

The Federal Government's Continued Shortcomings in Educational Reform: A Look into the Every Student Succeeds Act

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Executive Summary

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) currently dictates the K-12 educational landscape in the United States. Understanding ESSA is necessary to grasp the evolving dynamics of the education system and is significant for students, administrators, and educators across the country. By critically examining accountability, allocation, and distribution within ESSA, dialogue surrounding steps to improve the education system can be put into motion to ensure that every student truly has the opportunity to succeed.

Key Terms:

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA): Enacted by the Obama administration in 2015, ESSA is the most current and active educational policy intended as a replacement for NCLB. Its intended purpose was to provide states with greater autonomy in their educational proceeding by allowing them to create their own system of student performance assessments.

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB): Active from 2002-2015 and enacted by the Bush administration, NCLB attempted to hold schools accountable for every child's education. NCLB was widely unfavorable and replaced by ESSA.

Federal Accountability: Federal accountability encompasses the federal government holding schools and states accountable for the quality of education.

Background: No Child Left Behind

Pros:

- Federal attention and oversight in education
- An emphasis on teacher qualifications

Cons:

- Funding based on performance; Punished low performing schools instead of provided source
- Heavy emphasis on standardized testing and “teaching to the test”
- Success measured in terms of Math and English proficiency, neglecting other subjects
- Adopted a “one size fits all” approach to education which left minorities and those with disabilities at a disadvantage.

“No Child Left Behind: A Decade of Failure”



What Changed with ESSA?

“ESSA Explained: Inside the New Federal K-12 Law”



NCLB VERSUS ESSA

Federal v. state

Federal accountability model.  State-created accountability models.

Teacher evaluation

Teacher evaluation was required for NCLB waivers.  Allows—but does not require—states to use federal funds for teacher evaluation.

Testing

Mandatory testing in grades 3-8 and once in high school.  States now have flexibility in how and when they administer those tests and can apply to be part of the Innovative Assessment Pilot.

Standards

Through waivers to NCLB requirements, the U.S. Department of Education encouraged states to adopt college- and career-ready standards.  Requires the Department of Education to remain neutral on academic standards.

School accountability

States were required to report on defined progress (AYP) on federal goals. After five years of interventions, schools had a limited number of choices.  Eliminates Annual Yearly Progress (AYP). States must create a plan for schools at the bottom 5%, high schools that graduate less than 67% of students, or schools where subgroups are consistently underperforming.

Funding

\$23 billion appropriated in 2015 goals.  \$24.9 billion authorized in 2016.

Current Impact: What did ESSA get right? What is still Wrong?

What's Right?

ESSA is generally regarded as a great improvement in comparison to NCLB. ESSA has **expanded the indicators used to measure school performance** that go **beyond just standardized test scores**. As states have more flexibility, education is **no longer** regarded in a **one size fits all** approach but rather there is the possibility for local, parental, and **community engagement**. **Low performing school** are **no longer being punished**, instead action plans are created or assessed to best meet individual school's needs.

What's Wrong?

With the **hands off approach** the **federal government is adopting** with ESSA, the concern shared by many critic, including the NAACP, is that **states will not be accountable in ensuring marginalized communities receive resources** and funding which could lead to greater disparity between wealthy and poor districts. While most **states** mention **addressing equity** in their plans, language and strategies **widely vary**. Even though states mostly address achievement gaps, they fail to address funding or resource allocation concerns. There are even **fewer discussions surrounding teacher diversity or cultural training** of teachers despite an emphasis of community engagement in ESSA plans.

Recommendations:

- Invest in early-childhood education
- Promote community engagement
 - Gather input from the community to supplement any academic standard data
- Stakeholders should leverage the flexibility of ESSA in implementing research-based and community-initiated programs rooted in local school contexts.
 - Adopting a “rigid flexibility” model allows for a degree of sameness to exist among schools and states in relation to federal accountability surrounding equity and its legislative language, while still allowing a degree of flexibility to accommodate the uniqueness of differing schools.
- Implement diversity training and hire diverse qualified teachers to better meet the needs of minority students

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