5 Things States Should Do to Make ESSA Work for Students

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) shifts significant authority and decision-making on pre-K – 12 education back to states and local school districts following the flawed era of No Child Left Behind. This paradigm shift provides states an opportunity to rethink their accountability systems, assessments, school improvement plans, and more, and to fully engage educators and other key stakeholders in the development and implementation of these plans to ensure all students receive a great education regardless of their zip code.

Overarching questions to guide discussions and decisions:
- What do we want students to know and be able to do when they graduate?
- What do our school districts need to look like to produce those graduates?
- How can we use the opportunity of ESSA to create the changes needed to help our students?

Key actions to take:
- Engage stakeholders in your legislative district and at the state level. State lawmakers are among the stakeholders that State Departments of Education must engage in the development of your state accountability plans. But lawmakers should also be sure to engage with educators, parents, administrators, community leaders and activists, civil rights groups, the state education commissioner and state education board members to determine how you can leverage ESSA to provide the schools your students deserve.
- Host local town hall meetings. One way to fully engage stakeholders is to host and facilitate town hall meetings in your communities to help lead ESSA discussions with your constituents (especially parents and educators). Or, suggest your local school boards or other community organizations hold meetings on ESSA implementation and participate in those discussions. Reach out to your local NEA affiliate leaders to join and to help encourage participation in any back home meetings or dialogues.
✓ Get educated on key elements of the new law. Set up or request briefings from key stakeholders for your state legislative leaders, education committee members, and other lawmakers with interest in the new law. ESSA eliminates many of the rigid, Washington-driven requirements and punishments, and instead empowers states to develop or oversee plans and interventions. Get educated on what you must do, can do, and engage with stakeholders on what you should do to advance education for all your students. State plans are due to the U.S. Department of Education by the Spring / Summer of 2017!

✓ Hold hearings. As your state moves ahead, urge your education committees to hold hearings to get input on what state accountability plans should look like, and ensure that key voices – educators, students, parents and community members – are heard. Among the questions to answer: what is codified in state law that could or must be changed to implement ESSA effectively?

✓ Determine opportunity indicators for state’s accountability plan. In a significant difference from No Child Left Behind, ESSA looks beyond test scores and requires plans to include at least one indicator of school success or student support (i.e. access to advanced courses, extracurricular activities, access to counselors) be included in determining which schools need to do more to help students. Your NEA affiliate can help with this process in determining key indicators to help close opportunity gaps, as we developed an audit exercise to help states choose the indicators that offer the best opportunities for improvement for students, schools and communities.

Learn More: getESSAright.org