

Navigating the Every Student Succeeds Act

Policy Options to Close the Early Learning Opportunity Gap

Introduction

Research has demonstrated that students from low-income families enter kindergarten significantly trailing their peers from higher-income families. These gaps in reading and math skills, among other cognitive and social and emotional skills, can be partially attributed to the opportunity gap and affect education systems, the workforce and state economies.

In Washington state, policymakers, community leaders, parents, students and other community stakeholders are addressing the opportunity gap by reframing the discussion. They defined the opportunity gap as the differences in students’ access to highly effective educators, exemplary curriculum and materials, and appropriate academic and social support. These opportunities, resources and supports can be thought of as educational inputs. Achievement gaps, on the other hand, were defined as the differences in test scores between racial, ethnic and socio-economic student groups. These gaps can be thought of as educational outputs, resulting from the educational inputs received.

Several factors can contribute to the opportunity gap, including, but not limited to:

- Adverse childhood experiences and toxic stress.
- Concentrated poverty within schools and neighborhoods.
- Environmental and community stressors (e.g., violence, noise pollution).
- Food insecurity.
- Homelessness.
- School climate, culture and discipline policies.
- Health factors.
- Barriers for non-native English-speaking students and special education students.
- A lack of out-of-school opportunities and adequate transportation.

While opportunity gaps are difficult to address and close, state policymakers around the country have been actively engaged in working toward solving this complex and pervasive problem. Washington state is just one example of success. However, among the many local, isolated successes, some lawmakers believe there is an urgent need for a more systematic and comprehensive approach.

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A “Guide to the Guide”

This policy guide is intended to support state legislators interested in addressing and closing early learning opportunity gaps by focusing on the educational inputs in early learning systems (pre-K through third grade, P-3). The guide specifically addresses programs under the [Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\)](#), is organized by title and features three key areas:

- **Nuts and Bolts:** Outlines the purpose of each ESSA title program and how funding within each can be used to address the opportunity gap in states.
- **States to Watch:** Provides examples of the types of relevant legislation that states have enacted and the [innovative early learning elements of state plans](#).
- **Guiding Questions:** Connects the information provided to actionable steps for starting the conversation in your state.

For brevity and because less funding is appropriated to Titles V, VI, VII and IX of ESSA, coverage of these title programs is less comprehensive. The new [Preschool Development Grants Birth through Age Five Competitive Grant Program](#) is highlighted in Title IX as it provides a means for states to improve their early learning systems.

ESSA and Early Learning

The ESSA was signed into law on Dec. 10, 2015, with bipartisan support. ESSA reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the federal education law creating unprecedented state authority. ESSA was termed the “[largest devolution of federal control to the states in a quarter century](#),” according to the Wall Street Journal. It granted significant autonomy and power to states and local leaders to meet the needs of their communities. Additionally, ESSA “took unprecedented steps ... to make it clear that states and locals, not the federal government, are responsible for K-12 education.”

The law protects disadvantaged and high-needs students by requiring that they be taught to high academic standards and that annual statewide assessments measure student progress toward those standards. Under ESSA, states are provided a framework within which education plans for their schools must be developed ([ESSA State Plans](#)). Locally, leaders and educators are required to implement evidence-based and place-based interventions to address their districts’ and students’ needs. ESSA grants new flexibility for local leaders to determine their evidence-based approach.

For the first time, [Congress embedded and elevated early learning throughout the law](#) by focusing on increasing access to high-quality pre-K, promoting enhanced service coordination, encouraging more effective alignment between pre-K and the K-12 system, and improving the professional development and knowledge of P-3 teachers. Increasing access to high-quality pre-K can lead to [increased rates of high school graduation](#), [fewer incarcerations](#) and [better physical and mental health outcomes](#). Additionally, a focus on developing high-quality P-3 classroom environments and educators can lead to [strong returns on investment](#) and [sustained learning gains](#).

State legislators are well-positioned to improve educational outcomes for the youngest students in their states. By better understanding the policy options for P-3 education under ESSA, a systematic and comprehensive approach to addressing and closing early learning opportunity gaps can be implemented.

