



The Every Student Succeeds Act: Educator Involvement in Decision-Making

On December 10, 2015, President Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) which reauthorizes the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) for four years and enacts significant changes from the previous iteration of the law, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). In general, ESSA reduces federal intervention in state education policies and programs and assigns substantial decision-making authority to individual states and local education agencies (LEAs). ESSA also delineates the role of educators in decision-making at the federal, state, and local level by ensuring that their voices are included in important policy discussions around student achievement, school improvement, and professional support and working conditions in schools. In many cases, ESSA reiterates educator involvement in decision-making that was established in earlier iterations of the law; in other cases, ESSA expands educator involvement. Specifically, educators are assigned specific roles in planning, review, and approval of policies, programs, and regulations related to ESSA implementation.

As ESSA fosters changes in areas such as accountability and professional development, PSEA members have new opportunities to become involved in important decisions that impact teaching and learning.

Educator Involvement in Federal, State, and Local Planning. Title I (Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged) and Title II (Preparing, Training and Recruiting High-Quality Teachers, Principals, and Other School Leaders) of ESSA require states and LEAs that receive funds under the Act to develop comprehensive plans to show how they will meet the requirements and intent of the law. At both the state and local level, the comprehensive plan development process must include timely and meaningful consultation with multiple stakeholders including teachers, school leaders, specialized instructional support personnel, paraeducators, and parents. ESSA also requires that the development process for a Title II comprehensive plan include consultation with professional associations representing teachers and paraeducators.

At the school level, any school that applies to operate a schoolwide Title I program must develop a comprehensive plan and demonstrate to the state that the plan was developed with the involvement of stakeholders including teachers, paraeducators, and other school staff. Likewise, when a specific school is designated by the state in its accountability system as “in need of improvement,” the LEA must partner with stakeholders from the school, including teachers, to

develop and implement a comprehensive support and improvement plan. Before it can be implemented, the school improvement plan must be approved by stakeholders.

Educator Involvement in Review and Approval of Plans, Policies, and Regulations. When states submit their comprehensive Title I plans to USDOE, the plans must be reviewed and approved by a peer review committee. ESSA requires that federal peer review teams include a variety of stakeholders including parents, teachers, school leaders, specialized instructional support personnel, and the community. To the extent practicable, ESSA requires most members of a peer review panel should have had practical experience in a classroom, school administrative position, or in state or local government or state education agency within the last two years. This important requirement brings the voices of practitioners who have had recent hands-on experience to bear on decisions pertaining to the feasibility and utility of state Title I plan components.

ESSA also continues to require that each state convene a Committee of Practitioners to review and comment on all state rules, regulations and policies related to Title I implementation. The Committee of Practitioners must include teachers and support professionals with recent classroom experience, parents, school board members, and pupil services personnel.

Educator Involvement in Specialized, Competitive and Discretionary Programs. ESSA establishes several new discretionary programs for states and LEAs. Educators are involved in the application process and administration of several of these programs. The following are examples of important programs in Title I that require direct educator involvement in program application, administration, or evaluation.

- ***State and Local Assessment System Audits.*** ESSA allows states to use a portion of Title I funds to conduct an assessment audit to determine how assessments are being used by educators, parents, policymakers, and the public; how much time is invested in state and local assessment preparation and administration; and whether the number and/or length of assessments could be reduced.

If a state conducts an assessment audit, then the audit must gather feedback from teachers on both state and local assessment systems. The feedback should include information about how educators use assessment data to improve and differentiate instruction (or not), the amount of time teachers spend on assessment preparation and administration, and the assessments that educators do and do not find useful.

- ***Innovative Assessment Demonstration Projects.*** Up to seven states—either individually or within consortia—will be selected, through a competitive application process, to participate in an innovative assessment demonstration project. States that are selected to participate will receive a grant for up to 5 years to develop, administer, and study innovative state test models including competency-based assessments, instructionally-embedded assessments, interim assessments, cumulative year-end assessments, or performance-based assessments. In order to qualify for this competitive grant, a state must demonstrate that its application was developed in collaboration with stakeholders including teachers, principals and other school leaders and delineate how the state will

engage and support teachers in developing and scoring innovative assessments. The state also must gather regular feedback from educators on satisfaction and system utility and use the feedback to make needed changes to the innovative assessment system.

- **Title I Funding Flexibility Demonstration Agreements.** Through a competitive grant process, USDOE will select up to 50 LEAs to participate in Title I Funding Flexibility Demonstration Agreements. In order to enter into a flexibility agreement, however, an LEA must provide assurances that it has developed and will implement the local flexibility demonstration agreement in consultation with teachers, school leaders and other relevant stakeholders.

ESSA also requires educator input on other, smaller programs such as those that provide funds for teacher recruitment and retention, alternative teacher compensation programs, services for English language learners, and 21st Century Schools grants.

Finally, collective bargaining rights are extended to cover programs administered under both Title I and II. This means that under Title II collective bargaining rights now are protected with regard to professional development activities supported by grants awarded under this Title.

Conclusion. As Pennsylvania and LEAs begin to consider changes that result from the new law, there are a number of opportunities for educators to be involved in decision-making. PSEA is advocating for member participation in decision-making at the state level. Local leaders also should begin to think about the role of local members in ESSA decision-making and should discuss with their employer the involvement of local educators in planning and implementation of ESSA requirements. As always, PSEA UniServ Representatives are prepared to assist and guide local leaders and members as they become involved in local ESSA implementation issues. UniServ representatives will also work with a cross-divisional staff work team that is focused on implementation issues.

For more information about the Every Student Succeeds Act, including additional information about the ways educators may be involved in consultation and decision-making in Pennsylvania, PSEA members may contact Dr. Carla Claycomb, PSEA Director for Education Services, cclaycomb@psea.org.

