the 5Essentials Survey¹⁰ for grades 6-12 as a school climate survey indicator that accounts for 5% of the overall school score (p. 47 of ESSA plan).¹¹ The state is in the process of determining how this information can best be gathered from students in younger grades. The state plan notes that the 5Essentials Survey has been administered since 2013-14, creating a path to its inclusion in ESSA accountability, and it cites the Chicago Public Schools Quality Rating System as evidence that a culture and climate indicator can help meaningfully differentiate schools (pp. 55-56 of ESSA plan).¹²

Iowa is phasing in its use of the statewide Conditions for Learning Survey for accountability use. Over a 4-year span, the state will take steps to move the indicator from being administered in grades 5-12 for a 5% weight in the accountability system to being administered in grades 3-12 at a weight of 18% in elementary and middle school and 8% in high school. By Year 4, the indicator will be used to identify schools for targeted and comprehensive support and improvement. This phase-in approach is part of a longer glide path in Iowa to measure school climate, so the state can make continuous improvements along the way before taking the accountability metric statewide in every grade level. The Conditions for Learning Survey was designed as part of an index to measure conditions for learning in schools as part of a grant from the Office of Safe and Supportive Schools awarded in 2010 (Iowa's Safe and Supportive Schools or IS3 grant). The index measures three domains of conditions for learning: safety, engagement, and environment. Within this measure, Iowa will use the student survey portion of the index. According to the ESSA state plan, the survey is reliable and valid to be used with all students in grades 5 through 12, and has been part of the larger Iowa Youth Survey given to students bi-annually in grades 6, 8, and 11 (p. 50 of ESSA plan).¹³

⁹ Berg, J., Osher, D., Maroney, D., and Yoder, N. 2017. *Intersection of school climate and social and emotional development*. American Institutes for Research.

¹⁰ The 5Essentials framework was validated by the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago Urban Education Institute, in partnership with Chicago Public Schools. Research identifies Effective Leaders, Collaborative Teachers, Involved Families, Supportive Environment, and Ambitious Instruction as the factors that matter most for student learning. For more information see: <https://illinois.5-essentials.org/2017/>.

¹¹ Illinois State Board of Education.

¹² Illinois State Board of Education.

¹³ Iowa Department of Education. 2018. *Every Student Succeeds Act in Iowa*. Des Moines, IA: Author.

Nevada chose to take a glidepath approach to administering and increasing participation in its State Climate Survey by initially including a bonus of 2% in the accountability system for schools meeting or exceeding the statewide participation threshold, beginning with lower targets and then increasing the participation target to 75%. The Nevada Department of Education is collaborating with the American Institutes for Research (AIR) to design and administer the statewide School Climate/Social and Emotional Learning Survey that serves as the needs assessment for the social worker in school block grants. The survey is web-based for all students in grades 5-12 statewide (p. 82 of ESSA plan).¹⁴ Although most districts have opted to administer the State Climate Survey, there are some districts administering a district climate survey closely aligned to the State Climate Survey. Grade levels included in the administration of a climate survey vary by district. (p. 51 of ESSA plan).¹⁵ As Nevada has met its goal of increasing participation in the survey, it will no longer include the survey participation “bonus points” in the school rating system for the 2018-2019 school year. Moving forward, Nevada may continue to report survey participation rates, and will be associating school ratings with the school climate reports produced by AIR.

Other states are specifically highlighting school climate data on their report cards to improve transparency. For example, **Georgia** reports separately on school climate on the report card using a 1-to-5-star rating for each school. The rating is based on four components: 1) student, teacher, and parent perceptions of a school’s climate; 2) student discipline; 3) a safe- and substance-free learning environment; and 4) student attendance. All schools will report this information and Georgia will use it to support schools identified for improvement as well (pp. 30-31 of [ESSA plan](#)).¹⁶ **Rhode Island** takes a similar approach as Georgia by prominently featuring its statewide school culture and climate survey in the Report Card platform. Visitors to a school or district report card page first see three components: an overall Star Rating to summarize school performance, a brief narrative contributed by the school or LEA with their perspective on the school’s strengths or challenges, and an embedded SurveyWorks platform with results for students, educators, and families on a range of issues, including school safety, parent engagement, and student-teacher relationships. This school climate reporting mechanism supplements the proxy measures of school climate in Rhode Island’s system of school accountability, such as student and teacher chronic absence and suspension rates.