Title I

Improving Basic Programs Operated by Local Educational Agencies

Nuts and Bolts

Title I, Part A, is designed to upgrade educational programming in districts and schools where high percentages of students come from low-income families. There are [several policy options](#) within Title I, Part A, to improve early learning outcomes, including school improvement funding. Here are just a few:

■ **Coordination.** Effective alignment, collaboration and coordination between participating entities can lead to improved outcomes for kids. ESSA requires that state education agencies (SEAs) coordinate with local education agencies (LEAs) that provide services to young children. Further, LEAs receiving Title I funds are required to develop agreements and carry out coordination activities with Head Start and, if feasible, other early childhood programs, including:

- Developing and implementing a systematic procedure for receiving records of pre-K-aged children.
- Establishing channels of communication between K-12 school staff and their pre-K counterparts to facilitate coordination.
- Conducting meetings involving parents, kindergarten or elementary school teachers where pre-K and Head Start teachers discuss the developmental and other behavioral or health needs of children.

■ **Accountability.** ESSA is designed to promote greater transparency about educational opportunities and accountability. SEAs and LEAs are required to include the number and percentage of students enrolled in pre-K programs. States also must provide assurances within their state plans that they have and will continue to address the [unmet educational needs of pre-K English learners](#).

■ **Access.** Title I-eligible schools can use all or a portion of Title I funds to operate a pre-K program for eligible children. It is important to note that pre-K-aged students who are experiencing homelessness are automatically eligible to participate in Title I pre-K programs. They do not need to be identified as most at risk of failing to meet academic standards.

■ **Parent Engagement.** Under ESSA, if a district receives more than \$500,000 in Title I, Part A, funds, it must reserve 1% to assist schools in carrying out [parental engagement activities](#), including parents of pre-K students. This includes jointly developing school-parent compacts that outline how parents, educators and students will share the responsibility for improved academic achievement and the means to do so.

■ **Standards.** A school or district that provides pre-K services must follow state pre-K program requirements in addition to the [Head Start Program Performance Standards](#).

■ **Additional Uses.** There are [numerous other uses for Title I funds](#) as they relate to P-3 education:

- Classroom-based instructional programs.
- Salaries and benefits for teachers and other staff.
- After-school programs in Head Start or community-based programs.
- Support services, such as nutrition, vision, dental and counseling services.
- Buying equipment for community-based providers.

- Creating full-day kindergarten slots
- Supporting family engagement activities with community providers

Title I, Part C, allows funding to be used to support high-quality education programs for migratory children under the [Migrant Education Program](#). The program seeks to minimize the disparities between state curricula, graduation requirements and other standards so that students receive the most equitable education possible with minimal disruptions. Additionally, the program serves the purpose of reducing disruptions in education, eliminating social and communication barriers, and ensuring that migrant students receive the supportive services their unique situation requires.

States to Watch

STATE LEGISLATION

- [Colorado Senate Bill 103](#) (2017). This bill creates a school improvement strategy focused on the P-3 grades. Specifically, it requires the SEA to provide technical assistance to schools identified for improvement or turnaround plans using a needs assessment identifying the extent to which:
 - Quality pre-K programs are available for students who reside in the school neighborhood and children are enrolled in such programs.
 - Collaboration and transition plans are in place between pre-K providers and the school (and district) regarding transitions.
 - K-3 teachers have early learning teaching credentials.
 - Professional development opportunities are available.
 - Parental engagement plans and opportunities for engagement in the P-3 grades exist.
 - Other resources such as home visiting and early intervention services are available.
- [Illinois House Joint Resolution 24](#) (2017). This resolution established an advisory committee to review kindergarten transitions. It consists of a diverse group of stakeholders and practitioners, including those from state agencies, early childhood advocacy organizations, education-related professional associations and members of the General Assembly. The committee [recently released recommendations](#) to the governor, state Board of Education and General Assembly.

STATE ESSA PLANS

- [Minnesota](#) will partner with the Tri-Valley Opportunity Council to help identify migrant children and provide services to pre-K students.
- [New York](#) will consider pre-K and kindergarten access as quality indicators in its school quality ratings.
- [Oklahoma](#) will collect longitudinal data to document the effects of its universal pre-K program on all student groups, and include K-3 literacy outcomes as a component of school ratings and report cards.
- [Rhode Island](#) proposed a “chronic absenteeism indicator” that will document the percentage of students and teachers absent, including pre-K along with K-12 grades.

