



THE FEDERATION FOR
COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

The Every Student Succeeds Act: Opportunities to Change Outcomes for Students

Submitted by Melissa Mitchell on behalf of the Federation for Community Schools, April 26, 2016

As part of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), Illinois will receive \$627,541,589 to support low-income students and schools – and will have new flexibility over how funds are used and how school progress is measured, among other things. The state needs a comprehensive and innovative plan to change academic outcomes for students in low-income schools, and to promote positive youth development as part of a larger, more comprehensive vision of success for children and youth.

The state also has an opportunity to use ESSA as a lever to drive greater systems-level collaboration at the state and local levels. Many communities are already doing this kind of work – through community school and collective impact initiatives. The state can build on these experiences and use ESSA to prioritize cross-system partnerships that work to remove non-academic barriers to academic success in coordinated and efficient ways. Putting in place guidance around the use of Title I and Title IV funds, prioritizing authentic family and community engagement, incentivizing collaboration and coordination between schools and communities and directing funding to these efforts are some ways that the state can use the opportunities offered by ESSA to be innovative and impactful in meeting the needs of all students in the state.

ESSA offers opportunities for the state to incorporate nonacademic measures of success, prioritize coordination of efforts, recommend structures for family and community engagement with schools and school planning and create a system of school improvement strategies that weaves together classroom changes with wrap-around supports that remove barriers to academic success.

What do we value and how would that be translated into a state plan to improve student achievement?

- In order for young people to be ready for post-secondary learning and careers, we need to make sure that each student with what s/he needs to be successful in school and beyond, both academically and otherwise.
- We value equitable access to high-quality educational opportunities, enrichment and learning experiences, opportunities that promote positive youth development and social-emotional supports. For this to happen, we need to create cross-community partnerships that work together to remove nonacademic barriers to academic achievement.
- The community school approach is one way to structure partnerships and promote access to resources and supports. It's also one way to foster family engagement, community engagement and relational trust.

- We also need to build and sustain relationships between families and schools and look for ways to develop social capital using schools as drivers of shared leadership and decision making in communities.

What do we want to see in a state plan?

Improving outcomes in lowest-performing schools

- With the flexibility offered by ESSA, Illinois has an opportunity to create its own vision and strategies for school improvement. **The community school strategy should be a core component of state's school improvement plans and plans for transforming low-performing schools and changing outcomes for the better for the students who attend them.**
- Several current school improvement grantees are taking a community school approach, in recognition that changing outcomes for students and transforming schools are functions of both changes to the classroom experience and removing barriers to academic success.
- Focusing just on the academics can only go so far – using the community school strategy to foster family engagement, engage the community in planning for school improvement, align resources to remove nonacademic barriers to success and provide afterschool programs linked to classroom learning and enrichment is integral to sustained school improvement efforts.

Title I and Title IV flexibility

- The state should put in place parameters around how districts and schools plan for and use Title I flexibility – authentic parent and community participation in the planning process needs to be an expectation, including having families and community members play a part in the needs assessment and asset mapping process.
- **Greater flexibility in Title I and Title IV** allows districts and schools to use that funding to pay for a school-level coordinator, and provide more support for parent and family member engagement. This means that districts could use some of those Title funds to develop the community school strategy, and to fund a Resource Coordinator who would build partnerships, shared leadership structures and access to service.
- It's also a way that communities can start implementing collective impact strategies and organize more efficient and effective access to supports at the community level.
- **A greater emphasis on stakeholder engagement in planning and school improvement** strategies means the state plan should include having families and the community be partners in the local Title I and Title IV planning processes – they bring assets and expertise to bear on the academic and non-academic measures districts are required to address. This process should include conducting needs assessments and asset maps, and should all be part of the guideposts the state puts around the use of Title I funding.
- **ESSA preserves the original intent of 21st Century Community Learning Center grants**, so the state can and should maintain its commitment to using 21st CCLC funds to provide high-quality out-of-school time learning and enrichment experiences for students. 21st CCLC partnerships can also be measured based on student growth.
- The state should ensure that districts **coordinate and integrate Title I services** with other educational services at the district or individual school level, including services for English learners, children with disabilities, migratory children, and others. ESSA offers the flexibility for districts and schools to use Title I funds to bring in a coordinator who can support this integration.

