



Equity and ESSA: Leveraging Educational Opportunity Through the Every Student Succeeds Act

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Executive Summary

Despite the American promise of equal educational opportunity for all students, persistent achievement gaps among more and less advantaged groups of students remain, along with the opportunity gaps that create disparate outcomes. However, the recent passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) represents an opportunity for the federal government, states, districts, and schools to equitably design education systems to ensure that the students who have historically been underserved by these same education systems receive an education that prepares them for the demands of the 21st century.

ESSA contains a number of new provisions that can be used to advance equity and excellence throughout our nation's schools for students of color, low-income students, English learners, students with disabilities, and those who are homeless or in foster care. We review these provisions in four major areas: (1) access to learning opportunities focused on higher-order thinking skills; (2) multiple measures of equity; (3) resource equity; and (4) evidence-based interventions. Each of the provisions can be leveraged by educators, researchers, policy influencers, and advocates to advance equity in education for all students.



Higher-Order Skills for All Students

Rather than the rote-oriented education that disadvantaged students have regularly received, which prepares them for the factory jobs of the past, ESSA insists that states redesign education systems to reflect 21st-century learning. The new law establishes a set of expectations for states to design standards and assessments that develop and measure high-order thinking skills for children and provides related resources for professional learning.



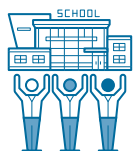
Multiple Measures to Assess School Performance and Progress

ESSA requires the use of multiple measures for accountability, calling upon states to evaluate student and school progress beyond test score gains and graduation rates by also including one or more indicators of "school quality or student success." Carefully chosen measures can help shine a light on poor learning conditions and other inequities, and can provide incentives to expand access to important learning opportunities, such as high-quality college- and career-ready curriculum; effective teachers; and indicators of parent/community engagement. A skillfully designed dashboard of indicators can provide objective, measurable ways for schools, districts, and states to identify challenges and solutions to close opportunity gaps.



Resource Equity

Much more than its predecessor, ESSA directly addresses the resource gaps among our nation's public schools. The law contains provisions that require states to focus on equity during the state application process; to report actual per-pupil spending on school report cards; and to evaluate and address resource inequities for schools identified as needing intervention assistance. In addition to the longstanding maintenance-of-effort, comparability, and supplement-not-supplant provisions, ESSA establishes incentives for districts to adopt strategies that fund schools based on student needs and that enrich the curriculum opportunities available to historically underserved students.



Equity Strategies and Evidence-Based Interventions

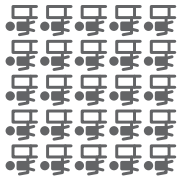
Finally, ESSA emphasizes evidence-based practices for school improvement. States and districts are required to implement evidence-based interventions in schools identified for school improvement, encouraging educators and leaders to determine which data-driven approaches are best suited for their schools and students. ESSA also provides funding streams for early childhood education and community schools, both of which are evidence-based, equity-enhancing approaches to reducing the opportunity gap.

The Four Pillars of Opportunity

Bridging Equity Through the Elementary and Secondary School Act

Factory Model

Relies on outdated rote thinking and memorization



21st-Century Model

Offers deeper learning and higher-order thinking

