



August 1, 2017

Dr. Michael Johnson  
Commissioner of Education and Early Development  
Alaska Department of Education and Early Development  
801 W 10Th St., Ste 200  
Juneau, AK 99801-1878

Dear Dr. Johnson,

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and the organizations listed below, we urge you to ensure that children receive the support and attention they deserve through the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in Alaska. As you prepare to submit your plan to the U.S Department of Education for review and approval before the September 18, 2017 deadline, it is critical that your plan meets the letter and purpose of the law to provide, “all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and close educational achievement gaps.” Given your role as a state leader and educator, you have a responsibility to students and taxpayers and we wanted to call your attention to the following state plan elements that are critical for realizing the promise of the law to support the education of all children in your state.

Your ESSA plan is a declaration of your commitment to the education of all children. This plan should set meaningful, aggressive, consistent, and achievable goals for ensuring children are prepared for future success and explain how the state will hold schools and districts responsible for educating *all* students. Parents and communities send children to school every day with the expectation that that school is doing its job and preparing their children for future success. They have the right to know that their state is committed to their children’s education and has a plan for what to do when a school is not educating well and needs help. The ESSA state plan is one way your state can demonstrate a serious commitment to the future success of all children, by creating a plan that explains how you will identify schools and districts that are not doing well and what you will do to help them improve.

Your state plan for ensuring all schools and districts are educating children well is only as good as the goals your plan sets for schools to improve and the degree to which goals drive the accountability system. Making sure that all children have a high-quality education that prepares them for the future is a responsibility that we all share—parents, grandparents, teachers, neighbors, advocates and state officials—we urge to you hold schools and districts accountable for their vital roles in ensuring all children can succeed.

Every child, no matter their unique challenges, their unique needs, or where they come from, should have the opportunity to grow up to be what they dream. The chances a child has to pursue their dreams should not depend on their zip code or their background. ***An ESSA plan that allows schools to shirk their responsibility to all children, especially groups of children who have been shortchanged for too long, fails to meet the intent of the law.***

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We urge you to include the following elements in your ESSA plan:

**Demonstrate that schools will be held accountable for disaggregated student achievement.** Data about African-American students, Latino students, Asian American students, Native students, White students, low-income students, English learners, and students with disabilities should each be included separately in your state accountability system and so-called “super-subgroups” should not be included as they contradict the purpose of disaggregated student data. N-sizes should be sufficiently small so as to include as many individual student groups as possible. School ratings should reflect the performance of each group of students and not simply the average of all students. Your plan should meaningfully define the term “consistently underperforming” and identify schools to receive targeted support and improvement when any group of students is consistently underperforming. You have a responsibility to ensure that data on how well schools are serving all groups of students is not obscured.

**Indicators in school ratings should be consistent across the state, disaggregated for each group of students, and focused on student achievement.** A statewide accountability system will only be statewide if the indicators used to measure school quality are the same (across a grade span) for all schools and districts. Data must also be provided for each subgroup of students in a school and therefore measures that are only available at the school or classroom level should not be used. While there is value in multiple measures of school quality, the focus on college- and career-readiness for students should not be obscured by other data that do not align to that goal of student success. Your state plan should include indicators in accountability systems that align to the purposes of ESSA’s accountability requirements and high achievement for students.

**Include evidence of parent and community engagement and tribal consultation in the plan’s development and an ongoing plan to engage and consult these crucial stakeholders.** Besides a student herself, no one has more to gain or lose from the quality of a school than a child’s parents and communities. Your state should include parents, including parents who do not speak English and parents with disabilities, at all steps along the development of the plan and should demonstrate an intention to continue engaging parents and communities, especially for marginalized students. Similarly, your state is obligated to consult with tribal leaders in the development of the plan to ensure that their children and citizens are supported and their needs are addressed. Your state plan should show that parents, communities, and tribes are being heard in the implementation of ESSA.

**Emphasize the four-year graduation rate in the accountability system.** The goal of K-12 education is for students to graduate from high school college and career ready. It is therefore critical that your state plan uses an accurate four-year adjusted cohort rate to hold schools accountable for student success. The four-year rate should be used when setting goals, as an indicator in state ratings, and when identifying high schools with a graduation rate below 67 percent for comprehensive support. Your state plan could use an extended year graduation rate to support students who take longer than four years to graduate from high school; however, it should emphasize graduation within four years. Your state plan should include a four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate as an indicator in the state accountability system.

**Include a separate measure of English language proficiency for English learners in the accountability system.**

The inclusion of English language acquisition in ESSA's accountability requirements was one of the most important changes made to this reauthorization of the law. The new attention to whether or not students are making progress toward English fluency will help to ensure that English learners receive the supports and services to which they are entitled. Your state plan must include an English language proficiency indicator and long-term goals for English language proficiency.

**Meaningfully hold schools accountable in the accountability system if fewer than 95 percent of all students or of any subgroup of students were not included in the state's assessment.**

Inclusion in the state's assessment is important to ensuring that a student's learning matters to a school and that the school is attending to the educational needs of that student. Weak or meaningless consequences for failing to meet the participation rate requirement, or loopholes created by other policies, could lead to a repeat of past practice in which historically marginalized students were purposefully excluded from the assessment in order to obscure student outcomes. Transparency and validity of assessment data are also at risk. Your plan should hold schools accountable for including all students in assessments.

**Include effective strategies for supporting districts to improve conditions for student learning.**

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The Every Student Succeeds Act is, as the latest reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, rooted in civil rights principles of equal opportunity in education. It is designed to help ensure that all children, no matter who they are or where they come from, have the opportunity to succeed. Failing to comply with the law or developing state policies counter to the success of all students only keeps children trapped and disadvantaged at a time when policymakers and educators should be working to build and support schools that nurture and empower our children to become their best selves. This is what our nation's children deserve.

Children go to school every day with the assumption that schools are prepared and invested in seeing them succeed. Your state has a responsibility to build and support the kind of schools that enable all children to reach their fullest potential. Your role is more critical than ever and you must take responsibility for the future of our children.

As your state proceeds with its weighty task of developing your ESSA plan, you must determine whether or not your plan will advance educational equity and serve the interests of all children. Low-income children, children of color, children with disabilities, English learners, and Native children have been left behind for far too long and deserve no less than robust and thorough state policy to ensure an excellent

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National Urban League  
New Leaders  
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center  
Southern Poverty Law Center  
Teach Plus  
TNTP  
UnidosUS (formerly NCLR)



August 1, 2017

Mr. Michael Sentance  
State Superintendent of Education  
Alabama Department of Education  
50 N Ripley St.  
Montgomery, AL 36130-1001

Dear Mr. Sentance,

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and the organizations listed below, we urge you to ensure that children receive the support and attention they deserve through the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in Alabama. As you prepare to submit your plan to the U.S Department of Education for review and approval before the September 18, 2017 deadline, it is critical that your plan meets the letter and purpose of the law to provide, “all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and close educational achievement gaps.” Given your role as a state leader and educator, you have a responsibility to students and taxpayers and we wanted to call your attention to the following state plan elements that are critical for realizing the promise of the law to support the education of all children in your state.

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August 1, 2017

Mr. Johnny Key  
Commissioner of Education  
Arkansas Department of Education  
Four Capitol Mall, Room 304-A  
Little Rock, AR 72201

Dear Mr. Key,

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and the organizations listed below, we urge you to ensure that children receive the support and attention they deserve through the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in Arkansas. As you prepare to submit your plan to the U.S Department of Education for review and approval before the September 18, 2017 deadline, it is critical that your plan meets the letter and purpose of the law to provide, “all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and close educational achievement gaps.” Given your role as a state leader and educator, you have a responsibility to students and taxpayers and we wanted to call your attention to the following state plan elements that are critical for realizing the promise of the law to support the education of all children in your state.

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August 1, 2017

Mr. Tom Torlakson  
State Superintendent of Public Instruction  
California Department of Education  
1430 N St., Suite 5602  
Sacramento, CA 95814-5901

Dear Mr. Torlakson,

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and the organizations listed below, we urge you to ensure that children receive the support and attention they deserve through the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in California. As you prepare to submit your plan to the U.S Department of Education for review and approval before the September 18, 2017 deadline, it is critical that your plan meets the letter and purpose of the law to provide, “all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and close educational achievement gaps.” Given your role as a state leader and educator, you have a responsibility to students and taxpayers and we wanted to call your attention to the following state plan elements that are critical for realizing the promise of the law to support the education of all children in your state.

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Inclusion in the state's assessment is important to ensuring that a student's learning matters to a school and that the school is attending to the educational needs of that student. Weak or meaningless consequences for failing to meet the participation rate requirement, or loopholes created by other policies, could lead to a repeat of past practice in which historically marginalized students were purposefully excluded from the assessment in order to obscure student outcomes. Transparency and validity of assessment data are also at risk. Your plan should hold schools accountable for including all students in assessments.

**Include effective strategies for supporting districts to improve conditions for student learning.**

ESSA requires states to describe how they will assist districts to reduce: bullying and harassment, the overuse of exclusionary discipline practices (e.g. suspensions, expulsions), school-based arrests, and seclusion and restraint. Marginalized students, including students of color, students with disabilities, and LGBTQ students, are disproportionately affected by bullying and harassment and exclusionary or overly punitive discipline, which can negatively impact academic progress. Your state should take meaningful steps to address these issues by providing districts with funding and other resources. Your state plan must describe the specific actions that will be taken to support positive conditions for student learning, especially for historically marginalized students.

The Every Student Succeeds Act is, as the latest reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, rooted in civil rights principles of equal opportunity in education. It is designed to help ensure that all children, no matter who they are or where they come from, have the opportunity to succeed. Failing to comply with the law or developing state policies counter to the success of all students only keeps children trapped and disadvantaged at a time when policymakers and educators should be working to build and support schools that nurture and empower our children to become their best selves. This is what our nation's children deserve.

Children go to school every day with the assumption that schools are prepared and invested in seeing them succeed. Your state has a responsibility to build and support the kind of schools that enable all children to reach their fullest potential. Your role is more critical than ever and you must take responsibility for the future of our children.

As your state proceeds with its weighty task of developing your ESSA plan, you must determine whether or not your plan will advance educational equity and serve the interests of all children. Low-income children, children of color, children with disabilities, English learners, and Native children have been left behind for far too long and deserve no less than robust and thorough state policy to ensure an excellent



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and equitable education. We appreciate your attention to our concerns. Please do not hesitate to contact Liz King, Leadership Conference director of education policy, at [king@civilrights.org](mailto:king@civilrights.org) or (202)466-0087.

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TNTP  
UnidosUS (formerly NCLR)



August 1, 2017

Ms. Pam Stewart  
Commissioner of Education  
Office of the Commissioner  
325 West Gaines St.  
Tallahassee, FL 32399

Dear Ms. Stewart,

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and the organizations listed below, we urge you to ensure that children receive the support and attention they deserve through the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in Florida. As you prepare to submit your plan to the U.S Department of Education for review and approval before the September 18, 2017 deadline, it is critical that your plan meets the letter and purpose of the law to provide, “all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and close educational achievement gaps.” Given your role as a state leader and educator, you have a responsibility to students and taxpayers and we wanted to call your attention to the following state plan elements that are critical for realizing the promise of the law to support the education of all children in your state.

Your ESSA plan is a declaration of your commitment to the education of all children. This plan should set meaningful, aggressive, consistent, and achievable goals for ensuring children are prepared for future success and explain how the state will hold schools and districts responsible for educating *all* students. Parents and communities send children to school every day with the expectation that that school is doing its job and preparing their children for future success. They have the right to know that their state is committed to their children’s education and has a plan for what to do when a school is not educating well and needs help. The ESSA state plan is one way your state can demonstrate a serious commitment to the future success of all children, by creating a plan that explains how you will identify schools and districts that are not doing well and what you will do to help them improve.

