

## August 2017 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Public Comment – Overall Themes

Thank you to everyone who participated in our ESSA public comment period! We received nearly 200 responses to our public input survey, had over 300 public meeting participants, and received nearly 100 letters and emails outlining the thoughts of students, families, teachers, administrators, student support staff, civil rights organizations, advocacy groups, Tribal Nations and more. The comments, concerns, ideas and questions shared have all been extremely valuable to Commissioner Cassellius and the rest of the team at the Minnesota Department of Education. This document outlines themes that arose across all channels throughout the process.

### Accountability

- Stakeholders appreciate the long-term goals that have been set for all students and student groups.
- While some stakeholders appreciate the ease of understanding the “funnel” system used for identifying schools for support and improvement, others wish the department would provide a model the public is more familiar with, such as a summative rating.
- Many educators expressed concern that under the academic achievement indicator, students will not receive a half-point for scoring “partially proficient.”
- Another area of concern for some stakeholders is that schools will be negatively impacted when a parent exercises choice to opt-out of testing.
- Stakeholders hope to see a robust system for reporting how schools are doing, that works for different audiences such as school administrators and parents, who have different needs.
- Stakeholders are hopeful that the school quality indicator will become more significant as data becomes available. Particularly, inclusion of kindergarten readiness and career and college readiness.

### Assessments

Stakeholders hope that the department will take advantage of opportunities to explore alternative assessments in the future.

### Early Learning

Advocates expressed concern with a lack of early childhood and would like to see it reflected more in the plan overall.

### Educator Quality

- With the new tiered licensure model in our state, stakeholders – particularly teachers – are concerned that defining what it means to be an “effective” teacher will be difficult.
- Stakeholders also emphasized the importance of providing professional development for teachers, administrators and support staff as much as possible, including early childhood educators and leaders.

## English Learners

- Stakeholders are hopeful that the new standardized entrance and exit criteria for English learners will ease frustrations of families who may move around and currently experience inconsistencies in services.
- There is also a desire to set ambitious long-term proficiency goal for English learners.

## Equity

Equity has been at the center of the work around the new ESSA state plan, and stakeholders appreciate that and recognize the potential for the new plan to help ensure all students in Minnesota are receiving an excellent education, while also noting that we have more work to do on this.

## Family Engagement

- Participants from all groups expressed the importance of including families, especially in the Comprehensive Needs Assessment.
- Parents would like to receive training on how to best advocate for their children, so that they can be more informed when engaging with their district or school.
- Additional supports for English learners and their families to help them better engage.

## School Support and Improvement

- Stakeholders would like to see more rigorous exit criteria, more than just “not being identified again.” Schools should also show improvement in order to exit support and improvement status.
- Many stakeholders expressed interest in the Comprehensive Needs Assessment process, and would like to be involved and be able to see what the results of these assessments are. There is also a lot of interest in a list of evidence-based tools that are used to make these assessments, which is already available as a resource. Advocates in the early childhood community would like to see early childhood programming availability as part of the needs assessments.

## Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholders appreciated how in-depth the engagement process was throughout the development of the state plan, and would like to see that continue throughout implementation of ESSA.

## Well-Rounded Education

This has been an important part of the state plan development process since day one, and participants made sure to remind the department again and again how important it is that every student in Minnesota receives a well-rounded education.

- Ensure the arts, physical education, libraries, science, social studies, career and technical education and many more important subjects are being offered to students during the school day.
- Students in English learner programs, special education students, and other high-need areas should still be offered a wide variety of subjects and learning opportunities, not taken out of these offerings to have more time for math and reading.