- By putting a priority in the plan for using some Title I funding to support a school site coordinator, the state can connect ESSA’s focus on conditions for learning and the provision of well-rounded education to a strategy for aligning community resources and being more intentional and collaborative.

Parent & community engagement

- Illinois can build a plan that recognizes that **students are parts of family and community systems**, and can identify strategies (such as the community school model) for engaging and supporting families so as to promote academic achievement and positive conditions for learning.
- Authentic family engagement that builds relationships between families and teachers should be one of the metrics on which the state tracks schools’ progress.
- The state’s ESSA plan should include guideposts on how schools and districts should be engaging communities and families in needs assessments, asset maps and plans (including school improvement and Title I priorities).
- ESSA formally establishes the **Full Service Community Schools Program**. Two communities (West Chicago/ District 33 and Chicago/ Columbia College for Community Arts Partnerships) have existing Full Service Community School grants. The program’s inclusion in ESSA provides Illinois with an opportunity to build on existing community school work.

Preparing teachers and school leaders

- ESSA implementation gives Illinois a chance to be innovative in how we approach teacher preparation and principal leadership development. The state plan should include strategies for ensuring that teachers and principals have the training that they need to engage parents and the community as partners in children’s education. They also need formal grounding in principles of youth development. In other words, the state’s ESSA plan should include ways Illinois will ensure that teachers and principals are prepared to implement the key elements of ESSA at the school level.
- Principals, in particular, need to be prepared to lead and innovate, to maximize both the flexibility offered by ESSA and meet new expectations around nonacademic measures of success, positive conditions for learning, family and community engagement and well-rounded educations.
- The community school strategy provides a structure that principals can use to accomplish many of the goals outlined above, and in ESSA more broadly. But we’ve seen strong community school work fade when a new principal comes into a school not prepared to engage authentically with families and the community, not able to see the role that schools play in building healthy communities and not flexible enough to innovate.
- The state can look to organizations like New Leaders for New Schools to identify strategies to include in leadership development plans, especially around developing principals’ capacities to build partnerships with and share decision-making with families and the community.

Positive conditions for learning

- To the extent that the state can define “conditions for learning,” that definition needs to include positive school climate and culture, family engagement, restorative practices and access to enrichment and supports that remove barriers to learning. The community school strategy is one way the state can promote the kinds of supports that contribute to positive conditions for learning.

- In terms of measuring school progress, the state needs to include nonacademic elements that point to positive conditions for learning, such as outcomes on the Five Essential Supports surveys (especially school climate measures) and student engagement/ attendance.
- The state plan should also include strategies that districts can choose to use to remove nonacademic barriers to academic success, including barriers to consistent school attendance.

Well-rounded education

- The state has an opportunity to put some guideposts around “well-rounded education.” Those guideposts should include access to high-quality afterschool programs, coordinated wrap-around services, social-emotional learning, behavioral health supports and engaging families and communities as partners in students’ educations.
- Some of the funds that the state will receive to support low-income students and schools should be targeted towards the elements of a well-rounded education referenced above, and should include funding for a coordination mechanism to ensure access to enrichment programs and other supports.
- By including priorities on **a well-rounded education and conditions for learning, ESSA offers Illinois the opportunity to ensure that districts go beyond academic proficiency** and look to create enriching learning opportunities for students, such as afterschool programming linked to classroom learning and arts education, and wrap-around services, restorative practices and family/ school relationships that foster positive conditions for learning.

What is a community school?

Community schools are the center around which the community revolves. In the community school model, public schools, non-profit organizations and local businesses come together to provide a broad range of programs and services to students and their families in support of comprehensive child development. Through this approach, community schools create an environment where students and their families can reach their full potential.

The community school model has three distinct features:

- Boost academic achievement through educational, social and emotional support, offering programs and services that remove barriers and provide enhanced opportunities
- Comprehensive support of the health and wellness of children and their families through medical support, counseling services, and youth and community development programs
- Parental and community engagement, including an active role in decision-making through shared leadership

Various partner organizations and an on-site resource coordinator bring these many elements together to create an optimal learning environment and a strong, vibrant community.

This work is happening in more than 25 communities across the state, and the community school strategy is a component of some of the School Improvement Grant schools’ improvement plans. It provides an infrastructure for organizing supports,