Your state plan for ensuring all schools and districts are educating children well is only as good as the goals your plan sets for schools to improve and the degree to which goals drive the accountability system. Making sure that all children have a high-quality education that prepares them for the future is a responsibility that we all share—parents, grandparents, teachers, neighbors, advocates and state officials—we urge to you hold schools and districts accountable for their vital roles in ensuring all children can succeed.

Every child, no matter their unique challenges, their unique needs, or where they come from, should have the opportunity to grow up to be what they dream. The chances a child has to pursue their dreams should not depend on their zip code or their background. ***An ESSA plan that allows schools to shirk their responsibility to all children, especially groups of children who have been shortchanged for too long, fails to meet the intent of the law.***

August 1, 2017



We urge you to include the following elements in your ESSA plan:

**Demonstrate that schools will be held accountable for disaggregated student achievement.** Data about African-American students, Latino students, Asian American students, Native students, White students, low-income students, English learners, and students with disabilities should each be included separately in your state accountability system and so-called “super-subgroups” should not be included as they contradict the purpose of disaggregated student data. N-sizes should be sufficiently small so as to include as many individual student groups as possible. School ratings should reflect the performance of each group of students and not simply the average of all students. Your plan should meaningfully define the term “consistently underperforming” and identify schools to receive targeted support and improvement when any group of students is consistently underperforming. You have a responsibility to ensure that data on how well schools are serving all groups of students is not obscured.

**Indicators in school ratings should be consistent across the state, disaggregated for each group of students, and focused on student achievement.** A statewide accountability system will only be statewide if the indicators used to measure school quality are the same (across a grade span) for all schools and districts. Data must also be provided for each subgroup of students in a school and therefore measures that are only available at the school or classroom level should not be used. While there is value in multiple measures of school quality, the focus on college- and career-readiness for students should not be obscured by other data that do not align to that goal of student success. Your state plan should include indicators in accountability systems that align to the purposes of ESSA’s accountability requirements and high achievement for students.

**Include evidence of parent and community engagement and tribal consultation in the plan’s development and an ongoing plan to engage and consult these crucial stakeholders.** Besides a student herself, no one has more to gain or lose from the quality of a school than a child’s parents and communities. Your state should include parents, including parents who do not speak English and parents with disabilities, at all steps along the development of the plan and should demonstrate an intention to continue engaging parents and communities, especially for marginalized students. Similarly, your state is obligated to consult with tribal leaders in the development of the plan to ensure that their children and citizens are supported and their needs are addressed. Your state plan should show that parents, communities, and tribes are being heard in the implementation of ESSA.

**Emphasize the four-year graduation rate in the accountability system.** The goal of K-12 education is for students to graduate from high school college and career ready. It is therefore critical that your state plan uses an accurate four-year adjusted cohort rate to hold schools accountable for student success. The four-year rate should be used when setting goals, as an indicator in state ratings, and when identifying high schools with a graduation rate below 67 percent for comprehensive support. Your state plan could use an extended year graduation rate to support students who take longer than four years to graduate from high school; however, it should emphasize graduation within four years. Your state plan should include a four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate as an indicator in the state accountability system.

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As your state proceeds with its weighty task of developing your ESSA plan, you must determine whether or not your plan will advance educational equity and serve the interests of all children. Low-income children, children of color, children with disabilities, English learners, and Native children have been left behind for far too long and deserve no less than robust and thorough state policy to ensure an excellent

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National Urban League  
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UnidosUS (formerly NCLR)



August 1, 2017

Mr. Richard Woods  
State School Superintendent  
Georgia Department of Education  
205 Jesse Hill Jr. Dr. SE  
Atlanta, GA 30334

Dear Mr. Woods,

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and the organizations listed below, we urge you to ensure that children receive the support and attention they deserve through the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in Georgia. As you prepare to submit your plan to the U.S Department of Education for review and approval before the September 18, 2017 deadline, it is critical that your plan meets the letter and purpose of the law to provide, “all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and close educational achievement gaps.” Given your role as a state leader and educator, you have a responsibility to students and taxpayers and we wanted to call your attention to the following state plan elements that are critical for realizing the promise of the law to support the education of all children in your state.

Your ESSA plan is a declaration of your commitment to the education of all children. This plan should set meaningful, aggressive, consistent, and achievable goals for ensuring children are prepared for future success and explain how the state will hold schools and districts responsible for educating *all* students. Parents and communities send children to school every day with the expectation that that school is doing its job and preparing their children for future success. They have the right to know that their state is committed to their children’s education and has a plan for what to do when a school is not educating well and needs help. The ESSA state plan is one way your state can demonstrate a serious commitment to the future success of all children, by creating a plan that explains how you will identify schools and districts that are not doing well and what you will do to help them improve.

Your state plan for ensuring all schools and districts are educating children well is only as good as the goals your plan sets for schools to improve and the degree to which goals drive the accountability system. Making sure that all children have a high-quality education that prepares them for the future is a responsibility that we all share—parents, grandparents, teachers, neighbors, advocates and state officials—we urge to you hold schools and districts accountable for their vital roles in ensuring all children can succeed.

Every child, no matter their unique challenges, their unique needs, or where they come from, should have the opportunity to grow up to be what they dream. The chances a child has to pursue their dreams should not depend on their zip code or their background. ***An ESSA plan that allows schools to shirk their responsibility to all children, especially groups of children who have been shortchanged for too long, fails to meet the intent of the law.***

August 1, 2017



We urge you to include the following elements in your ESSA plan:

**Demonstrate that schools will be held accountable for disaggregated student achievement.** Data about African-American students, Latino students, Asian American students, Native students, White students, low-income students, English learners, and students with disabilities should each be included separately in your state accountability system and so-called “super-subgroups” should not be included as they contradict the purpose of disaggregated student data. N-sizes should be sufficiently small so as to include as many individual student groups as possible. School ratings should reflect the performance of each group of students and not simply the average of all students. Your plan should meaningfully define the term “consistently underperforming” and identify schools to receive targeted support and improvement when any group of students is consistently underperforming. You have a responsibility to ensure that data on how well schools are serving all groups of students is not obscured.

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**Include evidence of parent and community engagement and tribal consultation in the plan’s development and an ongoing plan to engage and consult these crucial stakeholders.** Besides a student herself, no one has more to gain or lose from the quality of a school than a child’s parents and communities. Your state should include parents, including parents who do not speak English and parents with disabilities, at all steps along the development of the plan and should demonstrate an intention to continue engaging parents and communities, especially for marginalized students. Similarly, your state is obligated to consult with tribal leaders in the development of the plan to ensure that their children and citizens are supported and their needs are addressed. Your state plan should show that parents, communities, and tribes are being heard in the implementation of ESSA.

**Emphasize the four-year graduation rate in the accountability system.** The goal of K-12 education is for students to graduate from high school college and career ready. It is therefore critical that your state plan uses an accurate four-year adjusted cohort rate to hold schools accountable for student success. The four-year rate should be used when setting goals, as an indicator in state ratings, and when identifying high schools with a graduation rate below 67 percent for comprehensive support. Your state plan could use an extended year graduation rate to support students who take longer than four years to graduate from high school; however, it should emphasize graduation within four years. Your state plan should include a four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate as an indicator in the state accountability system.



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UnidosUS (formerly NCLR)



August 1, 2017

Ms. Kathryn Matayoshi  
State Superintendent of Education  
Hawai'i Department of Education  
1390 Miller St.  
Honolulu, HI 96813

Dear Ms. Matayoshi,

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and the organizations listed below, we urge you to ensure that children receive the support and attention they deserve through the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in Hawaii. As you prepare to submit your plan to the U.S Department of Education for review and approval before the September 18, 2017 deadline, it is critical that your plan meets the letter and purpose of the law to provide, “all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and close educational achievement gaps.” Given your role as a state leader and educator, you have a responsibility to students and taxpayers and we wanted to call your attention to the following state plan elements that are critical for realizing the promise of the law to support the education of all children in your state.

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August 1, 2017



We urge you to include the following elements in your ESSA plan:

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Southern Poverty Law Center  
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UnidosUS (formerly NCLR)



August 1, 2017

Mr. Ryan Wise  
Director of Education  
Iowa Department of Education  
400 E 14th St.  
Des Moines, IA 50319-0146

Dear Mr. Wise,

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and the organizations listed below, we urge you to ensure that children receive the support and attention they deserve through the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in Iowa. As you prepare to submit your plan to the U.S Department of Education for review and approval before the September 18, 2017 deadline, it is critical that your plan meets the letter and purpose of the law to provide, “all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and close educational achievement gaps.” Given your role as a state leader and educator, you have a responsibility to students and taxpayers and we wanted to call your attention to the following state plan elements that are critical for realizing the promise of the law to support the education of all children in your state.

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Your state plan for ensuring all schools and districts are educating children well is only as good as the goals your plan sets for schools to improve and the degree to which goals drive the accountability system. Making sure that all children have a high-quality education that prepares them for the future is a responsibility that we all share—parents, grandparents, teachers, neighbors, advocates and state officials—we urge to you hold schools and districts accountable for their vital roles in ensuring all children can succeed.

Every child, no matter their unique challenges, their unique needs, or where they come from, should have the opportunity to grow up to be what they dream. The chances a child has to pursue their dreams should not depend on their zip code or their background. ***An ESSA plan that allows schools to shirk their responsibility to all children, especially groups of children who have been shortchanged for too long, fails to meet the intent of the law.***



August 1, 2017



We urge you to include the following elements in your ESSA plan:

**Demonstrate that schools will be held accountable for disaggregated student achievement.** Data about African-American students, Latino students, Asian American students, Native students, White students, low-income students, English learners, and students with disabilities should each be included separately in your state accountability system and so-called “super-subgroups” should not be included as they contradict the purpose of disaggregated student data. N-sizes should be sufficiently small so as to include as many individual student groups as possible. School ratings should reflect the performance of each group of students and not simply the average of all students. Your plan should meaningfully define the term “consistently underperforming” and identify schools to receive targeted support and improvement when any group of students is consistently underperforming. You have a responsibility to ensure that data on how well schools are serving all groups of students is not obscured.

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ESSA requires states to describe how they will assist districts to reduce: bullying and harassment, the overuse of exclusionary discipline practices (e.g. suspensions, expulsions), school-based arrests, and seclusion and restraint. Marginalized students, including students of color, students with disabilities, and LGBTQ students, are disproportionately affected by bullying and harassment and exclusionary or overly punitive discipline, which can negatively impact academic progress. Your state should take meaningful steps to address these issues by providing districts with funding and other resources. Your state plan must describe the specific actions that will be taken to support positive conditions for student learning, especially for historically marginalized students.

The Every Student Succeeds Act is, as the latest reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, rooted in civil rights principles of equal opportunity in education. It is designed to help ensure that all children, no matter who they are or where they come from, have the opportunity to succeed. Failing to comply with the law or developing state policies counter to the success of all students only keeps children trapped and disadvantaged at a time when policymakers and educators should be working to build and support schools that nurture and empower our children to become their best selves. This is what our nation's children deserve.

Children go to school every day with the assumption that schools are prepared and invested in seeing them succeed. Your state has a responsibility to build and support the kind of schools that enable all children to reach their fullest potential. Your role is more critical than ever and you must take responsibility for the future of our children.

