

ESSA Opportunities in Arizona

Recommendation Summary

At the highest level, Stand for Children Arizona believes that the following pieces need to be in place for successful ESSA implementation.

- Aligned assessments that are externally validated and have appropriately set proficiency levels – this will allow for appropriate measures of student achievement and growth, and pave the way for trust to be built into educator effectiveness measures that are focused on teacher growth and improvement.
- Accountability indicators that are limited in number and allow for the meaningful identification of schools where improvement/success are highlighted.
- Data transparency that will allow for future improvements on the entire system, with particular attention paid to transparency of resource allocation and per pupil expenditures.

More specifically, we recommend:

STANDARD AND ASSESSMENTS

1. Rigorous alignment of new “menu of assessments” opportunities should ensure a high bar of comparability across performance levels as districts apply to use their own assessments instead of AZ Merit. Simply using NCE will not accurately provide parents with information. In addition, the data should be understandable to a typical parent, and easily accessed. Populating the School Report Cards, as required by AZ statute, can easily address this.
2. Maximize student participation in assessments by keeping the 95% tested requirements, and ensure that schools are not “gaming” the data and keeping their lower performing students home on test day.

ACCOUNTABILITY AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

1. Reporting of all subgroups should be based on a small N= size cut off for reporting of no more than 20.
2. A robust system must be in place to identify, support, exit and report on English Language Learners.
3. The fourth indicator should be chronic absenteeism, but should not count for more than 25% in determining a school or district rating.
4. College Matriculation should be included in the College and Career Ready Index.

EDUCATOR EFFECTIVENESS

1. Teacher evaluation systems should be used for feedback towards teacher growth and statewide plans for equitable distribution of effective teachers¹.
2. State and district report cards must include information on how high-poverty and low-poverty schools compare based on the number and percentage of inexperienced teachers, teachers with emergency or provisional certification, out of field teachers, *and* teacher effectiveness.
3. Use the full 3% of Title II funds for teacher residency programs/high quality experiential and outcomes oriented teacher/leader preparation programs. Do not transfer it to Title I.

¹ See Stand for Children’s position statement on Educator Evaluations for specifics on multiple measures and differentiation for novice and experienced educators

Stand for Children Arizona's ESSA Implementation Positions

STANDARDS AND ASSESSMENTS

The standards and assessment requirements present an opportunity for states to improve articulation between K-12 and post-secondary training and education, so a “college and career ready” diploma has real meaning in higher education and the workplace. For states that have already implemented high-quality standards and assessments, ESSA should not mean dramatic changes.

In considering new assessment systems, states should ensure results are comparable among schools and across years to allow stakeholders to measure growth in student achievement and progress in school performance. Some new ESSA options in assessment present new risks—particularly for states’ ability to compare results across schools and districts. Allowing districts to administer different tests in high school could fragment assessment systems within states, making comparing performance among schools challenging. States should not underestimate the effort required to develop and implement a new, high-quality assessment model and should steer away from any system of assessment that does not produce comparable and reliable results.

Key ESSA Provisions:

- States must adopt challenging academic standards aligned with entry requirements for state public post-secondary institutions and career and technical education standards.
- States must track performance relative to those standards through a system of statewide math and reading assessments in grades 3-8 and once in high school, and science tests within certain grade spans. These assessments must be valid, fair and reliable, and identify where students and schools are falling behind.
- States may apply for a grant to audit their state and local assessment systems and create a plan to streamline and improve assessments at the state, district, and school level.
- States may allow districts to choose a nationally-recognized high school assessment, like the SAT or ACT, in place of the statewide test.
- Up to seven states may be granted permission to implement innovative assessments, such as competency-based, interim, or performance-based assessments.

STAND FOR CHILDREN ARIZONA'S POSITION

1. **Arizona maintains rigorous standards and strong alignment between standards and assessments by having an external evaluation of alignment completed**
2. Establish authentic alignment in requirements and standards between high school and post-secondary
3. Summative assessments must be aligned to state standards, valid, reliable, rigorous, and comparable across schools and districts; AND performance targets must be set at appropriate levels
4. Support state-wide formative and interim assessments that are aligned to standards, valid, reliable, rigorous, comparable, and time efficient
5. Rigorous alignment of new “menu of assessments” opportunities should ensure a high bar of comparability across performance levels as districts apply to use their own assessments instead of AZ Merit.
6. Open to state-wide alternative high school assessments - SAT/ACT/PARCC/SBAC - pending determination of quality and standards alignment

7. Maximize student participation in assessments while ensuring timeliness and ease of access of assessment results for parents/teachers

Stand for Children Arizona's ESSA Implementation Positions

ACCOUNTABILITY AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

A strong state system of accountability and school improvement is the key to improving student outcomes and promoting transparency under ESSA. While states now have unprecedented flexibility in designing their systems, states should go beyond minimum compliance to create higher-quality systems.

