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The Every Student Succeeds Act in Pennsylvania:

Recommendations From Stakeholder Work Groups and Associated Research

OCTOBER 2016

IMPORTANT NOTE FROM THE PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION: The workgroup recommendations described in this report reflect the work and consensus of each stakeholder work group. These recommendations will be carefully evaluated by the Department, and considered in the context of relevant evidence, research, and additional stakeholder engagement as Pennsylvania develops its ESSA State Plan.

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This report was prepared for the Pennsylvania Department of Education by multiple authors from the American Institutes for Research. Mariann Lemke and Katelyn Lee authored the assessment section; Kerstin LeFloch and David English authored the accountability section; Lynn Holdheide and Jeremy Rasmussen authored the educator preparation section; and Ellen Sherratt and Cassandra Meyer authored the educator evaluation section.

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ESSA Work Groups

Eighty-two individuals, identified via nominations from more than 60 stakeholder organizations, contributed their time and expertise as members of the four work groups charged with creating the recommendations described in this report. A full list of each work group's membership can be found in Appendix A or online at the Pennsylvania Department of Education's ESSA website at http://www.education.pa.gov/Pages/Every-Student-Succeeds-Act.aspx.

Council of Chief State School Officers

Staff and advisors from the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) were essential in facilitating work group conversations. In particular, Scott Norton facilitated the assessment work group, Alissa Peltzman the accountability work group, David Hendrie the educator preparation work group, and Jeanne Harmon the educator evaluation work group. The Department also thanks Peter Zamora, Director of Federal Relations at CCSSO, for his leadership.

The Consortium for Policy Research in Education

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Executive Summary

On December 10, 2015, President Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Developed and passed with strong, bipartisan agreement, ESSA replaces the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and provides states and communities with new flexibility to manage federal education policy. ESSA requires that states develop and submit a State Plan to the U.S. Department of Education; states have the option of expanding these plans to address other important areas of federal education policy.[1]

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) believes that educator and stakeholder voice is crucial to the development of a coherent, and ultimately successful, State Plan. To ensure a solid foundation for State Plan development and further stakeholder engagement, the Department convened four work groups that explored the following components of the new law:

- Assessment
- Accountability
- Educator preparation[2]
- Educator evaluation

Eighty-two individuals, identified via nominations from more than 60 stakeholder organizations, contributed their time and expertise as members of these work groups. Each work group was charged with developing three to five recommendations to be considered by the Department and other education policymakers as appropriate in the development and implementation of the State Plan.

The Department contracted with the American Institutes for Research (AIR) to independently summarize the work groups' recommendations and relevant state policy and research. This approach aims to ensure that the Department and others account for the experiences of other states and systems that have implemented similar reforms and practices. Further, ESSA places significant emphasis on evidence-based practices, and this report is a first step in grounding Pennsylvania's State Plan in rigorous research and relevant policy analysis.

In some cases, available research did not match the specifics of the recommendation or addressed only part of the recommendation. In many other cases, it is difficult to generalize from the research to the recommendation because the recommendation is very broad. That is, the specifics of how recommendations are implemented will clearly have a strong bearing on the extent to which they can achieve successful outcomes. In these cases, we present information that is relevant and highlight how it relates to the recommendation. The Department will continue to work with all interested stakeholders to develop a State Plan that will best serve Pennsylvania's students, educators, and communities and reflects the best available research.

[1] States may submit plans in March or July 2017.

[2] Note that the educator preparation work group was originally charged with considering educator certification; however, because the group's discussion broadened beyond certification requirements alone, in this report we refer it as "educator preparation."

Assessment

Recommendation 1. PDE should reduce ESSA-required, statewide testing time for all students.

Overall, there is little evidence to suggest that reducing time spent on statewide assessments will lead to improved outcomes for students. Although students can benefit from increased instructional time, research on these benefits generally focuses on significant increases in instructional time from extending the school year, school hours, or afterschool time. It is not clear that any time saved by decreasing required testing would be used for instruction nor that the amount of time saved (likely a few hours) would be sufficient to have any effects.

However, it is likely that districts are spending time not reflected in state test administration time on activities related to state testing, such as test preparation. Reducing these activities and decreasing the emphasis on the use of test results within accountability policies have the potential to influence instruction and student outcomes.

Recommendation 2. Pursuant to decreasing the time spent on ESSA-required, statewide assessments, PDE should conduct a study to determine the feasibility of administering assessments at multiple points in time to better inform instruction.

To the extent that PDE wishes to investigate the possibilities of administering assessments at multiple points in time to better inform instruction, current research seems to suggest that though such an approach is technically feasible and perhaps desirable from the standpoint of providing more frequent information, it may necessitate significant investments in professional learning along with investments in development of such a system itself.