Of note, states are not generally including measures of school climate for early childhood education settings (e.g., pre-K-2), although some state education agencies (e.g., **District of Columbia**) do include classroom observation tools. Additionally, while the validity and reliability of school climate surveys for accountability purposes is growing, researchers generally agree that student self-report surveys of their own social and emotional learning and development are not appropriate for accountability purposes because of reference bias.¹⁷

14 Nevada Department of Education. 2017. *Nevada Department of Education consolidated state plan under the Every Student Succeeds Act*. Carson City, NV: Author.

15 Nevada Department of Education. 2017.

16 Georgia Department of Education. 2018. *Educating Georgia’s future: Georgia’s state plan for the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)*. Atlanta, GA: Author.

17 Hough, H., Kalogrides, D., & Loeb, S. 2017. *Using surveys of students’ social-emotional learning and school climate for accountability and continuous improvement*. Stanford, CA: Policy Analysis for California Education. Available at: http://edpolicyinca.org/sites/default/files/SEL-CC_report.pdf.

Chronic Absenteeism

Approximately two-thirds of all states are now including chronic absenteeism as a measure of school quality and student success within their accountability system, as an indicator that can help flag and address school climate, student engagement, conditions for learning, and needed whole child supports. Chronic absenteeism has been shown to negatively impact students' academic success. Research shows that attendance problems in the early years predict absenteeism in later grades, and students with the highest absenteeism typically scored lower on state assessments.¹⁸ Attendance in students' freshman year has proven to be a key indicator of whether students will finish high school.¹⁹ Research also suggests that an estimated 10-15% of students are chronically absent each year,²⁰ and that this has a greater academic impact on students from low-income families.²¹

This indicator is one that can be addressed successfully through whole school reforms and student and family supports,²² and there is significant evidence around these best practices and the use of the indicator.²³ Some states use chronic absenteeism on its own for diagnostic, accountability, and prevention purposes, and others use it as part of a fuller set of measures that comprise an early warning indicator system focused on attendance, behaviors, and course success. Although there is some variation in how states define chronic absenteeism, given the flexibility within ESSA for states to define accountability measures, the most common definition is missing 10% or more of school days in a year for any reason, including excused and unexcused absences. **Rhode Island** also looks at teacher chronic absence in addition to student chronic absence to determine a school's rating – establishing a clear tie to the learning environment. **Thirty-six states and the District of Columbia** are using this as an indicator to identify schools for support and improvement. One additional state, **Kansas**, is using rates of chronic absenteeism to inform efforts in schools already identified for support and improvement. The remaining 14 states are reporting rates of chronic absenteeism, as required by ESSA.

Although the measure has a strong evidence base and states are moving toward having common definitions across schools and districts, there are opportunities for states to continuously improve this measure to help districts and schools uniformly measure absences through standardized

18 Hart Buehler, M., and Topanga, J., and Chang, H., [Why Being in School Matters: Chronic Absenteeism in Oregon Public Schools](#), Attendance Works, June 2012.

19 Allensworth, E. M., & Easton, J. Q. 2007. [What matters for staying on-track and graduating in Chicago public high schools: A close look at course grades, failures, and attendance in the freshman year](#). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, Consortium on Chicago School Research.

20 Balfanz, R., & Byrnes, V. 2012. [The importance of being in school: A report on absenteeism in the nation's public schools](#). Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Center for Social Organization of Schools.

21 Ready, Douglas D. 2010. [Socioeconomic disadvantage, school attendance, and early cognitive development: The differential effects of school exposure](#). *Sociology of Education*, 83(4), 271-286.

22 Balfanz, R., Herzog, L., & Maclver, D.J. 2007. [Preventing student disengagement and keeping students on the graduation path in urban middle-grades schools: Early identification and effective interventions](#), *Educational Psychologist*, 42(4), 223–235.

23 For more information on the research around best practices and the use of the indicator see <https://www.attendanceworks.org/research/>.

policies, and to then use this data for cycles of school improvement and evidence-building. For example, a set of districts in **Ohio** are working with Proving Ground at Harvard University and the Ohio Department of Education in a research partnership to test in rapid-cycle whether their specific interventions, such as school climate and supports for social and emotional learning and development, are effective at improving chronic absence (p. 53 of [ESSA plan](#)).²⁴

School Discipline—Suspension Rate

Under ESSA, all states are required to collect and report on their report cards data from the [Civil Rights Data Collection](#) (CRDC) on in- and out-of-school suspensions, however a number of states are now also using this CRDC data to inform school ratings and identification for school improvement, with a particular focus on the disproportionality of discipline for students of color and students with disabilities. According to data from the CRDC (2013-14), students with disabilities and students of color are generally suspended and expelled at higher rates than their peers.²⁵ States' focus on suspension rates and disproportionality is particularly important given that suspensions can not only impact a student's social and emotional development at school and sense of a positive learning environment, but they also cause students to be absent from class, thereby causing direct negative academic impacts.

