



Comments on the Development of Arizona's Implementation Plan for the Every Student Succeeds Act

Arizona's school districts and locally elected governing boards serving the vast majority of Arizona's 1 million school children, have a significant stake in the development of Arizona's ESSA state plan. As the statewide representative of these districts, the Arizona School Boards Association submits these comments. In general, there are three areas in which the ASBA sees an opportunity to improve or revise Arizona's current systems to support quality K-12 education.

Provide Clear and Consistent Goals

Arizona has many different organizations representing business, philanthropy, educators, and the schools themselves, all striving to improve the system. They have been engaged in the conversation for a long time, as different measures and standards of quality have come in and out of fashion. There are perhaps thousands of different metrics by which a school system can define quality, but it falls to the State Board of Education and the department to define and implement those metrics for Arizona. Over the past few years, the A-F letter grade system, for example, changed so much and so often as a result of the ESEA waiver process that schools came to feel as though they would be forever chasing a moving target. The State Board and the department must use this process to consult meaningfully and broadly with all education stakeholders, and establish clear goals that define what a quality school system in Arizona should look like. Subsequently, they must stand behind those goals against attack from the outside, so they remain a consistent target toward which to align statewide efforts by all parties. Schools must first know the expectations before they can commit fully to making them reality. Changing course frequently and with little notice does not inspire confidence and wastes scarce resources.

ASBA supports the adoption of statewide quality metrics that are broadly indicative of a strong K-12 education system, such as high school graduation, college going, 8th grade math attainment, 3rd grade literacy attainment, and educator attraction and retention, to include compensation.

Implement an A-F Accountability System That Encourages Effective Educational Practice

Arizona should seize this opportunity to create an accountability system that encourages practices that sustain quality schools in the long term. Changing to an accountability system based on letter grades has heightened public focus on school accountability and whether or not the neighborhood schools are "good." However, the definition of an A school today is largely one whose students test well on English

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Language Arts and Math in grade level on a single test. This definition is incredibly narrow and favors a certain type of school. Still, all schools focus on these areas to the detriment of others to avoid being labeled as failing. Such a system stifles things like social studies, physical science, and career and technical education. It also discourages the effective use of assessment and other data, as it comes to be seen as a tool to punish rather than inform quality instruction. While standards proficiency is an important consideration, at least equally important, if not more, is the school's function in preparing a student for the future beyond graduation, whether public service, vocational training, community colleges, or universities. None of these are currently represented. The new A-F Letter Grade system will determine what metrics schools consider worthy of their limited time and resources by necessity. If the aim of Arizona's public education system is to prepare students for the future, then the criteria used to evaluate them should be encompassing of our stated goals as a state.

ASBA supports an A-F Letter Grade system that incentivizes schools to innovate and adopt educational practices that produce successful students, to include standards attainment, but also a robust College and Career Ready Index. ASBA supports the use of assessment data to inform and individualize instruction as much as possible, but does not support its use as the main determination of a school's quality or effectiveness. The organization supports differentiated recognition of achievement based on mission, such as alternative schools, JTEDs, and dropout recovery programs.

Revise the Teacher-Principal Evaluation System to Encourage Professional Growth

Similar to A-F Letter Grades, the Every Student Succeeds Act presents an opportunity to examine Arizona's educator evaluation requirements. The work of the Teacher-Principal Evaluation Task Force in early 2016 is a step in the right direction, however the use of student-level assessment data as a predominant factor in evaluation does not itself encourage educators to improve themselves as professionals. The demands of producing adequate test scores leave little room for the activities that make for a quality educator with longevity: time for collaboration with colleagues, meaningful professional learning, and the freedom to innovate. This is true especially in the early grades. The lower the grade level a teacher is teaching, the more important it is to be well grounded in the science of learning. A system that demands test results above all leaves no room for this important continuing development. It is becoming tiresome to point out that teachers are hard to come by in Arizona these days, but that doesn't make it any less pressing. Low salaries contribute to this issue, but working conditions are also hugely important. An evaluation system seen as punitive in nature rather than supportive is a large factor in job satisfaction, and it is at least partially responsible for driving promising teachers out of the profession. The goal of any evaluation system should be to model quality. High quality teachers with broad professional experience should be recognized and encouraged by the system, and serve as exemplars for new or struggling teachers.

ASBA supports a teacher-principal evaluation system that is focused on rewarding and encouraging high levels of professionalism and continuous improvement. ASBA supports accountability for student performance, but does not support the use of test data as a determinant factor in evaluation.