

Issue 10 – The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) – What’s Next for Georgia?

Issue Overview

The passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in December 2015 was touted as bringing an end to federally driven education policy. Free of the burdensome federal regulations of its predecessor, the much-maligned No Child Left Behind, ESSA was viewed as an opportunity for states to hit the reset button and provide school and district officials a road map to meet state expectations for the next generation of students.

Under ESSA, states can choose their own measures of progress for student learning aligned to their own educational goals and priorities. Accountability plans must show how states will implement academic standards aligned to help students stay on track for success in college and the workplace; ensure students from all backgrounds have an equal footing; track the progress of schools across a variety of measures not limited to test scores; and identify ways to offer additional support where students are struggling.

In developing the new state plan under ESSA, Georgia addressed issues related to:

- Measuring school performance, setting academic goals, and measuring student progress
- The role of the state assessment system in teaching and learning as well as in the accountability system
- How to intervene in struggling schools and what resources will be made available to support them

Significance for Georgia

In response to the passage of ESSA, the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) has developed a new consolidated state plan to address issues such as how to measure the performance of schools, the assessment systems, how to support struggling schools, and the state’s accountability system. GaDOE submitted the plan on September 18, 2017 to the U.S. Department of Education (USED) and is awaiting final approval.

The state ESSA plan provided Georgia with the opportunity to set out a policy framework related to federal requirements that would ensure accountability for *all* students, outline the role assessments play in teaching and learning, and most importantly, ensure equity of opportunity to the state’s schools and populations that struggle the most. The implementation of this plan in 2018 will begin to answer the question: Did Georgia accomplish its goals?

Action Steps for Georgia

Going into 2018, there are many uncertainties around the implementation of the ESSA plan. As plans are approved by USED, districts will begin implementing ESSA at the local level. Districts will have to address issues related to teacher equity, incorporation of early learning and kindergarten transition, and utilizing flexibility options to meet school improvement goals – among other issues. Depending on district capacity, there may be a wide range of effective implementation of the ESSA plan.

At the time of the printing of this issue, the state accountability system remains an open question. For federal accountability purposes, USED only needs to approve the GaDOE submitted plan. However, the State Board of Education, whose members are appointed by Gov. Deal, must approve any changes to the state accountability system. The Governor has already expressed his dissatisfaction with the revised accountability system and the State Board has echoed those concerns.