California and **Rhode Island** explicitly include a suspension rate measure as an indicator in their accountability system, and **Louisiana** uses this measure to help determine which schools can exit school improvement status. These states are also making the connection between out-of-school suspensions and chronic absence, given the research on the harmful effects of missing school, including due to suspension. **Tennessee** includes out-of-school suspensions in their definition of chronic absence for accountability purposes in an effort to capture the academic impacts of suspensions (p. 78 of [ESSA plan](#)).²⁶ **California** has developed a [data tool](#) to help districts, schools, and stakeholders better understand chronic absence patterns in their school or district, including a clear data link to the impact of suspensions on chronic absence.²⁷ States have an opportunity to expand their examination of discipline data on younger children, as these data become more widely collected and available on students in their early years.

Other Indicators

States have an opportunity to continuously improve existing indicators as well as test and possibly phase in other new indicators over time under ESSA. Some states include or are planning to pilot other indicators that relate to social and emotional learning and development,

24 Ohio Department of Education. 2018. *Consolidated state plan: The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act*. Columbus, OH: Author.

25 U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights. 2016. *Securing equal educational opportunity, Report to the President and Secretary of Education*. Washington, D.C.: Author. Available at: <https://www2.ed.gov/about/reports/annual/ocr/report-to-president-and-secretary-of-education-2016.pdf>.

26 Tennessee Department of Education. 2018. *Every Student Succeeds Act: Building on success in Tennessee*. Nashville, TN: Author.

27 Attendance Works. 2018. *Powerful data tools for California!*. Available at: <https://www.attendanceworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/CalDATTSATTfinal-1.pdf>

conditions for learning, and whole child supports, including piloting some indicators that stakeholders suggested during the ESSA plan development process. Some of these other developments in indicators include:

- **New Mexico** is looking into options for its Opportunity to Learn survey that is paired with a measure of attendance in its school quality and student success indicator. The state hopes to better capture learning climate, academic achievement, engagement, and self-efficacy (p. 74 of [ESSA plan](#)).²⁸
- **Connecticut** and **Vermont** both include an indicator of physical fitness in their accountability systems to ensure that school is meeting the needs of the whole child including health. Vermont’s ESSA plan explains that stakeholders “value the idea of including an assessment of fitness because they believe it will provide incentives to maintain required time for activity, physical education, and health education as required by the Education Quality Standards. They also felt that including the physical fitness assessment would support schools in attending to the whole child and supporting school nutrition programs and instruction that will promote a life time of healthy living” (p. 51 of [ESSA plan](#)).²⁹

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT SUPPORTS AND EXPECTATIONS

In addition to using metrics related to social and emotional learning and development in accountability systems, several states indicate that they will address social and emotional learning and development, conditions for learning, and whole child supports in their school improvement strategies or their statewide systems of supports for all schools. These strategies are typically informed by data and metrics from their accountability and reporting systems. For example, **Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Kansas, Minnesota,** and **Washington** indicate in their ESSA plans that schools identified for improvement will review discipline data and use it to inform their improvement plans. Many of these states also require schools to address suspension rates in their improvement plans. Several states, including **Alabama, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Georgia, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Tennessee,** and **Vermont,** have also included measures related to school climate in the diagnostic/needs assessment process for schools identified for improvement. ESSA requires needs assessments in the school improvement process (see [Building the State to Local Architecture for School Improvement –11 Key Levers to Support Leaders in Implementing a Robust System Under ESSA](#)), but states have significant authority to shape what the needs assessment includes.

Arizona, Arkansas, Hawaii, Massachusetts, Michigan, and **Missouri** include in their ESSA plan that they will provide evidence-based technical assistance to schools identified for improvement related to improving school climate. For example, as part of **Hawaii’s** more rigorous interventions for schools that do not exit improvement status, the state will focus

28 New Mexico Public Education Department. 2018. *New Mexico rising: New Mexico’s state plan for the Every Student Succeeds Act*. Santa Fe, NM: Author.