Guiding Questions

State legislators can consider the following questions to investigate regarding their state ESSA plan for improving pre-K through third grade (P-3) education:

- **Access:** Is access to pre-K and kindergarten included in state and district reporting? Is access connected to program quality levels (e.g., length of day)?
- **Coordination:** What memorandums of understanding (MOUs) exist between districts and pre-K providers? Do these MOUs facilitate systemic coordination?

- **Funding:** How state education agencies are tracking Title I funding across several areas may create questions for the expenditures of those funds. Questions could include:
 - How much Title I funding is provided to children from birth through age 5?
 - How many students are supported?
 - What types of services are provided and how are partnerships developed?
 - **Parent and Family Engagement:** Who is holding districts accountable to have a systematic procedure in place for schools to engage with parents and families?
 - **Quality:** How is quality measured and improved upon over time? How well is your state's [Quality Rating and Improvement System \(QRIS\)](#) improving quality scores over time? What mechanisms are in place to address centers and schools with low QRIS scores?
 - **Support services:** Are additional services such as after-school programs, counseling, dental, nutrition and vision addressed and provided for P-3 students?
 - **Transitions:** What information is shared between pre-K and kindergarten classrooms regarding curriculum, children's development, level of classroom quality and more? How well is the transition plan defined, if at all?
-

Title II

Preparing, Training and Recruiting High-Quality Teachers, Principals and Other School Leaders

Nuts and Bolts

Title II, Part A, authorizes funding for improving the quality and effectiveness of teachers, principals and other school leaders. The goal is to increase the quantity of educators who are effective in improving student academic achievement and provide low-income and minority students greater access to effective educators. Allowable uses of funds include:

- Professional development (PD) for pre-K educators, including providers in non-school settings.
- Joint PD and planning efforts to address the transition to elementary school, including issues related to school readiness.
- PD targeted and tailored to P-3 teachers that matches their unique responsibilities and students' needs (includes training in assessment, monitoring progress and identifying gifted and talented students).
- [Trauma-informed capacity building](#) and training for teachers, principals and other professionals to address the needs of children who have experienced significant trauma.
- Development or revision of comprehensive literacy instruction for students most in need, under the competitive [Literacy Education for All, Results for the Nation \(LEARN\) Grant Program](#) under Title II, Part B, Subpart 2. A literacy needs assessment is required and can be used for state and local programs and activities for children from birth to kindergarten entry (15% of grant) and K-5 (40% of grant).

States to Watch

STATE LEGISLATION

- [Connecticut House Bill 5335](#) (2018). Requires the State Department of Education to develop a state-wide reading plan for K-3 students. It must contain strategies and frameworks that are research-driven to produce effective reading instruction and improvement in student performance and be aligned with the state's two-generation initiative (i.e., providing overlapping [services to children and their parents](#)).
- [New Mexico House Bill 275](#) (2019). Designates certain endorsements, such as early childhood education, as high-need teacher positions that qualify for loan reimbursement up to \$4,000 annually.
- [Tennessee House Bill 402](#) (2019, carryover to 2020). Requires each local board of education to adopt a policy requiring all K-12 teachers, principals and assistant principals to participate in adverse childhood experiences training on an annual basis, before the first day of instruction.

STATE ESSA PLANS

- [Michigan](#) proposed a professional development system for birth to third-grade educators and is encouraging districts to include community-based pre-K providers in joint professional learning opportunities.
- [Oregon](#) is targeting PD efforts at P-3 educators, providing informal assessments of practice to guide instruction and fostering stronger alignment between community-based pre-K providers and elementary schools.

Guiding Questions

- Are P-3 teachers receiving PD that is specific to and aligned with [developmentally appropriate practice](#) for instruction? Does your state have [standards for professional development](#)?
- Is joint PD provided between pre-K and K-3 teachers? Between teachers in schools, private providers and community-based pre-K programs? Is there a focus on transitions between pre-K and kindergarten?
- What about PD for principals and center directors?
- Does PD include developmentally appropriate instructional strategies such as a focus on [social emotional learning](#) and whole child approaches? What about inclusion of trauma-informed instructional methods?
- Has your state applied for a LEARN grant?