STAND FOR CHILDREN ARIZONA'S POSITION

1. Ensure accountability systems are based on the state's comprehensive vision for education
2. School ratings and indicators should drive equity² and incentivize schools to help all students achieve college and career readiness; reporting of all subgroups should be based on a small N= size of no more than 20 for accountability
3. **A robust system must be in place to identify, support, exit and report on English Learners**
4. **State should adopt indicators that are strategic, provide meaningful/actionable information for schools for all groups of students, reflect individual student experiences, meaningfully distinguish schools, and are directly related to student academic outcomes. Student growth in ELA/Math should be included. Viable non-academic indicators are: chronic absenteeism rates, student engagement, credits earned in advanced coursework, on-track rates for graduation, and suspension/expulsion³ rates.**
5. **The fourth indicator should not count for more than 25% in determining a school or district rating**
6. College Matriculation should be included in the College and Career Ready Index.
7. High school graduation rates should use at least the 4 year adjusted cohort graduation rate, but could also include reporting on 5-year graduation rates; however, interventions should be based on the former
8. Interventions for schools where all students, or any group of students, are struggling must include evidence-based strategies to reduce chronic absenteeism, closely monitor student progress (early warning systems), and provide additional support for struggling students in and out of the classroom

Key ESSA Provisions:

- States must set long-term and interim goals for increasing math and reading proficiency and graduation rates. Goals must be disaggregated for specified subgroups of students and encourage closing achievement gaps.
- States must design school ratings systems which include assessment proficiency, student growth, graduation rates for high schools or another academic measure for 3-8 schools, progress in English language proficiency, and at least one other indicator of school quality and student success. Each measure must meaningfully differentiate among schools and be disaggregated for each individual subgroup. Academic indicators must be the most significant factors.
- Based on their ratings system, states must identify schools in the bottom 5 percent of schools overall and all high schools with graduation rates below 67% for support and improvement. States must also identify any school in which any subgroup of students is consistently underperforming for targeted support.
- States will create a system for improving identified schools. For whole-school improvement, this includes state approval of district-created improvement plans, state setting of exit criteria and state intervention if goals are not met. For targeted sub-group improvement, schools must create improvement plans to be approved by districts, and if goals are not met, districts must take additional action.

² ESSA requires that students be tested and their scores be reported for each school by grade level and individual subgroup. Schools are rated based on both. Some states now combine subgroups in to one "super-subgroup". Thus, high overall performance could mask low performance.

³ There are current questions around suspension/expulsion rates and implementation that would lead to unintended consequences. This indicator will be reviewed when additional information is

Stand for Children Arizona's ESSA Implementation Positions

EDUCATOR EFFECTIVENESS

Great educators have dramatic impact on students, but too often, students most in need don't have access to the most effective teachers. To ensure that every student has access to highly effective teachers, states should commit to quality teacher evaluation and support systems and policies that encourage great teachers to work where they will have the greatest impact.

Teacher evaluation systems that combine student achievement measures with multiple measures of teacher quality, such as classroom observation ratings and student surveys, are an important tool for identifying and supporting effective teaching, even though they are not required. Plans for improving teacher access provide an opportunity for states to encourage great teachers to focus on high-need schools and in-demand subjects. And new reporting requirements will provide much-needed transparency and attention to longstanding inequities.

Key ESSA Provisions:

- States must define teacher effectiveness
- States are no longer required to have evaluation systems based on student achievement.
- States are required to submit a plan for improving access to effective and experienced educators among economically disadvantaged and minority children and publicly report progress.
- States must report teacher qualifications for Title I schools.
- States must now report actual personnel and non-personnel expenditures per student in districts and schools.
- States are able to move up to 100% of Title II funds to Title I or Title IV.

STAND FOR CHILDREN ARIZONA'S POSITION

- 1. Teacher evaluation systems should be used for feedback towards teacher growth and statewide plans for equitable distribution of effective teachers⁴**
2. State and district report cards must include information on how high-poverty and low-poverty schools compare based on the number and percentage of inexperienced teachers, teachers with emergency or provisional certification, out of field teachers, *and* teacher effectiveness
3. Maximize Title II funds on high impact allowable uses and ensure 100% of funding stays in Title II
4. Teacher and leader ESSA plans should be integrated with equity plans and focus areas for Title II allocations should be limited to prioritize factors that will have the most positive impact on teachers:
 - a. Develop a state teacher recruitment strategy particularly for low-income and students of color, coupled with increased expectation for educator preparation admissions
 - b. Use the full 3% of Title II funds for teacher residency programs/high quality experiential and outcomes oriented teacher/leader preparation programs
 - c. Mandate professional development offerings be grounded in evidence and directly related to evaluations
 - d. Ensure measurements and incentives to reduce disproportionality of effective teacher distribution are appropriate

⁴ See Stand for Children's position statement on Educator Evaluations for specifics on multiple measures and differentiation for novice and experienced educators