29 Vermont Agency of Education. 2017. *Consolidated state plan: The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act*. Barre, VT: Author.

additional interventions across six key areas which include “wrap-around supports such as health care, eye care, and social and emotional services that support academics” and “positive discipline practices, such as restorative justice and social and emotional learning and supports” (p. 63 of [ESSA plan](#)).³⁰ However most states that discuss “evidence-based” approaches or technical assistance related to social and emotional learning and development, such as the implementation of a positive behavioral information system (PBIS) or a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) do not provide detail in their ESSA plans around how these strategies will be implemented.

New York identifies the choice of becoming a “Community School” as a more rigorous intervention for their persistently low performing schools. New York State Education Department has allocated over \$75 million to support districts launching community schools. A community school is both a place and a set of partnerships between the school and other community resources. The design integrates academics, health and social services, youth and community development, and community engagement to support students and their families toward positive outcomes.

Connecticut has created the Alliance District Program—a unique and targeted investment in the state’s lowest-performing districts. The state education agency and state legislature established a process for identifying Alliance Districts and allocating increased funding to support district strategies implement school reforms. State statute defines areas for spending on reforms that include options addressing whole child supports, such as coordination with governmental and community programs for student support and wrap around services, coordination with early childhood education providers, and tiered systems of interventions.

Some states include a broader approach that helps all schools statewide continuously improve around school climate and positive conditions for learning. **Alaska** developed a new statewide discipline data collection system that is intended to improve district ability to unpack the data, better understand students’ underlying needs, and also determine if disproportionality in discipline is occurring, for the purpose of improving schools (p. 61 of [ESSA plan](#)).³¹

California will require each LEA in its LCAP Addendum (local ESSA plan) to describe, among other things, how it will improve school conditions for learning and specifically how it will support efforts to reduce the overuse of discipline practices that remove students from the classroom. The state will also provide guidance to LEAs in how to support positive school conditions for learning and reduce the overuse of discipline practices that remove students from the classroom (p. 84 of [ESSA plan](#)).³²

30 Hawaii Department of Education. 2018. *Hawaii consolidated state plan*. Honolulu, HI: Author.

31 Alaska Department of Education and Early Development. 2018. *Consolidated state plan: The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act*. Juneau, AK: Author.

32 California State Board of Education and California Department of Education. 2017. *California ESSA Consolidated State Plan*. Sacramento, CA: Author.

USE OF TITLE II FUNDS

ESSA continues to offer the Title II, Part A formula program to states to improve the preparation, recruitment, and development of teachers, principals, and other school leaders.³³ This presents an opportunity for states and districts to use these funds to develop teachers' and leaders' ability to advance social and emotional learning and development, positive conditions for learning, and provide whole child supports in their schools. While state ESSA plans vary in their level of detail around plans for uses of funds, several states include a specific mention of supporting educators in advancing social and emotional learning and development in some way. For example, **California** and **New York** plan to use Title II funds to support cultural competency among educators (p. 107 of [California ESSA plan](#),³⁴ pp. 145-175 of [New York ESSA plan](#)³⁵). **Illinois** is committed to supporting educators in developing their "professional capital," which is defined as the "knowledge, skills, and understandings that an educator uses to meet the needs of the whole child in the context of a professional community...including human development, instructional design and delivery, universal design, differentiated instruction, balanced assessment practices, and data and assessment literacy. In addition to these areas, educators must be sensitive to the experiences that each and every child brings into the school and classroom(s) and the appropriate supports that may assist the child as they develop" (p. 15 of ESSA plan).³⁶ **Massachusetts** has encouraged schools and districts to consider using Title II, Part A funds to holistically address students' social, emotional and academic learning needs (pp. 88-89 of ESSA plan).³⁷

Districts

The most recent U.S. Department of Education survey results for districts' use of Title II, Part A funds indicates that districts "spent 11 percent of their funds for professional development for teachers on other non-academic topics. These topics included positive behavioral interventions and supports, teaching strategies, classroom management, and using data to improve instruction" (p. 8 of [Findings from the 2015-2016 Survey on the Use of Funds Under Title II, Part A Subgrants to LEAs](#)).³⁸

33 For further information on potential uses of Title II funds, see the U.S. Department of Education's Non-Regulatory Guidance on Title II, Part A: <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/essatitleiipartaguidance.pdf>

34 New York State Department of Education. 2018. *Consolidated state plan for The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act*. Albany, NY: Author.