As your state proceeds with its weighty task of developing your ESSA plan, you must determine whether or not your plan will advance educational equity and serve the interests of all children. Low-income children, children of color, children with disabilities, English learners, and Native children have been left behind for far too long and deserve no less than robust and thorough state policy to ensure an excellent

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National Urban League  
New Leaders  
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center  
Southern Poverty Law Center  
Teach Plus  
TNTP  
UnidosUS (formerly NCLR)



August 1, 2017

Ms. Sherri Ybarra  
Superintendent of Public Instruction  
Idaho State Department of Education  
650 West State St  
Boise, ID 83702

Dear Ms. Ybarra,

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and the organizations listed below, we urge you to ensure that children receive the support and attention they deserve through the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in Idaho. As you prepare to submit your plan to the U.S Department of Education for review and approval before the September 18, 2017 deadline, it is critical that your plan meets the letter and purpose of the law to provide, “all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and close educational achievement gaps.” Given your role as a state leader and educator, you have a responsibility to students and taxpayers and we wanted to call your attention to the following state plan elements that are critical for realizing the promise of the law to support the education of all children in your state.

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National Urban League  
New Leaders  
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center  
Southern Poverty Law Center  
Teach Plus  
TNTP  
UnidosUS (formerly NCLR)





August 1, 2017

Dr. Jennifer McCormick  
Superintendent of Public Instruction  
Indiana Department of Education  
115 W. Washington St.  
Indianapolis, IN 46204

Dear Dr. McCormick,

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and the organizations listed below, we urge you to ensure that children receive the support and attention they deserve through the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in Indiana. As you prepare to submit your plan to the U.S Department of Education for review and approval before the September 18, 2017 deadline, it is critical that your plan meets the letter and purpose of the law to provide, “all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and close educational achievement gaps.” Given your role as a state leader and educator, you have a responsibility to students and taxpayers and we wanted to call your attention to the following state plan elements that are critical for realizing the promise of the law to support the education of all children in your state.

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August 1, 2017

Dr. Randy Watson  
Commissioner of Education  
Kansas State Department of Education  
900 SW Jackson St.  
Topeka, KS 66612

Dear Dr. Watson,

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and the organizations listed below, we urge you to ensure that children receive the support and attention they deserve through the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in Kansas. As you prepare to submit your plan to the U.S Department of Education for review and approval before the September 18, 2017 deadline, it is critical that your plan meets the letter and purpose of the law to provide, “all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and close educational achievement gaps.” Given your role as a state leader and educator, you have a responsibility to students and taxpayers and we wanted to call your attention to the following state plan elements that are critical for realizing the promise of the law to support the education of all children in your state.

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The Every Student Succeeds Act is, as the latest reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, rooted in civil rights principles of equal opportunity in education. It is designed to help ensure that all children, no matter who they are or where they come from, have the opportunity to succeed. Failing to comply with the law or developing state policies counter to the success of all students only keeps children trapped and disadvantaged at a time when policymakers and educators should be working to build and support schools that nurture and empower our children to become their best selves. This is what our nation's children deserve.

Children go to school every day with the assumption that schools are prepared and invested in seeing them succeed. Your state has a responsibility to build and support the kind of schools that enable all children to reach their fullest potential. Your role is more critical than ever and you must take responsibility for the future of our children.

As your state proceeds with its weighty task of developing your ESSA plan, you must determine whether or not your plan will advance educational equity and serve the interests of all children. Low-income children, children of color, children with disabilities, English learners, and Native children have been left behind for far too long and deserve no less than robust and thorough state policy to ensure an excellent



August 1, 2017



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Teach Plus  
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UnidosUS (formerly NCLR)



August 1, 2017

Dr. Stephen Pruitt  
Commissioner of Education  
Kentucky Department of Education  
300 Sower Blvd., Fifth Floor  
Frankfort, KY 40601

Dear Dr. Pruitt,

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and the organizations listed below, we urge you to ensure that children receive the support and attention they deserve through the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in Kentucky. As you prepare to submit your plan to the U.S Department of Education for review and approval before the September 18, 2017 deadline, it is critical that your plan meets the letter and purpose of the law to provide, “all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and close educational achievement gaps.” Given your role as a state leader and educator, you have a responsibility to students and taxpayers and we wanted to call your attention to the following state plan elements that are critical for realizing the promise of the law to support the education of all children in your state.

Your ESSA plan is a declaration of your commitment to the education of all children. This plan should set meaningful, aggressive, consistent, and achievable goals for ensuring children are prepared for future success and explain how the state will hold schools and districts responsible for educating *all* students. Parents and communities send children to school every day with the expectation that that school is doing its job and preparing their children for future success. They have the right to know that their state is committed to their children’s education and has a plan for what to do when a school is not educating well and needs help. The ESSA state plan is one way your state can demonstrate a serious commitment to the future success of all children, by creating a plan that explains how you will identify schools and districts that are not doing well and what you will do to help them improve.

Your state plan for ensuring all schools and districts are educating children well is only as good as the goals your plan sets for schools to improve and the degree to which goals drive the accountability system. Making sure that all children have a high-quality education that prepares them for the future is a responsibility that we all share—parents, grandparents, teachers, neighbors, advocates and state officials—we urge to you hold schools and districts accountable for their vital roles in ensuring all children can succeed.

Every child, no matter their unique challenges, their unique needs, or where they come from, should have the opportunity to grow up to be what they dream. The chances a child has to pursue their dreams should not depend on their zip code or their background. ***An ESSA plan that allows schools to shirk their responsibility to all children, especially groups of children who have been shortchanged for too long, fails to meet the intent of the law.***

August 1, 2017



We urge you to include the following elements in your ESSA plan:

**Demonstrate that schools will be held accountable for disaggregated student achievement.** Data about African-American students, Latino students, Asian American students, Native students, White students, low-income students, English learners, and students with disabilities should each be included separately in your state accountability system and so-called “super-subgroups” should not be included as they contradict the purpose of disaggregated student data. N-sizes should be sufficiently small so as to include as many individual student groups as possible. School ratings should reflect the performance of each group of students and not simply the average of all students. Your plan should meaningfully define the term “consistently underperforming” and identify schools to receive targeted support and improvement when any group of students is consistently underperforming. You have a responsibility to ensure that data on how well schools are serving all groups of students is not obscured.

**Indicators in school ratings should be consistent across the state, disaggregated for each group of students, and focused on student achievement.** A statewide accountability system will only be statewide if the indicators used to measure school quality are the same (across a grade span) for all schools and districts. Data must also be provided for each subgroup of students in a school and therefore measures that are only available at the school or classroom level should not be used. While there is value in multiple measures of school quality, the focus on college- and career-readiness for students should not be obscured by other data that do not align to that goal of student success. Your state plan should include indicators in accountability systems that align to the purposes of ESSA’s accountability requirements and high achievement for students.

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UnidosUS (formerly NCLR)



August 1, 2017

Dr. Karen Salmon  
State Superintendent of Schools  
Maryland State Department of Education  
200 West Baltimore St.  
Baltimore, MD 21201-2595

Dear Dr. Salmon,

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and the organizations listed below, we urge you to ensure that children receive the support and attention they deserve through the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in Maryland. As you prepare to submit your plan to the U.S Department of Education for review and approval before the September 18, 2017 deadline, it is critical that your plan meets the letter and purpose of the law to provide, “all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and close educational achievement gaps.” Given your role as a state leader and educator, you have a responsibility to students and taxpayers and we wanted to call your attention to the following state plan elements that are critical for realizing the promise of the law to support the education of all children in your state.

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**Emphasize the four-year graduation rate in the accountability system.** The goal of K-12 education is for students to graduate from high school college and career ready. It is therefore critical that your state plan uses an accurate four-year adjusted cohort rate to hold schools accountable for student success. The four-year rate should be used when setting goals, as an indicator in state ratings, and when identifying high schools with a graduation rate below 67 percent for comprehensive support. Your state plan could use an extended year graduation rate to support students who take longer than four years to graduate from high school; however, it should emphasize graduation within four years. Your state plan should include a four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate as an indicator in the state accountability system.



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August 1, 2017

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

Dear Dr. Cassellius,

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and the organizations listed below, we urge you to ensure that children receive the support and attention they deserve through the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in Minnesota. As you prepare to submit your plan to the U.S Department of Education for review and approval before the September 18, 2017 deadline, it is critical that your plan meets the letter and purpose of the law to provide, “all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and close educational achievement gaps.” Given your role as a state leader and educator, you have a responsibility to students and taxpayers and we wanted to call your attention to the following state plan elements that are critical for realizing the promise of the law to support the education of all children in your state.

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UnidosUS (formerly NCLR)

August 1, 2017



August 1, 2017

Dr. Margie Vandeven  
Commissioner of Education  
Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education  
205 Jefferson St.  
Jefferson City, MO 65101

Dear Dr. Vandeven,

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and the organizations listed below, we urge you to ensure that children receive the support and attention they deserve through the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in Missouri. As you prepare to submit your plan to the U.S Department of Education for review and approval before the September 18, 2017 deadline, it is critical that your plan meets the letter and purpose of the law to provide, “all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and close educational achievement gaps.” Given your role as a state leader and educator, you have a responsibility to students and taxpayers and we wanted to call your attention to the following state plan elements that are critical for realizing the promise of the law to support the education of all children in your state.

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August 1, 2017



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**Demonstrate that schools will be held accountable for disaggregated student achievement.** Data about African-American students, Latino students, Asian American students, Native students, White students, low-income students, English learners, and students with disabilities should each be included separately in your state accountability system and so-called “super-subgroups” should not be included as they contradict the purpose of disaggregated student data. N-sizes should be sufficiently small so as to include as many individual student groups as possible. School ratings should reflect the performance of each group of students and not simply the average of all students. Your plan should meaningfully define the term “consistently underperforming” and identify schools to receive targeted support and improvement when any group of students is consistently underperforming. You have a responsibility to ensure that data on how well schools are serving all groups of students is not obscured.

**Indicators in school ratings should be consistent across the state, disaggregated for each group of students, and focused on student achievement.** A statewide accountability system will only be statewide if the indicators used to measure school quality are the same (across a grade span) for all schools and districts. Data must also be provided for each subgroup of students in a school and therefore measures that are only available at the school or classroom level should not be used. While there is value in multiple measures of school quality, the focus on college- and career-readiness for students should not be obscured by other data that do not align to that goal of student success. Your state plan should include indicators in accountability systems that align to the purposes of ESSA’s accountability requirements and high achievement for students.

**Include evidence of parent and community engagement and tribal consultation in the plan’s development and an ongoing plan to engage and consult these crucial stakeholders.** Besides a student herself, no one has more to gain or lose from the quality of a school than a child’s parents and communities. Your state should include parents, including parents who do not speak English and parents with disabilities, at all steps along the development of the plan and should demonstrate an intention to continue engaging parents and communities, especially for marginalized students. Similarly, your state is obligated to consult with tribal leaders in the development of the plan to ensure that their children and citizens are supported and their needs are addressed. Your state plan should show that parents, communities, and tribes are being heard in the implementation of ESSA.

**Emphasize the four-year graduation rate in the accountability system.** The goal of K-12 education is for students to graduate from high school college and career ready. It is therefore critical that your state plan uses an accurate four-year adjusted cohort rate to hold schools accountable for student success. The four-year rate should be used when setting goals, as an indicator in state ratings, and when identifying high schools with a graduation rate below 67 percent for comprehensive support. Your state plan could use an extended year graduation rate to support students who take longer than four years to graduate from high school; however, it should emphasize graduation within four years. Your state plan should include a four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate as an indicator in the state accountability system.

**Include a separate measure of English language proficiency for English learners in the accountability system.**

The inclusion of English language acquisition in ESSA's accountability requirements was one of the most important changes made to this reauthorization of the law. The new attention to whether or not students are making progress toward English fluency will help to ensure that English learners receive the supports and services to which they are entitled. Your state plan must include an English language proficiency indicator and long-term goals for English language proficiency.