Recommendation 3. PDE should utilize a standards-aligned, state-required multiple choice-only assessment to meet ESSA requirements. PDE should encourage local education agencies (LEAs) to utilize performance-based measures for students to demonstrate progress toward achievement of postsecondary goals.

Evidence accumulated over the last 15 to 20 years suggests that although using a multiple-choice-only assessment may offer financial benefits, it may also carry risks in terms of potentially influencing undesirable instructional or other practices in schools and districts. Performance-based assessment, though holding promise in terms of its relationship to instruction, may require significant investments to ensure that it can be implemented successfully.

Accountability

Recommendation 1. The accountability system should start with a student-centered approach which considers the whole student experience including academics, physical and cultural environment and supports.

Research supports the link between inputs that support the whole child and academic success, but there is little evidence of their efficacy in the context of identifying schools for accountability purposes.

Recommendation 2. The PA accountability system should be based on an array of indicators of student experiences and growth toward college and career readiness, appropriately selected and weighted to serve different purposes, including:

- ***Identifying schools for ESSA supports, intervention, and recognition;***
- ***Timely reporting of meaningful information to schools, policymakers, and communities; and***
- ***Setting statewide, school, and community goals and interim targets.***

Using multiple measures can increase the validity and reliability of overall accountability determinations and support a richer theory of action for identifying leverage points for school improvement. However, despite consensus among policymakers and researchers about the importance of using multiple measures in accountability systems, there is little research to support decisions regarding which exact measures to use or how best to combine them. Some states are already including indicators related to college and career readiness in their accountability systems, which could serve as examples for Pennsylvania to consider. In addition, there are a number of examples of different state approaches to indicators that are required under ESSA, such as achievement status and growth, which may also be useful for Pennsylvania to consider.

Researchers do note that particular measures may be more suited for one role or another based on their technical validity, transparency, or other characteristics. Policymakers should consider the trade-offs between transparency, accuracy, fairness and potential for corruption as they consider indicators under ESSA. Fairness, in particular, must be considered from the perspective of each of the relevant stakeholders, such as students, parents, schools, and educators.

Recommendation 3. The PA accountability system will enable system wide continuous and sustainable improvement by providing transparent, timely, and meaningful feedback to all stakeholders.

To enable continuous improvement, careful consideration of how accountability results are reported is critical. To provide a strong and clear message that motivates stakeholders, a single summative score or rating might be best; a dashboard type of approach, however, may provide more insight into strengths and weaknesses and more readily support school improvement. There is some evidence that different stakeholders, such as parents and schools, prefer different approaches. Here, too, a number of existing state practices might provide examples for Pennsylvania to consider.

To support improvement efforts, however, research clearly suggests that states must ensure an adequate data infrastructure, be timely in delivering results, provide time for educators to use data, and build their capacity to do so.

Recommendation 4. The interventions in Pennsylvania's accountability system are evidence-based and applied in ways that are flexible and responsive to varying needs of students, communities, and schools to support the growth of every child. Pennsylvania's system includes a framework for district differentiated recognition, accountability and assistance. The level of state response is dependent on the tier status of the LEA. The tiered system classifies schools and LEAs on multiple levels based on multiple measures. The level or tier indicates the amount and type of support/intervention needed to improve student outcomes.

There are insufficient causal studies to provide a clear roadmap for states seeking to redesign their system of supports. However, over the past decade, scholars and practitioners have attempted to synthesize lessons learned from research and practice. Some of these tenets, such as providing significant resources to support planning and treating the district as the unit of change, are directly applicable to Pennsylvania's current work.

Educator Preparation

Recommendation 1. The Department should promote and increase opportunities to recruit, retain, and ensure a diverse, talented, and supported educator workforce.

The work group recommended a series of sub-recommendations related to this more general recommendation, as follows:

- **Sub-Recommendation 1a:** Promote and market teaching as a valued and respected profession;
- **Sub-Recommendation 1b:** Improve recruitment efforts through the use of financial incentives and by targeting diverse populations;
- **Sub-Recommendation 1c:** Investigate certification requirements considering quality and effect on diversity recruitment; and,
- **Sub-Recommendation 1d:** Strengthen educator support across the career continuum.

At this point little research exists on the success of efforts to promote and market teaching, though there are examples of programs to improve perceptions and increase recruitment into the profession which may serve as useful examples for Pennsylvania to consider.

