



Where Minnesota School Boards Learn to Lead

August 22, 2017

Commissioner Brenda Cassellius
Minnesota Department of Education
1500 West Highway 36
Roseville, MN 55113

Dear Commissioner Cassellius:

The Minnesota School Boards Association (MSBA) appreciates the work you and your team have exhibited in drafting the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) plan for Minnesota. We recognize the time and effort put forth and the conscientious inclusion of various stakeholders throughout our state. MSBA is appreciative of the opportunity to collaborate and contribute in the process over the last year. Thank you for the opportunity to respond to Minnesota's ESSA draft plan.

In general, MSBA is encouraged with the major components of the plan. We believe the current framework of the plan provides a transparent, fair, and balanced accountability system for our students and school districts. We believe the Minnesota plan maintains the spirit of the Elementary Secondary Education Act (ESEA) by looking at the accountability system through the equity lens—a positive step toward ensuring underrepresented groups are not hidden within averages. More specifically, we appreciate the shift away from a punitive system and the emphasis of a support system for schools identified as needing assistance. We applaud the alignment with the World's Best Workforce, incorporating district progress over the past two years. Finally, selecting consistent attendance as the fifth indicator will provide an initial transition that will not overburden districts with additional reporting.

MSBA would encourage the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) to

- continue to align the new statewide goals and the World's Best Workforce goals, wherever possible, to emphasize one simple and understandable accountability system.
- review the high school graduation rate indicator. The current plan requires 67 percent graduation rate for a school or any student group within a school. This will likely mean almost 200 schools will be identified as needing comprehensive support, which goes beyond ESSA requirements. The MDE should immediately and actively pursue funding for high schools, so that districts may begin working to ensure all student subgroups meet or exceed the 67 percent graduation rate. If Minnesota is to be truly effective in reaching consistent attendance, grants must be made available to districts to assist them in analyzing data and initiating programs to reduce absenteeism.
- include the seven-year graduation rates, along with the four-year, which more accurately reflect public education's commitment to learners up to age 21. We urge the MDE to push back on this issue and include a seven-year graduation rate in the equation.

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- find another avenue to reach the 95 percent participation rate. MSBA strongly believes a fair and honest accountability system should not punish a school, by counting students who exercise their legal right to not take the test, as non-proficient. Once again, this exceeds ESSA requirements. Another area of concern is the MDE's decision to eliminate a half point for students who "partially meet standards." We believe students who "partially meet standards" are a part of the equation and must be considered to accurately depict the learning taking place at all grade levels.
- include a waiver exemption for students with medical or emotional needs in the "Consistent Attendance" calculation.

On a final note, financial resources are always a concern. MSBA continues to share our apprehension about how our state will pay for a plan of this extent, chiefly the intention to expand the roles and responsibilities of the Regional Centers of Excellence. As with any expansion, cost is a major factor in implementation and sustainability.

We strongly support continued stakeholder input, especially on several specific topics – testing and the need for more flexibility, particularly the potential to substitute high school MCAs with the ACT/SAT; adding career and college readiness to Minnesota's plan; and, finally, selecting criteria to recognize successful schools. MSBA and its members look forward to being part of these discussions.

Sincerely,



Kirk Schneidawind, Executive Director
Minnesota School Boards Association

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