**Meaningfully hold schools accountable in the accountability system if fewer than 95 percent of all students or of any subgroup of students were not included in the state's assessment.**

Inclusion in the state's assessment is important to ensuring that a student's learning matters to a school and that the school is attending to the educational needs of that student. Weak or meaningless consequences for failing to meet the participation rate requirement, or loopholes created by other policies, could lead to a repeat of past practice in which historically marginalized students were purposefully excluded from the assessment in order to obscure student outcomes. Transparency and validity of assessment data are also at risk. Your plan should hold schools accountable for including all students in assessments.

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ESSA requires states to describe how they will assist districts to reduce: bullying and harassment, the overuse of exclusionary discipline practices (e.g. suspensions, expulsions), school-based arrests, and seclusion and restraint. Marginalized students, including students of color, students with disabilities, and LGBTQ students, are disproportionately affected by bullying and harassment and exclusionary or overly punitive discipline, which can negatively impact academic progress. Your state should take meaningful steps to address these issues by providing districts with funding and other resources. Your state plan must describe the specific actions that will be taken to support positive conditions for student learning, especially for historically marginalized students.

The Every Student Succeeds Act is, as the latest reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, rooted in civil rights principles of equal opportunity in education. It is designed to help ensure that all children, no matter who they are or where they come from, have the opportunity to succeed. Failing to comply with the law or developing state policies counter to the success of all students only keeps children trapped and disadvantaged at a time when policymakers and educators should be working to build and support schools that nurture and empower our children to become their best selves. This is what our nation's children deserve.

Children go to school every day with the assumption that schools are prepared and invested in seeing them succeed. Your state has a responsibility to build and support the kind of schools that enable all children to reach their fullest potential. Your role is more critical than ever and you must take responsibility for the future of our children.

As your state proceeds with its weighty task of developing your ESSA plan, you must determine whether or not your plan will advance educational equity and serve the interests of all children. Low-income children, children of color, children with disabilities, English learners, and Native children have been left behind for far too long and deserve no less than robust and thorough state policy to ensure an excellent

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August 1, 2017

Dr. Carey M. Wright,  
State Superintendent  
Mississippi Department of Education  
P.O. Box 771  
Jackson, MS 39205-0771

Dear Dr. Wright,

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and the organizations listed below, we urge you to ensure that children receive the support and attention they deserve through the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in Mississippi. As you prepare to submit your plan to the U.S. Department of Education for review and approval before the September 18, 2017 deadline, it is critical that your plan meets the letter and purpose of the law to provide, “all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and close educational achievement gaps.” Given your role as a state leader and educator, you have a responsibility to students and taxpayers and we wanted to call your attention to the following state plan elements that are critical for realizing the promise of the law to support the education of all children in your state.

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Your state plan for ensuring all schools and districts are educating children well is only as good as the goals your plan sets for schools to improve and the degree to which goals drive the accountability system. Making sure that all children have a high-quality education that prepares them for the future is a responsibility that we all share—parents, grandparents, teachers, neighbors, advocates and state officials—we urge to you hold schools and districts accountable for their vital roles in ensuring all children can succeed.

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National Urban League  
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Teach Plus  
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August 1, 2017

Ms. Elsie Arntzen  
Superintendent of Public Instruction  
The Montana Office of Public Instruction  
P.O. Box 202501  
Helena, MT 59620-2501

Dear Ms. Arntzen,

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and the organizations listed below, we urge you to ensure that children receive the support and attention they deserve through the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in Montana. As you prepare to submit your plan to the U.S Department of Education for review and approval before the September 18, 2017 deadline, it is critical that your plan meets the letter and purpose of the law to provide, “all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and close educational achievement gaps.” Given your role as a state leader and educator, you have a responsibility to students and taxpayers and we wanted to call your attention to the following state plan elements that are critical for realizing the promise of the law to support the education of all children in your state.

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August 1, 2017

Mr. Mark Johnson  
State Superintendent of Public Instruction  
Office of the State Superintendent of Education  
6301 Mail Service Center  
Raleigh, NC 27699-6301

Dear Mr. Johnson,

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and the organizations listed below, we urge you to ensure that children receive the support and attention they deserve through the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in North Carolina. As you prepare to submit your plan to the U.S Department of Education for review and approval before the September 18, 2017 deadline, it is critical that your plan meets the letter and purpose of the law to provide, “all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and close educational achievement gaps.” Given your role as a state leader and educator, you have a responsibility to students and taxpayers and we wanted to call your attention to the following state plan elements that are critical for realizing the promise of the law to support the education of all children in your state.

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Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates  
Democrats for Education Reform  
Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund  
The Education Trust  
Educators for Excellence  
Judge David L. Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law  
Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law  
League of United Latin American Citizens  
NAACP  
National Center for Learning Disabilities  
National Down Syndrome Congress  
National Indian Education Association  
National Urban League  
New Leaders  
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center  
Southern Poverty Law Center  
Teach Plus  
TNTP  
UnidosUS (formerly NCLR)



August 1, 2017

Dr. Matthew Blomstedt  
Commissioner of Education  
Nebraska Department of Education  
P.O. Box 94987  
Lincoln, NE 68509-4987

Dear Dr. Blomstedt,

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and the organizations listed below, we urge you to ensure that children receive the support and attention they deserve through the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in Nebraska. As you prepare to submit your plan to the U.S Department of Education for review and approval before the September 18, 2017 deadline, it is critical that your plan meets the letter and purpose of the law to provide, “all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and close educational achievement gaps.” Given your role as a state leader and educator, you have a responsibility to students and taxpayers and we wanted to call your attention to the following state plan elements that are critical for realizing the promise of the law to support the education of all children in your state.

Your ESSA plan is a declaration of your commitment to the education of all children. This plan should set meaningful, aggressive, consistent, and achievable goals for ensuring children are prepared for future success and explain how the state will hold schools and districts responsible for educating *all* students. Parents and communities send children to school every day with the expectation that that school is doing its job and preparing their children for future success. They have the right to know that their state is committed to their children’s education and has a plan for what to do when a school is not educating well and needs help. The ESSA state plan is one way your state can demonstrate a serious commitment to the future success of all children, by creating a plan that explains how you will identify schools and districts that are not doing well and what you will do to help them improve.

Your state plan for ensuring all schools and districts are educating children well is only as good as the goals your plan sets for schools to improve and the degree to which goals drive the accountability system. Making sure that all children have a high-quality education that prepares them for the future is a responsibility that we all share—parents, grandparents, teachers, neighbors, advocates and state officials—we urge to you hold schools and districts accountable for their vital roles in ensuring all children can succeed.

Every child, no matter their unique challenges, their unique needs, or where they come from, should have the opportunity to grow up to be what they dream. The chances a child has to pursue their dreams should not depend on their zip code or their background. ***An ESSA plan that allows schools to shirk their responsibility to all children, especially groups of children who have been shortchanged for too long, fails to meet the intent of the law.***

August 1, 2017



We urge you to include the following elements in your ESSA plan:

**Demonstrate that schools will be held accountable for disaggregated student achievement.** Data about African-American students, Latino students, Asian American students, Native students, White students, low-income students, English learners, and students with disabilities should each be included separately in your state accountability system and so-called “super-subgroups” should not be included as they contradict the purpose of disaggregated student data. N-sizes should be sufficiently small so as to include as many individual student groups as possible. School ratings should reflect the performance of each group of students and not simply the average of all students. Your plan should meaningfully define the term “consistently underperforming” and identify schools to receive targeted support and improvement when any group of students is consistently underperforming. You have a responsibility to ensure that data on how well schools are serving all groups of students is not obscured.

**Indicators in school ratings should be consistent across the state, disaggregated for each group of students, and focused on student achievement.** A statewide accountability system will only be statewide if the indicators used to measure school quality are the same (across a grade span) for all schools and districts. Data must also be provided for each subgroup of students in a school and therefore measures that are only available at the school or classroom level should not be used. While there is value in multiple measures of school quality, the focus on college- and career-readiness for students should not be obscured by other data that do not align to that goal of student success. Your state plan should include indicators in accountability systems that align to the purposes of ESSA’s accountability requirements and high achievement for students.

**Include evidence of parent and community engagement and tribal consultation in the plan’s development and an ongoing plan to engage and consult these crucial stakeholders.** Besides a student herself, no one has more to gain or lose from the quality of a school than a child’s parents and communities. Your state should include parents, including parents who do not speak English and parents with disabilities, at all steps along the development of the plan and should demonstrate an intention to continue engaging parents and communities, especially for marginalized students. Similarly, your state is obligated to consult with tribal leaders in the development of the plan to ensure that their children and citizens are supported and their needs are addressed. Your state plan should show that parents, communities, and tribes are being heard in the implementation of ESSA.

**Emphasize the four-year graduation rate in the accountability system.** The goal of K-12 education is for students to graduate from high school college and career ready. It is therefore critical that your state plan uses an accurate four-year adjusted cohort rate to hold schools accountable for student success. The four-year rate should be used when setting goals, as an indicator in state ratings, and when identifying high schools with a graduation rate below 67 percent for comprehensive support. Your state plan could use an extended year graduation rate to support students who take longer than four years to graduate from high school; however, it should emphasize graduation within four years. Your state plan should include a four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate as an indicator in the state accountability system.

**Include a separate measure of English language proficiency for English learners in the accountability system.**

The inclusion of English language acquisition in ESSA's accountability requirements was one of the most important changes made to this reauthorization of the law. The new attention to whether or not students are making progress toward English fluency will help to ensure that English learners receive the supports and services to which they are entitled. Your state plan must include an English language proficiency indicator and long-term goals for English language proficiency.

**Meaningfully hold schools accountable in the accountability system if fewer than 95 percent of all students or of any subgroup of students were not included in the state's assessment.**

Inclusion in the state's assessment is important to ensuring that a student's learning matters to a school and that the school is attending to the educational needs of that student. Weak or meaningless consequences for failing to meet the participation rate requirement, or loopholes created by other policies, could lead to a repeat of past practice in which historically marginalized students were purposefully excluded from the assessment in order to obscure student outcomes. Transparency and validity of assessment data are also at risk. Your plan should hold schools accountable for including all students in assessments.

**Include effective strategies for supporting districts to improve conditions for student learning.**

ESSA requires states to describe how they will assist districts to reduce: bullying and harassment, the overuse of exclusionary discipline practices (e.g. suspensions, expulsions), school-based arrests, and seclusion and restraint. Marginalized students, including students of color, students with disabilities, and LGBTQ students, are disproportionately affected by bullying and harassment and exclusionary or overly punitive discipline, which can negatively impact academic progress. Your state should take meaningful steps to address these issues by providing districts with funding and other resources. Your state plan must describe the specific actions that will be taken to support positive conditions for student learning, especially for historically marginalized students.

The Every Student Succeeds Act is, as the latest reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, rooted in civil rights principles of equal opportunity in education. It is designed to help ensure that all children, no matter who they are or where they come from, have the opportunity to succeed. Failing to comply with the law or developing state policies counter to the success of all students only keeps children trapped and disadvantaged at a time when policymakers and educators should be working to build and support schools that nurture and empower our children to become their best selves. This is what our nation's children deserve.

Children go to school every day with the assumption that schools are prepared and invested in seeing them succeed. Your state has a responsibility to build and support the kind of schools that enable all children to reach their fullest potential. Your role is more critical than ever and you must take responsibility for the future of our children.

As your state proceeds with its weighty task of developing your ESSA plan, you must determine whether or not your plan will advance educational equity and serve the interests of all children. Low-income children, children of color, children with disabilities, English learners, and Native children have been left behind for far too long and deserve no less than robust and thorough state policy to ensure an excellent

August 1, 2017



and equitable education. We appreciate your attention to our concerns. Please do not hesitate to contact Liz King, Leadership Conference director of education policy, at [king@civilrights.org](mailto:king@civilrights.org) or (202)466-0087.