Research about teacher compensation continues to suggest that salaries affect the labor market decisions that teachers make. Findings related to the use of incentives suggest a mixed level of success in teacher recruitment and retention. There is also research that a diverse teaching force may improve student achievement. Current research suggests that basic skills tests have disproportionate effects on minority candidates, potentially creating a barrier to minority populations pursuing teaching as a profession.

Research supports that induction and mentoring can have positive effects on teacher retention and improvements in practice; however, success is largely dependent on the quality of the induction and mentoring programs. While using educator evaluation data to guide professional learning and support provided through induction and mentoring is logical, research supporting this recommendation is not yet available.

Recommendation 2. The Department will define effective teachers as those who strive to engage all students in learning, demonstrate instructional and subject matter competence, and continuously grow and improve.

Though significant research has been done on measuring effective teaching, definitions of effective teaching or an effective educator center on theory and beliefs about what makes for successful teaching. Pennsylvania's 2015 Equity Plan simply defines "effective" educators as those whose overall effectiveness rating is "proficient" or "distinguished."

Many states and professional organizations have created their own definitions, which generally speak to multiple elements, such as teachers' contributions to student learning and other student outcomes, their contributions to their profession, knowledge of and practice of teaching, and possibly also relationship with parents or the community.

Recommendation 3. The Department should promote and support collaborative in-field, practical experiences as a crucial component of educator preparation.

Some research and policies support the idea of strong partnerships between IHEs and districts to improve teacher candidate quality. Research also shows that having a strong mentor or cooperating teacher can positively impact a teacher candidate, though specific strategies how to improve the training, expectations and incentives for cooperating teachers is still emerging. Finally, there is research on the importance of quality clinical training experiences, but there is less research on exactly what those programs should look like.

Recommendation 4. The Department should promote and increase opportunities to recruit, retain, and support diverse and talented school leaders.

There are some existing policy recommendations on principal recruitment and examples of programs which may serve as examples for Pennsylvania to consider, but there is little direct evidence on the best strategies or practices to promote and retain principals.

Although significant research may support the claim that effective principals are critical, there is limited evidence about how best to support principals with coaching or mentoring. There is some research which suggests that a core set of principal leadership practices, ranging from human capital management to agenda setting to coaching and instructional leadership, are associated with improved student outcomes, but also research which indicates that few principals actually engage in these practices. There is some limited research indicating that intensity of professional development may be important to bring about meaningful changes in principal effectiveness.

Educator Evaluation

Recommendation 1: Revise the overall components of the professional evaluation systems to reflect the following provisions that support teacher quality and student achievement: 80% professional practice (observation) and 20% student measures (SPP or combination of SPP and other relevant data as identified in the LEA's comprehensive plan).

The Educator Evaluation work group's recommendations to include only two measures and weight the professional practice measures at 80% of an educator's rating may run counter to the best available research. However, given limitations of the research base and the importance of stakeholder support, such changes might best align the educator evaluation system with the values of educators and other stakeholders.

Recommendation 2. Ensure that LEAs implement PA's educator evaluation system using a differentiated and collaborative process which promotes educator growth.

The work group recommended a series of sub-recommendations related to this more general recommendation, as follows:

- **Sub-Recommendation 2a:** Include position-specific observation rubrics in the educator evaluation system
- **Sub-Recommendation 2b:** Rotate educators with no performance concerns through cycles of formal evaluation and supportive growth
- **Sub-Recommendation 2c:** Assure evaluator competence in the use of observation rubrics
- **Sub-Recommendation 2d:** Provide timely, formative feedback

With respect to the idea of position-specific rubrics and rotating educators through cycles of evaluation, there is no extant research base related to these specific practices in education, but there are examples from other states. These examples may serve as useful guidance for Pennsylvania, and such practices could be relevant for stakeholder support of the system.

In contrast, research supports the notion that evaluator competence is important, and offers information on specific practices, including initial training, certification, use of multiple observers and conducting system reliability checks.

The importance of ensuring that evaluations result in timely feedback for teachers is supported by the existing research base. Indeed, research suggests some evidence about specifics of feedback: the value of keeping feedback focused on the task, not the learner (or self); employing a rubric that can clearly demonstrate the alignment between the teacher's actions and the desired goal (reduce uncertainty between performance and goals); focusing a few high leverage behaviors so that feedback can be delivered in manageable units; aligning with the district's and school's vision of teaching so that, overall, the teacher does not get conflicting feedback; allowing opportunities for practice between sessions so that feedback can be delivered after the

teacher has attempted a solution; and establishing a committed relationship between teacher and coach so that the teacher is more open to processing negative feedback. Translating this evidence very specifically to the Pennsylvania context and successfully implementing such a feedback system, however, may continue to present challenges.

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