

# Supporting Health and Wellness in ESSA Implementation: State Policy Opportunity

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ESSA policy center.

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# State Policy Opportunity

## An Introduction

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) transfers significant authority from the federal government to the state level, creating opportunities to support school health and wellness through state policy. This document is intended to support state-level educators in making the most of the opportunities presented by ESSA. Key opportunities for incorporating health and wellness into ESSA state plans are summarized below.

To discuss these opportunities, please contact Ryan Mann at [ryan@healthyschoolscampaign.org](mailto:ryan@healthyschoolscampaign.org).

## State Accountability Systems

Under ESSA, each State Education Agency (SEA) is required to create a state accountability system with at least four indicators, including three academic indicators and one non-academic indicator (a measure of school quality or success). Measurement of these non-academic indicators can bring attention to—and galvanize resources or support for—factors closely connected to health. Examples of non-academic indicators listed in ESSA include measures of school climate and safety such as chronic absenteeism and incidences of violence. Given that state accountability systems define the goals and activities of many Title I programs, the inclusion of a non-academic indicator in these systems presents an important opportunity to highlight the connection between health and learning and ensure SEAs and Local Education Agencies (LEAs) are held accountable for supporting the whole child.

### Terms and Abbreviations

**Chronic Absenteeism:** Missing 10 percent or more of school days for any reason, excused or unexcused. For more, see Healthy Schools Campaign's [Chronic Absenteeism Toolkit](#).

**ESSA:** Every Student Succeeds Act. The 2015 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the bill that authorizes the federal government's role in education. Its last prior

## State Report Cards

SEAs must release an annual state report card describing how the state is meeting Title I requirements. In addition to measures such as per-pupil expenditures and student achievement, the report cards must include rates of chronic absenteeism and incidences of violence, including bullying and harassment. LEAs are also required to prepare and disseminate report cards to the public that include the same minimum requirements as the SEA report cards (e.g. the requirement to include rates of chronic absenteeism). Rates of chronic absenteeism and incidences of violence are directly impacted by a school's health and safety environment; their inclusion on report cards can help raise awareness of the critical importance of healthy school environments.

## Needs Assessments

ESSA requires school-level needs assessments as a component of Title I and Title IV:

- **School Improvement:** SEAs must reserve 7 percent of their Title I funding for comprehensive support and improvement in the lowest performing schools. SEAs can use this funding to support student engagement and promote healthy, safe and supportive school environments. LEAs, in partnership with stakeholders, must develop and implement a school improvement plan that is based on a school-level needs assessment. In addition, the plan must be informed by the indicators in the statewide accountability system; include evidence-based interventions; and identify resource inequities.
- **Schoolwide Title I Programs:** In schools where at least 40 percent of the students are from low-income

reauthorization was as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

**LEA:** Local Education Agency. The local body, such as a school district, responsible for implementing ESSA.

**SEA:** State Education Agency. The state-level body, such as a state board of education, responsible for implementing ESSA.

families, LEAs can consolidate and use Title I and other federal, state and local funds for schoolwide Title I programs. An eligible school must develop a comprehensive plan with input from parents and community members and base the plan on a comprehensive needs assessment of the entire school.

#### • **Student Support and Academic Enrichment**

**Grants:** Title IV, Part A of ESSA consolidates 49 grant programs, some of which previously focused on student health, into a new grant program called Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants. SEAs and LEAs can use this to promote student health, increase access to well-rounded education and improve the use of technology. Any school district that receives more than \$30,000 through this grant program must conduct a needs assessment and use the funding to address the needs identified.

Including a health and wellness component in a school-level needs assessments is a key strategy for better understanding the student health conditions in a given community and identifying areas for improvement in school health and wellness. States can play a key role in providing guidance to school districts on how to conduct needs assessments. State level guidance and models should include a health and wellness component in order to ensure district leaders understand how to identify student health needs and understand opportunities to improve the school health and wellness environment through needs assessments.

#### **Equity**

ESSA emphasizes the importance of ensuring educational equity for all children. For example, under ESSA, the purpose of Title I is “to provide all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable and high-quality education, and to close the academic achievement gaps.” Title II emphasizes the need to improve equitable access to quality teachers and Title IV highlights the importance of ensuring equitable access to programming. Given the link between health, education and equity, understanding how to incorporate equity into state plans is important to addressing student health and wellness.