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TNTP  
UnidosUS (formerly NCLR)



August 1, 2017

Mr. Frank Edelblut  
Commissioner of Education  
New Hampshire Department of Education  
101 Pleasant St.  
Concord, NH 03301-3494

Dear Mr. Edelblut,

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and the organizations listed below, we urge you to ensure that children receive the support and attention they deserve through the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in New Hampshire. As you prepare to submit your plan to the U.S Department of Education for review and approval before the September 18, 2017 deadline, it is critical that your plan meets the letter and purpose of the law to provide, “all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and close educational achievement gaps.” Given your role as a state leader and educator, you have a responsibility to students and taxpayers and we wanted to call your attention to the following state plan elements that are critical for realizing the promise of the law to support the education of all children in your state.

Your ESSA plan is a declaration of your commitment to the education of all children. This plan should set meaningful, aggressive, consistent, and achievable goals for ensuring children are prepared for future success and explain how the state will hold schools and districts responsible for educating *all* students. Parents and communities send children to school every day with the expectation that that school is doing its job and preparing their children for future success. They have the right to know that their state is committed to their children’s education and has a plan for what to do when a school is not educating well and needs help. The ESSA state plan is one way your state can demonstrate a serious commitment to the future success of all children, by creating a plan that explains how you will identify schools and districts that are not doing well and what you will do to help them improve.

Your state plan for ensuring all schools and districts are educating children well is only as good as the goals your plan sets for schools to improve and the degree to which goals drive the accountability system. Making sure that all children have a high-quality education that prepares them for the future is a responsibility that we all share—parents, grandparents, teachers, neighbors, advocates and state officials—we urge to you hold schools and districts accountable for their vital roles in ensuring all children can succeed.

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August 1, 2017



We urge you to include the following elements in your ESSA plan:

**Demonstrate that schools will be held accountable for disaggregated student achievement.** Data about African-American students, Latino students, Asian American students, Native students, White students, low-income students, English learners, and students with disabilities should each be included separately in your state accountability system and so-called “super-subgroups” should not be included as they contradict the purpose of disaggregated student data. N-sizes should be sufficiently small so as to include as many individual student groups as possible. School ratings should reflect the performance of each group of students and not simply the average of all students. Your plan should meaningfully define the term “consistently underperforming” and identify schools to receive targeted support and improvement when any group of students is consistently underperforming. You have a responsibility to ensure that data on how well schools are serving all groups of students is not obscured.

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**Include evidence of parent and community engagement and tribal consultation in the plan’s development and an ongoing plan to engage and consult these crucial stakeholders.** Besides a student herself, no one has more to gain or lose from the quality of a school than a child’s parents and communities. Your state should include parents, including parents who do not speak English and parents with disabilities, at all steps along the development of the plan and should demonstrate an intention to continue engaging parents and communities, especially for marginalized students. Similarly, your state is obligated to consult with tribal leaders in the development of the plan to ensure that their children and citizens are supported and their needs are addressed. Your state plan should show that parents, communities, and tribes are being heard in the implementation of ESSA.

**Emphasize the four-year graduation rate in the accountability system.** The goal of K-12 education is for students to graduate from high school college and career ready. It is therefore critical that your state plan uses an accurate four-year adjusted cohort rate to hold schools accountable for student success. The four-year rate should be used when setting goals, as an indicator in state ratings, and when identifying high schools with a graduation rate below 67 percent for comprehensive support. Your state plan could use an extended year graduation rate to support students who take longer than four years to graduate from high school; however, it should emphasize graduation within four years. Your state plan should include a four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate as an indicator in the state accountability system.



**Include a separate measure of English language proficiency for English learners in the accountability system.**

The inclusion of English language acquisition in ESSA's accountability requirements was one of the most important changes made to this reauthorization of the law. The new attention to whether or not students are making progress toward English fluency will help to ensure that English learners receive the supports and services to which they are entitled. Your state plan must include an English language proficiency indicator and long-term goals for English language proficiency.

**Meaningfully hold schools accountable in the accountability system if fewer than 95 percent of all students or of any subgroup of students were not included in the state's assessment.**

Inclusion in the state's assessment is important to ensuring that a student's learning matters to a school and that the school is attending to the educational needs of that student. Weak or meaningless consequences for failing to meet the participation rate requirement, or loopholes created by other policies, could lead to a repeat of past practice in which historically marginalized students were purposefully excluded from the assessment in order to obscure student outcomes. Transparency and validity of assessment data are also at risk. Your plan should hold schools accountable for including all students in assessments.

**Include effective strategies for supporting districts to improve conditions for student learning.**

ESSA requires states to describe how they will assist districts to reduce: bullying and harassment, the overuse of exclusionary discipline practices (e.g. suspensions, expulsions), school-based arrests, and seclusion and restraint. Marginalized students, including students of color, students with disabilities, and LGBTQ students, are disproportionately affected by bullying and harassment and exclusionary or overly punitive discipline, which can negatively impact academic progress. Your state should take meaningful steps to address these issues by providing districts with funding and other resources. Your state plan must describe the specific actions that will be taken to support positive conditions for student learning, especially for historically marginalized students.

The Every Student Succeeds Act is, as the latest reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, rooted in civil rights principles of equal opportunity in education. It is designed to help ensure that all children, no matter who they are or where they come from, have the opportunity to succeed. Failing to comply with the law or developing state policies counter to the success of all students only keeps children trapped and disadvantaged at a time when policymakers and educators should be working to build and support schools that nurture and empower our children to become their best selves. This is what our nation's children deserve.

Children go to school every day with the assumption that schools are prepared and invested in seeing them succeed. Your state has a responsibility to build and support the kind of schools that enable all children to reach their fullest potential. Your role is more critical than ever and you must take responsibility for the future of our children.

As your state proceeds with its weighty task of developing your ESSA plan, you must determine whether or not your plan will advance educational equity and serve the interests of all children. Low-income children, children of color, children with disabilities, English learners, and Native children have been left behind for far too long and deserve no less than robust and thorough state policy to ensure an excellent

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UnidosUS (formerly NCLR)



August 1, 2017

Ms. MaryEllen Elia  
State Commissioner of Education  
New York State Education Building  
89 Washington Ave.  
Albany, NY 12234

Dear Ms. Elia,

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and the organizations listed below, we urge you to ensure that children receive the support and attention they deserve through the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in New York. As you prepare to submit your plan to the U.S Department of Education for review and approval before the September 18, 2017 deadline, it is critical that your plan meets the letter and purpose of the law to provide, “all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and close educational achievement gaps.” Given your role as a state leader and educator, you have a responsibility to students and taxpayers and we wanted to call your attention to the following state plan elements that are critical for realizing the promise of the law to support the education of all children in your state.

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August 1, 2017



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TNTP  
UnidosUS (formerly NCLR)



August 1, 2017

Mr. Paulo DeMaria  
Superintendent of Public Instruction  
Ohio Department of Education  
25 South Front St.  
Columbus, OH 43215-4183

Dear Mr. DeMaria,

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and the organizations listed below, we urge you to ensure that children receive the support and attention they deserve through the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in Ohio. As you prepare to submit your plan to the U.S Department of Education for review and approval before the September 18, 2017 deadline, it is critical that your plan meets the letter and purpose of the law to provide, “all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and close educational achievement gaps.” Given your role as a state leader and educator, you have a responsibility to students and taxpayers and we wanted to call your attention to the following state plan elements that are critical for realizing the promise of the law to support the education of all children in your state.

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August 1, 2017



We urge you to include the following elements in your ESSA plan:

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**Include evidence of parent and community engagement and tribal consultation in the plan’s development and an ongoing plan to engage and consult these crucial stakeholders.** Besides a student herself, no one has more to gain or lose from the quality of a school than a child’s parents and communities. Your state should include parents, including parents who do not speak English and parents with disabilities, at all steps along the development of the plan and should demonstrate an intention to continue engaging parents and communities, especially for marginalized students. Similarly, your state is obligated to consult with tribal leaders in the development of the plan to ensure that their children and citizens are supported and their needs are addressed. Your state plan should show that parents, communities, and tribes are being heard in the implementation of ESSA.

**Emphasize the four-year graduation rate in the accountability system.** The goal of K-12 education is for students to graduate from high school college and career ready. It is therefore critical that your state plan uses an accurate four-year adjusted cohort rate to hold schools accountable for student success. The four-year rate should be used when setting goals, as an indicator in state ratings, and when identifying high schools with a graduation rate below 67 percent for comprehensive support. Your state plan could use an extended year graduation rate to support students who take longer than four years to graduate from high school; however, it should emphasize graduation within four years. Your state plan should include a four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate as an indicator in the state accountability system.

**Include a separate measure of English language proficiency for English learners in the accountability system.**

The inclusion of English language acquisition in ESSA's accountability requirements was one of the most important changes made to this reauthorization of the law. The new attention to whether or not students are making progress toward English fluency will help to ensure that English learners receive the supports and services to which they are entitled. Your state plan must include an English language proficiency indicator and long-term goals for English language proficiency.

**Meaningfully hold schools accountable in the accountability system if fewer than 95 percent of all students or of any subgroup of students were not included in the state's assessment.**

Inclusion in the state's assessment is important to ensuring that a student's learning matters to a school and that the school is attending to the educational needs of that student. Weak or meaningless consequences for failing to meet the participation rate requirement, or loopholes created by other policies, could lead to a repeat of past practice in which historically marginalized students were purposefully excluded from the assessment in order to obscure student outcomes. Transparency and validity of assessment data are also at risk. Your plan should hold schools accountable for including all students in assessments.

**Include effective strategies for supporting districts to improve conditions for student learning.**

ESSA requires states to describe how they will assist districts to reduce: bullying and harassment, the overuse of exclusionary discipline practices (e.g. suspensions, expulsions), school-based arrests, and seclusion and restraint. Marginalized students, including students of color, students with disabilities, and LGBTQ students, are disproportionately affected by bullying and harassment and exclusionary or overly punitive discipline, which can negatively impact academic progress. Your state should take meaningful steps to address these issues by providing districts with funding and other resources. Your state plan must describe the specific actions that will be taken to support positive conditions for student learning, especially for historically marginalized students.

The Every Student Succeeds Act is, as the latest reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, rooted in civil rights principles of equal opportunity in education. It is designed to help ensure that all children, no matter who they are or where they come from, have the opportunity to succeed. Failing to comply with the law or developing state policies counter to the success of all students only keeps children trapped and disadvantaged at a time when policymakers and educators should be working to build and support schools that nurture and empower our children to become their best selves. This is what our nation's children deserve.

Children go to school every day with the assumption that schools are prepared and invested in seeing them succeed. Your state has a responsibility to build and support the kind of schools that enable all children to reach their fullest potential. Your role is more critical than ever and you must take responsibility for the future of our children.

As your state proceeds with its weighty task of developing your ESSA plan, you must determine whether or not your plan will advance educational equity and serve the interests of all children. Low-income children, children of color, children with disabilities, English learners, and Native children have been left behind for far too long and deserve no less than robust and thorough state policy to ensure an excellent

August 1, 2017



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New Leaders  
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center  
Southern Poverty Law Center  
Teach Plus  
TNTP  
UnidosUS (formerly NCLR)



August 1, 2017

Ms. Joy Hofmeister  
State Superintendent of Public Instruction  
Oklahoma State Department of Education  
2500 North Lincoln Blvd.  
Oklahoma City, OK 73105

Dear Ms. Hofmeister,

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and the organizations listed below, we urge you to ensure that children receive the support and attention they deserve through the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in Oklahoma. As you prepare to submit your plan to the U.S Department of Education for review and approval before the September 18, 2017 deadline, it is critical that your plan meets the letter and purpose of the law to provide, “all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and close educational achievement gaps.” Given your role as a state leader and educator, you have a responsibility to students and taxpayers and we wanted to call your attention to the following state plan elements that are critical for realizing the promise of the law to support the education of all children in your state.