Title III

Language Instruction for English Learners and Immigrant Students

Nuts and Bolts

Title III is designed to provide supplemental services that improve the English language proficiency and academic achievement of English Learners (ELs). Under ESSA, states are required to [more fully include English learners](#) (ELs) in school-level accountability systems under Title I instead of the separate district level accountability systems in Title III of the previous No Child Left Behind Act. This move provides more of a spotlight on EL student performance, although advocates [have their concerns](#). The federal [National Professional Development Program](#) provides grants to implement PD activities intended to improve instruction for ELs. Title III supports ELs in a variety of ways:

- Requires states to report disaggregated data on:
 - [ELs with disabilities](#).
 - The [academic achievement of former ELs](#) (those who have achieved English language proficiency).
 - The number of ELs who have been receiving English language acquisition services for five or more years (i.e., a [long-term English learner, LTEL](#)) and have not yet attained English language proficiency.
- Establishes subgrants that can be used to:
 - Strengthen or develop pre-K and elementary school programs to improve outcomes and school readiness for young ELs, often referred to as [dual language learners](#).
 - Provide teacher PD, including [culturally and linguistically responsive instruction](#).
 - Promote parent and family engagement activities.
 - Address [substantial increases](#) in immigrant children populations by recruiting professionals trained to provide services to immigrant youth, family literacy programs and comprehensive community services.

States to Watch

STATE LEGISLATION

- [California Assembly Bill 81](#) (2017). Requires the notice of assessment of a child's English proficiency to include additional information, including whether a child is, or is at risk of becoming, an LTEL and how the English language development program will meet the educational needs of LTELs or those at risk.
- [Idaho Senate Bill 1352](#) (2018). Appropriates funding to evaluate programs for students who are limited- or non-proficient English speakers and requires the results to be reported to the Joint Finance-Appropriations Committee and House and Senate Education Committees.
- [Massachusetts House Bill 4032](#) (2017). Creates the Language Opportunity for Our Kids (LOOK) Act and a special commission dedicated to evaluating EL programming and its effectiveness. The LOOK Act also requires review and reporting of EL outcomes, improvements to data collection and dissemination, and underperforming schools serving ELs to establish EL Parent Advisory Councils.

STATE ESSA PLANS

- [Texas](#) has included annual training for districts to ensure that EL reclassification procedures (returning ELs to mainstream English classrooms from language support classrooms after they have achieved proficiency in English) are conducted with fidelity and in accordance with state regulations.
- [Wisconsin](#) provided an EL Policy Handbook for practitioners created by EL experts and educators as part of its state ESSA plan.

Guiding Questions

- What is your state’s English learner population in the P-3 grades? Has it changed significantly in recent years?
- Does your state’s ESSA state plan specifically address the school readiness of ELs entering kindergarten? How is EL outcome data reported?
- Are P-3 educators equipped with effective instructional techniques and support for teaching ELs? What activities and programs are proposed within Title III grantees’ submissions to the state education agency?
- Has your state applied for a grant from the National Professional Development Project? If so, how does your state intend to use the grant funds?

Title IV

21st Century Schools, Student Support and Academic Enrichment, Community Learning Centers and more

Nuts and Bolts

Title IV focuses on supporting safe and healthy students and allows states to provide enrichment opportunities such as [science, technology, engineering and mathematics \(STEM\) education](#), music and the arts. It also allows the establishment of [21st Century Community Learning Centers](#), [Promise Neighborhoods](#) and [full-service community schools](#), all of which focus on community and family engagement and provide wraparound services to complement regular academic programs (e.g., after-school learning opportunities, health screenings and educational services for parents). Multiple grants under this title can be used to:

- Provide young learners with a well-rounded education.
- Improve school conditions and climates for student learning.
- Improve the use of technology to advance digital literacy.
- Support early learning by creating, developing and implementing evidence-based innovations that are rigorously evaluated and improve student achievement and attainment for high-needs students.

Two competitive grants, the Promise Neighborhoods and full-service community schools grants, fund the implementation of “pipeline services” that are a continuum of coordinated supports, services and opportunities for children from birth through postsecondary. These grants can be used to support high-quality early learning programs. Other grants awarded under Title IV may be used to promote school readiness by developing and disseminating accessible instructional materials and [arts-based educational programming](#), such as music lessons for early learners.