#### **Professional Development**

Title II provides funding to SEAs and LEAs to support professional development for principals, teachers, early childhood educators and other school personnel, including professional development to support school staff in addressing student behavioral and mental health needs and chronic absenteeism.

The majority of professional development training programs for school staff currently do not provide school staff with training on the connection between health and learning. However, there are examples of professional development programs that provide educators with knowledge and skills to support student health and wellness, such as Healthy Schools Campaign’s Fit to Learn professional development program. Fit to Learn engages teachers and principals in prioritizing health in the classroom and throughout the school. In addition, there are multiple examples of professional development programs that provide teachers with training on how to support student social and emotional wellness.

As a result, there is an opportunity to inform this professional development programming and ensure that school staff have the knowledge and skills to support student health and wellness.

#### **Educator Support and Working Conditions**

In addition to supporting professional development programming, Title II funds can be used by states and school districts to conduct and publicly report on an assessment of educator support and working conditions that would be developed with teachers, leaders, parents, students and the community. For example, funds could be used to develop and conduct an evaluation of teacher stress levels to better understand teacher’s working conditions. Assessing school staff’s working conditions can be a critical step toward identifying strategies to improve overall working conditions and increase staff retention. In addition, promoting workplace wellness is a proven strategy for supporting student health and learning.

#### **Evidence-Based Interventions**

Both the school improvement program within Title I and Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants

(SSAEG) program in Title IV require that programming include evidence-based interventions. While both programs clearly state that funding can be used to implement efforts to support health and wellness programs, there is a critical need to ensure information about evidence-based interventions that support student health and wellness are easily accessible to educators. Numerous evidence-based interventions for supporting student health have been documented by federal agencies and private organizations, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Agency, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the Department of Justice and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Ensuring that states and school districts are aware of these interventions and know where to access information about them will be key to supporting their implementation and promoting the use of evidence-based interventions that support health and wellness through Title I and Title IV.

### Early Childhood Provisions

LEA plans for using Title I funding must describe how Title I services will support, coordinate and integrate with early childhood education programs at the LEA or individual school level, including plans for the transition from early childhood programs to local elementary schools. Schoolwide Title I programs can also include strategies for assisting preschool children in the transition from early childhood education programs to local elementary schools. Because federally-funded early childhood programs must meet a variety of health-related requirements, this creates an opportunity to support health-promoting initiatives in the K-12 school environment.

#### About Healthy Schools Campaign

*Healthy Schools Campaign (HSC) is dedicated to making schools healthier places where all children can learn and thrive. HSC advocates for children to have access to nutritious school food, physical activity, school health resources, green schoolyards and clean air. HSC has a special focus on the wellness and environmental health issues affecting low-income students of color.*

### Transferability

Title V of ESSA allows SEAs and LEAs to redirect federal funds to the programs and activities that most effectively address the unique needs of the states and localities. Specifically, Title V allows Title II and Title IV, Part A funding to be reallocated to Title I or programming to support English language learners (Title III). There is a critical need to ensure states do not transfer funding from Title II or Title IV, Part A and that SEAs and LEAs fully understand the importance of allocating Title IV Part A funding to support safe and healthy school environments.

### Stakeholder Engagement

The development of Title I state plans and schoolwide Title I programs provide important opportunities for engaging a wide range of stakeholders to ensure these programs meet students' needs and leverage community resources and assets. For example, ESSA requires meaningful stakeholder engagement as a part of the process of developing state plans and also recognizes the need to engage parents in school-level planning.

There is a specific need to build the capacity of all Title I schools to engage parents and families in efforts to create health-promoting school environments. In addition, SEAs must emphasize the importance of engaging stakeholders in other sectors to develop state plans and carry out key components of ESSA, such as conducting needs assessments. The opportunities presented by ESSA implementation can help transform education to better support student health and wellness.

*We start with a social justice perspective and believe this focus is especially critical in light of the vast health disparities our nation faces. HSC facilitates collaboration among parents, educators, students and policymakers to help prepare this diverse group of stakeholders to lead change for healthier schools at the school, district, state and national levels.*

## Stay connected!

For questions or to discuss this issue, please contact Ryan Mann at [ryan@healthyschoolscampaign.org](mailto:ryan@healthyschoolscampaign.org).

Learn more and sign up for updates from HSC at [healthyschoolscampaign.org](http://healthyschoolscampaign.org).

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