Your ESSA plan is a declaration of your commitment to the education of all children. This plan should set meaningful, aggressive, consistent, and achievable goals for ensuring children are prepared for future success and explain how the state will hold schools and districts responsible for educating *all* students. Parents and communities send children to school every day with the expectation that that school is doing its job and preparing their children for future success. They have the right to know that their state is committed to their children’s education and has a plan for what to do when a school is not educating well and needs help. The ESSA state plan is one way your state can demonstrate a serious commitment to the future success of all children, by creating a plan that explains how you will identify schools and districts that are not doing well and what you will do to help them improve.

Your state plan for ensuring all schools and districts are educating children well is only as good as the goals your plan sets for schools to improve and the degree to which goals drive the accountability system. Making sure that all children have a high-quality education that prepares them for the future is a responsibility that we all share—parents, grandparents, teachers, neighbors, advocates and state officials—we urge to you hold schools and districts accountable for their vital roles in ensuring all children can succeed.

Every child, no matter their unique challenges, their unique needs, or where they come from, should have the opportunity to grow up to be what they dream. The chances a child has to pursue their dreams should not depend on their zip code or their background. ***An ESSA plan that allows schools to shirk their responsibility to all children, especially groups of children who have been shortchanged for too long, fails to meet the intent of the law.***

August 1, 2017



We urge you to include the following elements in your ESSA plan:

**Demonstrate that schools will be held accountable for disaggregated student achievement.** Data about African-American students, Latino students, Asian American students, Native students, White students, low-income students, English learners, and students with disabilities should each be included separately in your state accountability system and so-called “super-subgroups” should not be included as they contradict the purpose of disaggregated student data. N-sizes should be sufficiently small so as to include as many individual student groups as possible. School ratings should reflect the performance of each group of students and not simply the average of all students. Your plan should meaningfully define the term “consistently underperforming” and identify schools to receive targeted support and improvement when any group of students is consistently underperforming. You have a responsibility to ensure that data on how well schools are serving all groups of students is not obscured.

**Indicators in school ratings should be consistent across the state, disaggregated for each group of students, and focused on student achievement.** A statewide accountability system will only be statewide if the indicators used to measure school quality are the same (across a grade span) for all schools and districts. Data must also be provided for each subgroup of students in a school and therefore measures that are only available at the school or classroom level should not be used. While there is value in multiple measures of school quality, the focus on college- and career-readiness for students should not be obscured by other data that do not align to that goal of student success. Your state plan should include indicators in accountability systems that align to the purposes of ESSA’s accountability requirements and high achievement for students.

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ESSA requires states to describe how they will assist districts to reduce: bullying and harassment, the overuse of exclusionary discipline practices (e.g. suspensions, expulsions), school-based arrests, and seclusion and restraint. Marginalized students, including students of color, students with disabilities, and LGBTQ students, are disproportionately affected by bullying and harassment and exclusionary or overly punitive discipline, which can negatively impact academic progress. Your state should take meaningful steps to address these issues by providing districts with funding and other resources. Your state plan must describe the specific actions that will be taken to support positive conditions for student learning, especially for historically marginalized students.

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Southern Poverty Law Center  
Teach Plus  
TNTP  
UnidosUS (formerly NCLR)





August 1, 2017

Mr. Pedro Rivera  
Secretary of Education  
Pennsylvania Department of Education  
333 Market St.  
Harrisburg, PA 17126

Dear Mr. Rivera,

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and the organizations listed below, we urge you to ensure that children receive the support and attention they deserve through the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in Pennsylvania. As you prepare to submit your plan to the U.S Department of Education for review and approval before the September 18, 2017 deadline, it is critical that your plan meets the letter and purpose of the law to provide, “all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and close educational achievement gaps.” Given your role as a state leader and educator, you have a responsibility to students and taxpayers and we wanted to call your attention to the following state plan elements that are critical for realizing the promise of the law to support the education of all children in your state.

Your ESSA plan is a declaration of your commitment to the education of all children. This plan should set meaningful, aggressive, consistent, and achievable goals for ensuring children are prepared for future success and explain how the state will hold schools and districts responsible for educating *all* students. Parents and communities send children to school every day with the expectation that that school is doing its job and preparing their children for future success. They have the right to know that their state is committed to their children’s education and has a plan for what to do when a school is not educating well and needs help. The ESSA state plan is one way your state can demonstrate a serious commitment to the future success of all children, by creating a plan that explains how you will identify schools and districts that are not doing well and what you will do to help them improve.

Your state plan for ensuring all schools and districts are educating children well is only as good as the goals your plan sets for schools to improve and the degree to which goals drive the accountability system. Making sure that all children have a high-quality education that prepares them for the future is a responsibility that we all share—parents, grandparents, teachers, neighbors, advocates and state officials—we urge to you hold schools and districts accountable for their vital roles in ensuring all children can succeed.

Every child, no matter their unique challenges, their unique needs, or where they come from, should have the opportunity to grow up to be what they dream. The chances a child has to pursue their dreams should not depend on their zip code or their background. ***An ESSA plan that allows schools to shirk their responsibility to all children, especially groups of children who have been shortchanged for too long, fails to meet the intent of the law.***

August 1, 2017



We urge you to include the following elements in your ESSA plan:

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**Include evidence of parent and community engagement and tribal consultation in the plan’s development and an ongoing plan to engage and consult these crucial stakeholders.** Besides a student herself, no one has more to gain or lose from the quality of a school than a child’s parents and communities. Your state should include parents, including parents who do not speak English and parents with disabilities, at all steps along the development of the plan and should demonstrate an intention to continue engaging parents and communities, especially for marginalized students. Similarly, your state is obligated to consult with tribal leaders in the development of the plan to ensure that their children and citizens are supported and their needs are addressed. Your state plan should show that parents, communities, and tribes are being heard in the implementation of ESSA.

**Emphasize the four-year graduation rate in the accountability system.** The goal of K-12 education is for students to graduate from high school college and career ready. It is therefore critical that your state plan uses an accurate four-year adjusted cohort rate to hold schools accountable for student success. The four-year rate should be used when setting goals, as an indicator in state ratings, and when identifying high schools with a graduation rate below 67 percent for comprehensive support. Your state plan could use an extended year graduation rate to support students who take longer than four years to graduate from high school; however, it should emphasize graduation within four years. Your state plan should include a four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate as an indicator in the state accountability system.

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**Meaningfully hold schools accountable in the accountability system if fewer than 95 percent of all students or of any subgroup of students were not included in the state's assessment.**

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ESSA requires states to describe how they will assist districts to reduce: bullying and harassment, the overuse of exclusionary discipline practices (e.g. suspensions, expulsions), school-based arrests, and seclusion and restraint. Marginalized students, including students of color, students with disabilities, and LGBTQ students, are disproportionately affected by bullying and harassment and exclusionary or overly punitive discipline, which can negatively impact academic progress. Your state should take meaningful steps to address these issues by providing districts with funding and other resources. Your state plan must describe the specific actions that will be taken to support positive conditions for student learning, especially for historically marginalized students.

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UnidosUS (formerly NCLR)



August 1, 2017

Dr. Ken Wagner  
Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education  
Rhode Island Department of Education  
255 Westminster St.  
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Dr. Wagner,

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and the organizations listed below, we urge you to ensure that children receive the support and attention they deserve through the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in Rhode Island. As you prepare to submit your plan to the U.S Department of Education for review and approval before the September 18, 2017 deadline, it is critical that your plan meets the letter and purpose of the law to provide, “all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and close educational achievement gaps.” Given your role as a state leader and educator, you have a responsibility to students and taxpayers and we wanted to call your attention to the following state plan elements that are critical for realizing the promise of the law to support the education of all children in your state.

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Your state plan for ensuring all schools and districts are educating children well is only as good as the goals your plan sets for schools to improve and the degree to which goals drive the accountability system. Making sure that all children have a high-quality education that prepares them for the future is a responsibility that we all share—parents, grandparents, teachers, neighbors, advocates and state officials—we urge to you hold schools and districts accountable for their vital roles in ensuring all children can succeed.

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Southeast Asia Resource Action Center  
Southern Poverty Law Center  
Teach Plus  
TNTP  
UnidosUS (formerly NCLR)



August 1, 2017

Ms. Molly Spearman  
State Superintendent of Education  
South Carolina Department of Education  
1429 Senate St.  
Columbia, SC 29201

Dear Ms. Spearman,

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and the organizations listed below, we urge you to ensure that children receive the support and attention they deserve through the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in South Carolina. As you prepare to submit your plan to the U.S Department of Education for review and approval before the September 18, 2017 deadline, it is critical that your plan meets the letter and purpose of the law to provide, “all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and close educational achievement gaps.” Given your role as a state leader and educator, you have a responsibility to students and taxpayers and we wanted to call your attention to the following state plan elements that are critical for realizing the promise of the law to support the education of all children in your state.

Your ESSA plan is a declaration of your commitment to the education of all children. This plan should set meaningful, aggressive, consistent, and achievable goals for ensuring children are prepared for future success and explain how the state will hold schools and districts responsible for educating *all* students. Parents and communities send children to school every day with the expectation that that school is doing its job and preparing their children for future success. They have the right to know that their state is committed to their children’s education and has a plan for what to do when a school is not educating well and needs help. The ESSA state plan is one way your state can demonstrate a serious commitment to the future success of all children, by creating a plan that explains how you will identify schools and districts that are not doing well and what you will do to help them improve.

Your state plan for ensuring all schools and districts are educating children well is only as good as the goals your plan sets for schools to improve and the degree to which goals drive the accountability system. Making sure that all children have a high-quality education that prepares them for the future is a responsibility that we all share—parents, grandparents, teachers, neighbors, advocates and state officials—we urge to you hold schools and districts accountable for their vital roles in ensuring all children can succeed.

Every child, no matter their unique challenges, their unique needs, or where they come from, should have the opportunity to grow up to be what they dream. The chances a child has to pursue their dreams should not depend on their zip code or their background. ***An ESSA plan that allows schools to shirk their responsibility to all children, especially groups of children who have been shortchanged for too long, fails to meet the intent of the law.***

August 1, 2017



We urge you to include the following elements in your ESSA plan:

**Demonstrate that schools will be held accountable for disaggregated student achievement.** Data about African-American students, Latino students, Asian American students, Native students, White students, low-income students, English learners, and students with disabilities should each be included separately in your state accountability system and so-called “super-subgroups” should not be included as they contradict the purpose of disaggregated student data. N-sizes should be sufficiently small so as to include as many individual student groups as possible. School ratings should reflect the performance of each group of students and not simply the average of all students. Your plan should meaningfully define the term “consistently underperforming” and identify schools to receive targeted support and improvement when any group of students is consistently underperforming. You have a responsibility to ensure that data on how well schools are serving all groups of students is not obscured.

**Indicators in school ratings should be consistent across the state, disaggregated for each group of students, and focused on student achievement.** A statewide accountability system will only be statewide if the indicators used to measure school quality are the same (across a grade span) for all schools and districts. Data must also be provided for each subgroup of students in a school and therefore measures that are only available at the school or classroom level should not be used. While there is value in multiple measures of school quality, the focus on college- and career-readiness for students should not be obscured by other data that do not align to that goal of student success. Your state plan should include indicators in accountability systems that align to the purposes of ESSA’s accountability requirements and high achievement for students.

**Include evidence of parent and community engagement and tribal consultation in the plan’s development and an ongoing plan to engage and consult these crucial stakeholders.** Besides a student herself, no one has more to gain or lose from the quality of a school than a child’s parents and communities. Your state should include parents, including parents who do not speak English and parents with disabilities, at all steps along the development of the plan and should demonstrate an intention to continue engaging parents and communities, especially for marginalized students. Similarly, your state is obligated to consult with tribal leaders in the development of the plan to ensure that their children and citizens are supported and their needs are addressed. Your state plan should show that parents, communities, and tribes are being heard in the implementation of ESSA.