35 California Department of Education. 2018. *California ESSA consolidated state plan*. Sacramento, CA: Author.

36 Illinois State Board of Education.

37 Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

38 U.S. Department of Education. 2016. *Findings from the 2015-2016 survey on the use of funds under Title II, Part A subgrants to LEAs*. Washington, D.C.: Author.

USE OF TITLE IV FUNDS

ESSA created Student Support and Academic Enrichment (SSAE) Grants—a formula grant program that combines several previous NCLB line item uses of funds and makes them allowable under Title IV, Part A and adds broader flexibility. In FY2018, funding for this grant program was at \$1.1 billion, and Congress has authorized potential funding for the program up to \$1.6 billion under ESSA. Many states indicate that they will use the state share of these formula funds (up to 5% of the state’s total allocation) to support activities related to social and emotional learning and development, conditions for learning, and other whole child supports. Additionally, a large percentage of districts indicate that they will use Title IV, Part A funds for similar uses, according to a May 2018 national survey on Title IV, Part A uses of funds conducted by the School Superintendents Association (AASA), the National Association of Federal Program Administrators (NAFPA), and Whiteboard Advisors.³⁹

States also have an opportunity to leverage their Title IV, Part B 21st Century Community Learning Centers grants (out-of-school time and extended school day programming) to support social and emotional learning and development and whole child supports. Some might argue that providing those programs is, on its own, an example of a whole child support that every state will leverage. A few states spoke explicitly to social and emotional learning and development in their ESSA plan descriptions of how they will use these grants; most states, however, wrote much broader and briefer descriptions about how they will use and subgrant these funds. Additionally, other Title IV grant programs such as Full Service Community Schools, charter and magnet school programs, and [Promise Neighborhoods](#) all may lend themselves to eligible entities addressing the social and emotional learning and development of students, conditions for learning, and whole child supports. However, states were not required to write about these programs in their federal ESSA state plans, and states addressed them to varying degrees—often not at all. Therefore, this analysis looks mainly at states’ plans for Title IV, Part A formula funds.

Nevada, for example, has created several structures that it will use Title IV, Part A state funds to support, and that districts can use their Title IV local funds, braided with other funds, to implement. These include the state’s work on:

- A statewide school climate survey with the American Institutes for Research;
- A statewide Safe and Respectful Learning Environment Initiative that provides tiered support to schools and districts, helps teach coping skills to students and families, and provides social work and other positions to schools and districts; and
- A Social Workers in Schools Initiative that supports districts and charter schools to contract with social workers and other mental health workers to support “social emotional learning, a caring school climate, and intervention and treatment services to students and families who are struggling with food and shelter insecurity, behavioral health concerns, or overcoming trauma” (p. 86 of ESSA plan).⁴⁰

³⁹ Ng, N. E., & DeSchryver, D. 2018. *Bringing ESSA Title IVA to life: How school districts are investing Student Support and Academic Enrichment funding, memo on preliminary findings.* (n.p.): AASA, NAFPA, & WhiteBoard Advisors.

⁴⁰ Nevada Department of Education. 2017.

The **Massachusetts** Department of Elementary and Secondary Education plans to use Title IV, Part A state-level funds for staff time devoted to supporting “supplemental efforts around social and emotional learning, health, and safety,” building upon ongoing efforts. For example, Title IV funds will help support Massachusetts’ work as part of the CASEL Collaborating States Initiative to create conditions that will support statewide implementation of social and emotional learning in pre-K through high school. This includes:

- Developing and implementing policies, guidance, and technical assistance addressing positive school climate, bullying prevention and intervention, and substance use, prevention, and recovery (including paired with credit recovery supports);
- Implementing the “Rethinking Discipline Initiative” by engaging approximately three dozen schools and districts in a professional learning network to reduce the inappropriate or excessive use of long-term suspensions and expulsions, including disproportional rates of suspensions and expulsions for students with disabilities and/or of students of color. The network will also share their lessons-learned to help other districts;
- Supporting the “Urban Leaders Network for School Climate and Student Support” in urban and “Gateway” cities, where a group of district leaders has developed and is currently piloting a series of metrics to assess the “conditions for learning” that allow for academic success (i.e., school climate, student support, social and emotional learning, academic engagement, and family and community engagement);
- Rolling out a “Systems for Student Success Initiative” through which a subset of the lowest performing districts is developing plans to systematically address students’ barriers to learning. Through this process, participating districts are receiving grant funding, targeted assistance, and networking opportunities to innovate the systems and strategies they use to meet students’ holistic needs; and
- Supporting and encouraging LEAs to consider how they are ensuring a safe and supportive learning environment for all students when performing their required Title IV, Part A needs assessment, as well as in developing their action plans for utilizing their Title IV, Part A and other allocations under ESSA (pp. 88-89 of ESSA plan).⁴¹