States to Watch

STATE LEGISLATION

- [New Mexico House Bill 477](#) (2017). This bill pertains to community schools that promote early childhood initiatives and provide before- and after-school programming, school-based or school-linked health and mental health initiatives, parent engagement, adult education and other programs based on student and community needs.
- [Oregon House Bill 2224](#) (2019, pending). Directs the department of education to distribute grants for improving student outcomes by supporting social, emotional, mental and physical health needs of students. The bill also directs the department to create a list of recommended curricula and training for students and school employees.

STATE ESSA PLANS

- [Delaware](#) and [Iowa](#) will conduct developmental screenings to support social and emotional learning and development for P-3 students.
- [New Mexico](#) proposed to develop a version of its Opportunity to Learn indicator, a survey measure of teacher effectiveness, for the early grades.
- [Oregon](#) has proposed developing social and emotional standards for kindergarten students.

Guiding Questions

- What is in your state's ESSA plan regarding additional supports for P-3 students (e.g., community schools, wraparound services, culture and climate measures)?
- What social and emotional learning initiatives does your state support? Are they aligned with the state supports outlined in the ESSA state plan?
- How does the state approach [school discipline in the P-3 grades](#), or is it a local decision?

Title V, Part B

Flexibility and Accountability— Rural Education Initiative

Nuts and Bolts

Title V, Part B, funds providing resources to rural school districts that frequently lack the personnel and resources to compete for federal grants. These funds are authorized to carry out any activities listed under Title I, Part A; Title II, Part A; Title III; and Title IV, Parts A and B. There are two sub-grant programs:

- The Rural, Low-Income School (RLIS) Program targets rural LEAs that serve large numbers of low-income students.
- The Small, Rural School Achievement (SRSA) Program that provides funds to very small, rural LEAs.
 - Under ESSA, LEAs that are eligible for both subgrant programs must choose only one grant to receive funds in any given year. However, those LEAs eligible for both grants may use RLIS funds with the Alternative Fund Use Authority provided to LEAs that are eligible for SRSA.

Funds for both subgrant programs can be used to recruit and retain pre-K teachers, provide PD for those teachers, improve basic programs offered by local education agencies, and provide Title III language instruction for English learners and immigrant youth. Program activities funded under this title should be planned in coordination and collaboration with other federal programs so that they may supplement, and not supplant, those other programs.

States to Watch

STATE ESSA PLANS

- [Massachusetts](#) includes providing academic and support services and strengthening core programs for low-achieving pre-K students as an RLIS-funded program objective.
- [Tennessee](#) requires that LEAs develop goals and strategies to address the early learning needs of students that include forming partnerships with existing pre-K programs and establishing new pre-K programs.

Guiding Questions

- How well does your state provide early learning services (e.g., home visiting, child care and pre-K) to children in remote and rural areas?
- How has your state taken advantage of Title V, Part B, provisions in the state ESSA plan?

Title VI

Indian, Native Hawaiian and Alaska Native Education

Nuts and Bolts

Title VI grant funds provide LEAs with an opportunity to support early learning programs for Native American, Native Hawaiian and Alaska Native children while also increasing diversity among teachers. Young students have been shown to [benefit from diversity](#) in the teaching workforce.

These grants can be used to incorporate culturally responsive teaching and learning strategies into the education program of an LEA, and to provide opportunities for family engagement, including family literacy services. Funding also can be applied toward PD for early learning educators seeking to meet certification requirements.

State to Watch

- [New Mexico Senate Bill 22](#) (2019). Creates the Early Childhood Education and Care Department. Includes creating the position of assistant secretary for Native American early education and care. The assistant secretary will seek funding for and assist with delivering culturally relevant education and care programs for Native American children through consultation with New Mexico Indian nations, tribes and pueblos.

State Plans

Provisions made under Title VI were not required to be made explicit in ESSA state plans.

Guiding Questions

- How many LEAs in your state receive Title VI funds?
- How are the funds used to support students?

Title IX, Part A

Homeless Children and Youth

Nuts and Bolts

According to the Administration for Children and Families, [over 1.2 million children under the age of 6 experienced homelessness](#) during the 2014–2015 school year. In 2015, only 8.3 percent of these children were enrolled in federally funded early learning programs, including Head Start, Early Head Start and programs funded with McKinney-Vento subgrants.