**Emphasize the four-year graduation rate in the accountability system.** The goal of K-12 education is for students to graduate from high school college and career ready. It is therefore critical that your state plan uses an accurate four-year adjusted cohort rate to hold schools accountable for student success. The four-year rate should be used when setting goals, as an indicator in state ratings, and when identifying high schools with a graduation rate below 67 percent for comprehensive support. Your state plan could use an extended year graduation rate to support students who take longer than four years to graduate from high school; however, it should emphasize graduation within four years. Your state plan should include a four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate as an indicator in the state accountability system.

**Include a separate measure of English language proficiency for English learners in the accountability system.**

The inclusion of English language acquisition in ESSA's accountability requirements was one of the most important changes made to this reauthorization of the law. The new attention to whether or not students are making progress toward English fluency will help to ensure that English learners receive the supports and services to which they are entitled. Your state plan must include an English language proficiency indicator and long-term goals for English language proficiency.

**Meaningfully hold schools accountable in the accountability system if fewer than 95 percent of all students or of any subgroup of students were not included in the state's assessment.**

Inclusion in the state's assessment is important to ensuring that a student's learning matters to a school and that the school is attending to the educational needs of that student. Weak or meaningless consequences for failing to meet the participation rate requirement, or loopholes created by other policies, could lead to a repeat of past practice in which historically marginalized students were purposefully excluded from the assessment in order to obscure student outcomes. Transparency and validity of assessment data are also at risk. Your plan should hold schools accountable for including all students in assessments.

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The Every Student Succeeds Act is, as the latest reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, rooted in civil rights principles of equal opportunity in education. It is designed to help ensure that all children, no matter who they are or where they come from, have the opportunity to succeed. Failing to comply with the law or developing state policies counter to the success of all students only keeps children trapped and disadvantaged at a time when policymakers and educators should be working to build and support schools that nurture and empower our children to become their best selves. This is what our nation's children deserve.

Children go to school every day with the assumption that schools are prepared and invested in seeing them succeed. Your state has a responsibility to build and support the kind of schools that enable all children to reach their fullest potential. Your role is more critical than ever and you must take responsibility for the future of our children.

As your state proceeds with its weighty task of developing your ESSA plan, you must determine whether or not your plan will advance educational equity and serve the interests of all children. Low-income children, children of color, children with disabilities, English learners, and Native children have been left behind for far too long and deserve no less than robust and thorough state policy to ensure an excellent

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National Urban League  
New Leaders  
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center  
Southern Poverty Law Center  
Teach Plus  
TNTP  
UnidosUS (formerly NCLR)



August 1, 2017

Ms. Melody Schopp  
Secretary of Education  
South Dakota Department of Education  
800 Governors Drive  
Pierre, SD 57501

Dear Ms. Schopp,

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and the organizations listed below, we urge you to ensure that children receive the support and attention they deserve through the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in South Dakota. As you prepare to submit your plan to the U.S Department of Education for review and approval before the September 18, 2017 deadline, it is critical that your plan meets the letter and purpose of the law to provide, “all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and close educational achievement gaps.” Given your role as a state leader and educator, you have a responsibility to students and taxpayers and we wanted to call your attention to the following state plan elements that are critical for realizing the promise of the law to support the education of all children in your state.

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Teach Plus  
TNTP  
UnidosUS (formerly NCLR)



August 1, 2017

Mr. Mike Morath  
Commissioner of Education  
Texas Education Agency  
1701 N. Congress Ave.  
Austin, TX 78701

Dear Mr. Morath,

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and the organizations listed below, we urge you to ensure that children receive the support and attention they deserve through the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in Texas. As you prepare to submit your plan to the U.S Department of Education for review and approval before the September 18, 2017 deadline, it is critical that your plan meets the letter and purpose of the law to provide, “all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and close educational achievement gaps.” Given your role as a state leader and educator, you have a responsibility to students and taxpayers and we wanted to call your attention to the following state plan elements that are critical for realizing the promise of the law to support the education of all children in your state.

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TNTP  
UnidosUS (formerly NCLR)



August 1, 2017

Dr. Sydnee Dickson  
Superintendent of Public Instruction  
Utah State Board of Education  
PO Box 144200  
Salt Lake City, UT 84114-4200

Dear Dr. Dickson,

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and the organizations listed below, we urge you to ensure that children receive the support and attention they deserve through the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in Utah. As you prepare to submit your plan to the U.S Department of Education for review and approval before the September 18, 2017 deadline, it is critical that your plan meets the letter and purpose of the law to provide, “all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and close educational achievement gaps.” Given your role as a state leader and educator, you have a responsibility to students and taxpayers and we wanted to call your attention to the following state plan elements that are critical for realizing the promise of the law to support the education of all children in your state.

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**Include effective strategies for supporting districts to improve conditions for student learning.**

ESSA requires states to describe how they will assist districts to reduce: bullying and harassment, the overuse of exclusionary discipline practices (e.g. suspensions, expulsions), school-based arrests, and seclusion and restraint. Marginalized students, including students of color, students with disabilities, and LGBTQ students, are disproportionately affected by bullying and harassment and exclusionary or overly punitive discipline, which can negatively impact academic progress. Your state should take meaningful steps to address these issues by providing districts with funding and other resources. Your state plan must describe the specific actions that will be taken to support positive conditions for student learning, especially for historically marginalized students.

The Every Student Succeeds Act is, as the latest reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, rooted in civil rights principles of equal opportunity in education. It is designed to help ensure that all children, no matter who they are or where they come from, have the opportunity to succeed. Failing to comply with the law or developing state policies counter to the success of all students only keeps children trapped and disadvantaged at a time when policymakers and educators should be working to build and support schools that nurture and empower our children to become their best selves. This is what our nation's children deserve.

Children go to school every day with the assumption that schools are prepared and invested in seeing them succeed. Your state has a responsibility to build and support the kind of schools that enable all children to reach their fullest potential. Your role is more critical than ever and you must take responsibility for the future of our children.

As your state proceeds with its weighty task of developing your ESSA plan, you must determine whether or not your plan will advance educational equity and serve the interests of all children. Low-income children, children of color, children with disabilities, English learners, and Native children have been left behind for far too long and deserve no less than robust and thorough state policy to ensure an excellent

August 1, 2017



and equitable education. We appreciate your attention to our concerns. Please do not hesitate to contact Liz King, Leadership Conference director of education policy, at [king@civilrights.org](mailto:king@civilrights.org) or (202)466-0087.

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Southern Poverty Law Center  
Teach Plus  
TNTP  
UnidosUS (formerly NCLR)



August 1, 2017

Dr. Steven Staples  
Superintendent of Public Instruction  
Virginia Department of Education  
PO Box 2120  
Richmond, VA 23218

Dear Dr. Staples,

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and the organizations listed below, we urge you to ensure that children receive the support and attention they deserve through the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in Virginia. As you prepare to submit your plan to the U.S Department of Education for review and approval before the September 18, 2017 deadline, it is critical that your plan meets the letter and purpose of the law to provide, “all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and close educational achievement gaps.” Given your role as a state leader and educator, you have a responsibility to students and taxpayers and we wanted to call your attention to the following state plan elements that are critical for realizing the promise of the law to support the education of all children in your state.

Your ESSA plan is a declaration of your commitment to the education of all children. This plan should set meaningful, aggressive, consistent, and achievable goals for ensuring children are prepared for future success and explain how the state will hold schools and districts responsible for educating *all* students. Parents and communities send children to school every day with the expectation that that school is doing its job and preparing their children for future success. They have the right to know that their state is committed to their children’s education and has a plan for what to do when a school is not educating well and needs help. The ESSA state plan is one way your state can demonstrate a serious commitment to the future success of all children, by creating a plan that explains how you will identify schools and districts that are not doing well and what you will do to help them improve.

Your state plan for ensuring all schools and districts are educating children well is only as good as the goals your plan sets for schools to improve and the degree to which goals drive the accountability system. Making sure that all children have a high-quality education that prepares them for the future is a responsibility that we all share—parents, grandparents, teachers, neighbors, advocates and state officials—we urge to you hold schools and districts accountable for their vital roles in ensuring all children can succeed.

Every child, no matter their unique challenges, their unique needs, or where they come from, should have the opportunity to grow up to be what they dream. The chances a child has to pursue their dreams should not depend on their zip code or their background. ***An ESSA plan that allows schools to shirk their responsibility to all children, especially groups of children who have been shortchanged for too long, fails to meet the intent of the law.***

August 1, 2017



We urge you to include the following elements in your ESSA plan:

**Demonstrate that schools will be held accountable for disaggregated student achievement.** Data about African-American students, Latino students, Asian American students, Native students, White students, low-income students, English learners, and students with disabilities should each be included separately in your state accountability system and so-called “super-subgroups” should not be included as they contradict the purpose of disaggregated student data. N-sizes should be sufficiently small so as to include as many individual student groups as possible. School ratings should reflect the performance of each group of students and not simply the average of all students. Your plan should meaningfully define the term “consistently underperforming” and identify schools to receive targeted support and improvement when any group of students is consistently underperforming. You have a responsibility to ensure that data on how well schools are serving all groups of students is not obscured.

**Indicators in school ratings should be consistent across the state, disaggregated for each group of students, and focused on student achievement.** A statewide accountability system will only be statewide if the indicators used to measure school quality are the same (across a grade span) for all schools and districts. Data must also be provided for each subgroup of students in a school and therefore measures that are only available at the school or classroom level should not be used. While there is value in multiple measures of school quality, the focus on college- and career-readiness for students should not be obscured by other data that do not align to that goal of student success. Your state plan should include indicators in accountability systems that align to the purposes of ESSA’s accountability requirements and high achievement for students.

**Include evidence of parent and community engagement and tribal consultation in the plan’s development and an ongoing plan to engage and consult these crucial stakeholders.** Besides a student herself, no one has more to gain or lose from the quality of a school than a child’s parents and communities. Your state should include parents, including parents who do not speak English and parents with disabilities, at all steps along the development of the plan and should demonstrate an intention to continue engaging parents and communities, especially for marginalized students. Similarly, your state is obligated to consult with tribal leaders in the development of the plan to ensure that their children and citizens are supported and their needs are addressed. Your state plan should show that parents, communities, and tribes are being heard in the implementation of ESSA.

**Emphasize the four-year graduation rate in the accountability system.** The goal of K-12 education is for students to graduate from high school college and career ready. It is therefore critical that your state plan uses an accurate four-year adjusted cohort rate to hold schools accountable for student success. The four-year rate should be used when setting goals, as an indicator in state ratings, and when identifying high schools with a graduation rate below 67 percent for comprehensive support. Your state plan could use an extended year graduation rate to support students who take longer than four years to graduate from high school; however, it should emphasize graduation within four years. Your state plan should include a four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate as an indicator in the state accountability system.

**Include a separate measure of English language proficiency for English learners in the accountability system.**

The inclusion of English language acquisition in ESSA's accountability requirements was one of the most important changes made to this reauthorization of the law. The new attention to whether or not students are making progress toward English fluency will help to ensure that English learners receive the supports and services to which they are entitled. Your state plan must include an English language proficiency indicator and long-term goals for English language proficiency.

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ESSA requires states to describe how they will assist districts to reduce: bullying and harassment, the overuse of exclusionary discipline practices (e.g. suspensions, expulsions), school-based arrests, and seclusion and restraint. Marginalized students, including students of color, students with disabilities, and LGBTQ students, are disproportionately affected by bullying and harassment and exclusionary or overly punitive discipline, which can negatively impact academic progress. Your state should take meaningful steps to address these issues by providing districts with funding and other resources. Your state plan must describe the specific actions that will be taken to support positive conditions for student learning, especially for historically marginalized students.