Illinois plans to use its Title IV, Part A (SSAE), Part B (21st Century Community Learning Centers), and Part F funds (Promise Neighborhoods and Full-Service Community School Programs) to coordinate state-level strategies to reduce exclusionary discipline, implement evidence-based behavioral health awareness training programs, expand access for school-based counseling and behavioral health programs, and improve outcomes of children living in the most distressed communities (p. 106 of ESSA plan).⁴²

⁴¹ Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. 2017. *Massachusetts consolidated state plan under the Every Student Succeeds Act*. Malden, MA: Author.

⁴² Illinois State Board of Education.

Districts

According to the district survey conducted by AASA, NAFPA, and WhiteBoard Advisors in May 2018,⁴³ districts will spend Title IV, Part A funds on supports related to social and emotional learning and development, conditions for learning, and whole child supports in the following broad categories:

- Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (61% of responding districts)
- Safe and Supportive Learning Environments (54% of responding districts)
- Well-Rounded Education Focused on “Social and Emotional Learning” (53% of responding districts)
- Violence Prevention, Crisis Management, Conflict Resolution (45% of responding districts)
- Trauma-Informed Classroom Management (37% of responding districts)
- School Based Health and Mental Health Services (45% of responding districts)

CROSS-AGENCY SUPPORTS

A significant proportion of states articulate in their ESSA plans support for advancing the whole child approach, meaning a cross-divisional focus on supporting students’ academic and non-academic needs, positive conditions for learning, and social and emotional learning and development. For example, **Georgia** is focused on engaging in cross-divisional work in support of the whole child and developing a common framework for supporting schools through the consolidated LEA improvement plan (CLIP), including sections on a Coherent Instructional System, Professional Capacity, Supportive Learning Environment, Effective Leadership, and Family and Community Engagement. There is strong alignment across Georgia’s ESSA plan including in Title I, Title II, and Title IV fund uses of funds for a whole child approach. The plan addresses school conditions, staffing structures to support whole child, the use of positive behavioral interventions and supports, and bullying as part of school improvement. These factors aggregate to form a dedicated focus on whole child supports and conditions for learning across uses of ESSA funds, with an emphasis on social and emotional learning and development.⁴⁴

43 Ng, N. E., & DeSchryver, D. 2018. *Bringing ESSA Title IV to life: How school districts are investing Student Support and Academic Enrichment funding, memo on preliminary findings.* (n.p.): AASA, NAFPA, & WhiteBoard Advisors.

44 Georgia Department of Education. 2018. *Educating Georgia’s Future: Georgia’s state plan for the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).* Atlanta, GA: Author.

CONCLUSION

ESSA provides numerous leverage points to elevate the importance of social and emotional learning and development, student learning conditions, and whole child supports, which states are using in their plans to improve education systems and schools. This signals states' recognition that students' learning environments, mental health, wellness and nutrition, and sense of safety and belonging in school impact academic outcomes and long-term success, which is undergirded by continuously emerging research on the science of learning and development.^{45,46} It also represents a broader view of what statewide education data and accountability systems measure and value. Measuring social and emotional learning and development, learning conditions, and whole child supports is an evolving field and a complex area of measurement that currently involves many proxy measures. However, states have found ways to use these proxies such as school climate, chronic absenteeism, and out-of-school suspension in a way that will potentially redefine what it means to be a high-quality school or a school in need of support to encompass the more holistic educational experience at that school. The 2017-18 school year is the first time most states will have results and data that indicate how these new metrics may play out in state accountability and reporting systems, and it will be important to continue to analyze and use these and other data to make continuous improvements. Perhaps more importantly, states are also looking at which school and student supports and areas for professional development can also improve students' social and emotional development, conditions for learning, and other supports that help them succeed. As research continues to grow in these areas, it will be important to make this research accessible to schools, districts, and states so they can continuously improve upon the structures and supports in place in schools for students. In this way, states, districts, and schools can make the most of this opportunity to reflect on and advance the full array of competencies, conditions for learning, and supports that can help each student succeed.

45 Osher et al.

46 Cantor et al.



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