The [McKinney-Vento Act](#), reauthorized in Title IX, Part A, requires that SEAs use funds to ensure that homeless children, including pre-K students, have equal access to the free, appropriate public education that the LEA provides. It also requires that SEAs designate a state coordinator to report the number of homeless children and youth in the state annually, update a list of LEA liaisons, provide PD for those LEA liaisons, respond to inquiries from homeless parents and youth, and monitor LEAs to enforce compliance.

States to Watch

- [New York](#) ensures that children experiencing homelessness have access to state-administered pre-K programs by providing services such as the New York State Technical and Education Assistance Center for Homeless Students (NYS-TEACHS) hotline. Services include onsite and online resources and trainings for liaisons and the public, housing questionnaires, and tuition reimbursement to LEAs for homeless students who enroll in the school district where they temporarily reside if that district differs from the student's prior residence.
- [Virginia](#) commits to continuing to flag students experiencing homelessness in its state accountability system, reserve slots for those children, encourage families to enroll their children in pre-K, and maintain a child's school of origin by providing transportation when it is in the child's best interest.

Guiding Questions

- Does your state provide training to early learning providers regarding the homeless identification process? Are these systems and processes aligned between pre-K and K-12?
- How do LEAs connect homeless pre-K-aged students to resources?

Title IX, Part B

Preschool Development Grants Birth-Age 5

Nuts and Bolts

Competitive Preschool Development Grants Birth-5 (PDG B-5) were designed to support states in their efforts to analyze the current landscape of their early care and education mixed delivery system (public and private providers of home visiting, child care and pre-K). The PDG B-5 focuses on addressing gaps by asking states to identify and understand early learning opportunities for low-income and disadvantaged populations. [Forty-four states, Washington, D.C., and the Virgin Islands received grants](#) ranging from \$538,000 to \$10.62 million for the first phase and included the following goals:

- Maximizing the availability of high-quality early care and education options for those in need.
- Streamlining administrative processes and requirements.
- Improving state-level early care and education funding efficiencies.

To reach these goals, there are five main activities within Phase One of the PDG B-5:

1. Conducting a statewide birth-5 needs assessment of the availability and quality of existing programs in the state, including those intended to address the most vulnerable or underserved populations and children in rural areas, and a new or updated strategic plan based on what is learned through that assessment.
2. Maximizing the use of existing federal, state, local and non-governmental resources to align and strengthen the delivery of existing programs; coordinating delivery models and funding streams within the state's mixed delivery system; and developing recommendations to better use existing resources and capitalize on partnership opportunities.
3. Encouraging partnerships among Head Start, Early Head Start, child care and pre-K providers, state and local governments, Indian tribes and organizations, private entities (including faith- and community-based entities) and school systems.
4. Improving the overall quality of programs and transitions between pre-K and school systems.
5. Maximizing parents' knowledge about the state's mixed delivery system of existing programs and providers by making information readily available.

[Renewal grants](#) are designed to follow up on Phase One grants by allowing rewarded states to use a portion of the grants to act upon their strategic plans. Twenty renewal grants, ranging from \$10 million to \$25 million for three- to four-year periods, will be provided. Applications for renewal grants are anticipated to be due in October 2019 with awards announced in December. At the current funding level, only 20 of 45 states awarded in Phase One will be awarded grants to continue to Phase Two; states not receiving Phase Two awards will have to implement their plans to sustain efforts on their own, as required in the initial application for Phase One.

States to Watch

STATE PDG B-5 APPROVED SUBMISSIONS

- [New Mexico's](#) plan focuses on geographic access to services and data in the early learning workforce through the state's integrated data system.
- The [District of Columbia's](#) plan focuses on subsidized child care vouchers and improved quality rating and improvement system metrics for early care and education systems. It also targets ongoing stakeholder engagement that facilitates a discussion between the LEA and the public regarding available offerings, any unmet needs and quality improvement.
- [Texas's](#) plan addresses the need to align resources across siloed agencies and providers to better streamline coordination and quality improvement.

Guiding Questions

- How can information resulting from the needs assessment be used to inform early learning policy improvements?
- Is there a legislative desire to bring together stakeholders to discuss outcomes resulting from the needs assessment?
- Are all children being addressed? What about vulnerable populations? Where are the gaps and who is most disproportionately affected?
- How does your state’s plan address sustainability?
- State legislators can ask that state education agencies identify:
 - How much total funding (federal, state and local) is provided for services for children from birth through age 5 and how many students receive that funding.
 - What types of services are offered to children from aged birth through age 5 (e.g. home visiting, child care, pre-K).
 - How students are selected for those programs.

Conclusion

These policy options, state actions and guiding questions provide a roadmap for state efforts to strengthen early learning systems through the Every Student Succeeds Act. For example, legislators interested in supporting students’ transition from pre-K to kindergarten in their states can use provisions within Titles I and II to create coordinated structures for joint professional development and incentives for implementation.

This guide also encourages cross-sector conversations between legislators serving on education, health, human services and other committees to develop comprehensive approaches to long-standing issues. For example, needs assessments resulting from the Preschool Development Grants Birth-5 can be used as a platform from which legislators can discuss pre-K access and quality issues that are also connected to health and economic outcomes in their states.

This guide has presented policy options within the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) that state legislators can consider to help address and close early learning opportunity gaps in their states. Taken together, they begin to paint a picture for systematic improvement to early learning systems, a critical time for setting up strong foundations for future educational, economic and societal success.

A primary tenet of the Every Student Succeeds Act is continuous improvement. Legislators play an important role and legislative requests for transparency are unlikely to require [amendments](#) to a state’s ESSA plan. Legislators can also consider an ESSA plan subcommittee or task force focused on the implementation of ESSA.

NCSL Resources

- [Closing Early Learning Opportunity Gaps Under ESSA](#)
- [Addressing Achievement Through Opportunity: Washington State’s Approach to Closing the Gap](#)
- [State Policy and Research for Early Education Working Group \(SPREE\) Report: A Fair Start: Ensuring All Students Are Ready to Learn](#)
- [Close Opportunity Gaps and Boost Economies with Early Learning](#)
 - [Infographic](#)
 - [Podcast, “The Economic Argument for Early Childhood Education”](#)
- [Dual Language Learners: State Options Under the Every Student Succeeds Act](#)
- [Preschool-3rd Grade State Legislative Tracking Database](#)
- [Every Student Succeeds Act Database \(Legislation, State Plans and Expenditure Reporting\)](#)
- [No Time to Lose: How to Build a World-Class Instructional System State by State](#)

Additional Resources

- [ESSA and Early Learning: A Marathon Not a Sprint](#) (Education Counsel and Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes)
- [Birth to Grade 3 Indicator Framework: Opportunities to Integrate Early Childhood in ESSA Toolkit](#) (CEELO and Council of Chief State School Officers)
- [Early Learning in State ESSA Plans: How States Are Using the Law](#) (First Five Years Fund)
- [Every Student Succeeds Act: Early Childhood Requirements and Opportunities](#) (Mid-Atlantic Comprehensive Center)
- [Every Student Succeeds Act Federal Funding Guide](#) (National Education Association)
- [Federal Education Related Discretionary Programs-Final Appropriations, FY 2019](#) (U.S. Department of Education)
- [Unlocking ESSA’s Potential to Support Early Learning](#) (New America)

The National Conference of State Legislatures is the bipartisan organization dedicated to serving the lawmakers and staffs of the nation's 50 states, its commonwealths and territories.

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NCSL Contacts:

Colleen Brooks

Senior Policy Specialist,
Education Program
(303) 856-1376

Collen.Brooks@ncsl.org

Jorge Casares

Research Analyst I,
Education Program
(303) 856-1394

Jorge.Casares@ncsl.org

Adrienne Fischer

Policy Associate,
Education Program
(303) 856-1544

Adrienne.Fischer@ncsl.org

Matt Weyer

Senior Policy Specialist,
Education Program
(303) 856-1424

Matthew.Weyer@ncsl.org



NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF STATE LEGISLATURES

William T. Pound, Executive Director

7700 East First Place, Denver, Colorado 80230, 303-364-7700 | 444 North Capitol Street, N.W., Suite 515, Washington, D.C. 20001, 202-624-5400

www.ncsl.org

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