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UnidosUS (formerly NCLR)





August 1, 2017

Mr. Chris Reykdal  
Superintendent of Public Instruction  
Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction  
PO Box 47200  
Olympia, WA 98504-7200

Dear Mr. Reykdal,

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and the organizations listed below, we urge you to ensure that children receive the support and attention they deserve through the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in Washington. As you prepare to submit your plan to the U.S Department of Education for review and approval before the September 18, 2017 deadline, it is critical that your plan meets the letter and purpose of the law to provide, “all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and close educational achievement gaps.” Given your role as a state leader and educator, you have a responsibility to students and taxpayers and we wanted to call your attention to the following state plan elements that are critical for realizing the promise of the law to support the education of all children in your state.

Your ESSA plan is a declaration of your commitment to the education of all children. This plan should set meaningful, aggressive, consistent, and achievable goals for ensuring children are prepared for future success and explain how the state will hold schools and districts responsible for educating *all* students. Parents and communities send children to school every day with the expectation that that school is doing its job and preparing their children for future success. They have the right to know that their state is committed to their children’s education and has a plan for what to do when a school is not educating well and needs help. The ESSA state plan is one way your state can demonstrate a serious commitment to the future success of all children, by creating a plan that explains how you will identify schools and districts that are not doing well and what you will do to help them improve.

Your state plan for ensuring all schools and districts are educating children well is only as good as the goals your plan sets for schools to improve and the degree to which goals drive the accountability system. Making sure that all children have a high-quality education that prepares them for the future is a responsibility that we all share—parents, grandparents, teachers, neighbors, advocates and state officials—we urge to you hold schools and districts accountable for their vital roles in ensuring all children can succeed.

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August 1, 2017



We urge you to include the following elements in your ESSA plan:

**Demonstrate that schools will be held accountable for disaggregated student achievement.** Data about African-American students, Latino students, Asian American students, Native students, White students, low-income students, English learners, and students with disabilities should each be included separately in your state accountability system and so-called “super-subgroups” should not be included as they contradict the purpose of disaggregated student data. N-sizes should be sufficiently small so as to include as many individual student groups as possible. School ratings should reflect the performance of each group of students and not simply the average of all students. Your plan should meaningfully define the term “consistently underperforming” and identify schools to receive targeted support and improvement when any group of students is consistently underperforming. You have a responsibility to ensure that data on how well schools are serving all groups of students is not obscured.

**Indicators in school ratings should be consistent across the state, disaggregated for each group of students, and focused on student achievement.** A statewide accountability system will only be statewide if the indicators used to measure school quality are the same (across a grade span) for all schools and districts. Data must also be provided for each subgroup of students in a school and therefore measures that are only available at the school or classroom level should not be used. While there is value in multiple measures of school quality, the focus on college- and career-readiness for students should not be obscured by other data that do not align to that goal of student success. Your state plan should include indicators in accountability systems that align to the purposes of ESSA’s accountability requirements and high achievement for students.

**Include evidence of parent and community engagement and tribal consultation in the plan’s development and an ongoing plan to engage and consult these crucial stakeholders.** Besides a student herself, no one has more to gain or lose from the quality of a school than a child’s parents and communities. Your state should include parents, including parents who do not speak English and parents with disabilities, at all steps along the development of the plan and should demonstrate an intention to continue engaging parents and communities, especially for marginalized students. Similarly, your state is obligated to consult with tribal leaders in the development of the plan to ensure that their children and citizens are supported and their needs are addressed. Your state plan should show that parents, communities, and tribes are being heard in the implementation of ESSA.

**Emphasize the four-year graduation rate in the accountability system.** The goal of K-12 education is for students to graduate from high school college and career ready. It is therefore critical that your state plan uses an accurate four-year adjusted cohort rate to hold schools accountable for student success. The four-year rate should be used when setting goals, as an indicator in state ratings, and when identifying high schools with a graduation rate below 67 percent for comprehensive support. Your state plan could use an extended year graduation rate to support students who take longer than four years to graduate from high school; however, it should emphasize graduation within four years. Your state plan should include a four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate as an indicator in the state accountability system.

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Inclusion in the state's assessment is important to ensuring that a student's learning matters to a school and that the school is attending to the educational needs of that student. Weak or meaningless consequences for failing to meet the participation rate requirement, or loopholes created by other policies, could lead to a repeat of past practice in which historically marginalized students were purposefully excluded from the assessment in order to obscure student outcomes. Transparency and validity of assessment data are also at risk. Your plan should hold schools accountable for including all students in assessments.

**Include effective strategies for supporting districts to improve conditions for student learning.**

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UnidosUS (formerly NCLR)



August 1, 2017

Dr. Tony Evers  
Superintendent of Public Instruction  
Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction  
125 S. Webster St.  
Madison, WI 53703

Dear Dr. Evers,

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and the organizations listed below, we urge you to ensure that children receive the support and attention they deserve through the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in Wisconsin. As you prepare to submit your plan to the U.S Department of Education for review and approval before the September 18, 2017 deadline, it is critical that your plan meets the letter and purpose of the law to provide, “all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and close educational achievement gaps.” Given your role as a state leader and educator, you have a responsibility to students and taxpayers and we wanted to call your attention to the following state plan elements that are critical for realizing the promise of the law to support the education of all children in your state.

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August 1, 2017



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National Urban League  
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Southern Poverty Law Center  
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UnidosUS (formerly NCLR)



August 1, 2017

Dr. Steven Paine  
State Superintendent of Schools  
West Virginia Department of Education  
1900 Kanawha Blvd. East  
Charleston, WV 25305

Dear Dr. Paine,

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and the organizations listed below, we urge you to ensure that children receive the support and attention they deserve through the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in West Virginia. As you prepare to submit your plan to the U.S Department of Education for review and approval before the September 18, 2017 deadline, it is critical that your plan meets the letter and purpose of the law to provide, “all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and close educational achievement gaps.” Given your role as a state leader and educator, you have a responsibility to students and taxpayers and we wanted to call your attention to the following state plan elements that are critical for realizing the promise of the law to support the education of all children in your state.

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August 1, 2017



We urge you to include the following elements in your ESSA plan:

**Demonstrate that schools will be held accountable for disaggregated student achievement.** Data about African-American students, Latino students, Asian American students, Native students, White students, low-income students, English learners, and students with disabilities should each be included separately in your state accountability system and so-called “super-subgroups” should not be included as they contradict the purpose of disaggregated student data. N-sizes should be sufficiently small so as to include as many individual student groups as possible. School ratings should reflect the performance of each group of students and not simply the average of all students. Your plan should meaningfully define the term “consistently underperforming” and identify schools to receive targeted support and improvement when any group of students is consistently underperforming. You have a responsibility to ensure that data on how well schools are serving all groups of students is not obscured.

**Indicators in school ratings should be consistent across the state, disaggregated for each group of students, and focused on student achievement.** A statewide accountability system will only be statewide if the indicators used to measure school quality are the same (across a grade span) for all schools and districts. Data must also be provided for each subgroup of students in a school and therefore measures that are only available at the school or classroom level should not be used. While there is value in multiple measures of school quality, the focus on college- and career-readiness for students should not be obscured by other data that do not align to that goal of student success. Your state plan should include indicators in accountability systems that align to the purposes of ESSA’s accountability requirements and high achievement for students.

**Include evidence of parent and community engagement and tribal consultation in the plan’s development and an ongoing plan to engage and consult these crucial stakeholders.** Besides a student herself, no one has more to gain or lose from the quality of a school than a child’s parents and communities. Your state should include parents, including parents who do not speak English and parents with disabilities, at all steps along the development of the plan and should demonstrate an intention to continue engaging parents and communities, especially for marginalized students. Similarly, your state is obligated to consult with tribal leaders in the development of the plan to ensure that their children and citizens are supported and their needs are addressed. Your state plan should show that parents, communities, and tribes are being heard in the implementation of ESSA.

**Emphasize the four-year graduation rate in the accountability system.** The goal of K-12 education is for students to graduate from high school college and career ready. It is therefore critical that your state plan uses an accurate four-year adjusted cohort rate to hold schools accountable for student success. The four-year rate should be used when setting goals, as an indicator in state ratings, and when identifying high schools with a graduation rate below 67 percent for comprehensive support. Your state plan could use an extended year graduation rate to support students who take longer than four years to graduate from high school; however, it should emphasize graduation within four years. Your state plan should include a four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate as an indicator in the state accountability system.

**Include a separate measure of English language proficiency for English learners in the accountability system.**

The inclusion of English language acquisition in ESSA's accountability requirements was one of the most important changes made to this reauthorization of the law. The new attention to whether or not students are making progress toward English fluency will help to ensure that English learners receive the supports and services to which they are entitled. Your state plan must include an English language proficiency indicator and long-term goals for English language proficiency.

**Meaningfully hold schools accountable in the accountability system if fewer than 95 percent of all students or of any subgroup of students were not included in the state's assessment.**

Inclusion in the state's assessment is important to ensuring that a student's learning matters to a school and that the school is attending to the educational needs of that student. Weak or meaningless consequences for failing to meet the participation rate requirement, or loopholes created by other policies, could lead to a repeat of past practice in which historically marginalized students were purposefully excluded from the assessment in order to obscure student outcomes. Transparency and validity of assessment data are also at risk. Your plan should hold schools accountable for including all students in assessments.

**Include effective strategies for supporting districts to improve conditions for student learning.**

ESSA requires states to describe how they will assist districts to reduce: bullying and harassment, the overuse of exclusionary discipline practices (e.g. suspensions, expulsions), school-based arrests, and seclusion and restraint. Marginalized students, including students of color, students with disabilities, and LGBTQ students, are disproportionately affected by bullying and harassment and exclusionary or overly punitive discipline, which can negatively impact academic progress. Your state should take meaningful steps to address these issues by providing districts with funding and other resources. Your state plan must describe the specific actions that will be taken to support positive conditions for student learning, especially for historically marginalized students.

The Every Student Succeeds Act is, as the latest reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, rooted in civil rights principles of equal opportunity in education. It is designed to help ensure that all children, no matter who they are or where they come from, have the opportunity to succeed. Failing to comply with the law or developing state policies counter to the success of all students only keeps children trapped and disadvantaged at a time when policymakers and educators should be working to build and support schools that nurture and empower our children to become their best selves. This is what our nation's children deserve.

Children go to school every day with the assumption that schools are prepared and invested in seeing them succeed. Your state has a responsibility to build and support the kind of schools that enable all children to reach their fullest potential. Your role is more critical than ever and you must take responsibility for the future of our children.

As your state proceeds with its weighty task of developing your ESSA plan, you must determine whether or not your plan will advance educational equity and serve the interests of all children. Low-income children, children of color, children with disabilities, English learners, and Native children have been left behind for far too long and deserve no less than robust and thorough state policy to ensure an excellent

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and equitable education. We appreciate your attention to our concerns. Please do not hesitate to contact Liz King, Leadership Conference director of education policy, at [king@civilrights.org](mailto:king@civilrights.org) or (202)466-0087.

Sincerely,

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights  
American Civil Liberties Union  
American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee  
The Arc of the United States  
Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates  
Democrats for Education Reform  
Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund  
The Education Trust  
Educators for Excellence  
Judge David L. Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law  
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National Indian Education Association  
National Urban League  
New Leaders  
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center  
Southern Poverty Law Center  
Teach Plus  
TNTP  
UnidosUS (formerly NCLR)



August 1, 2017

Dr. Jillian Balow  
State Superintendent of Public Instruction  
Wyoming Department of Education  
Hathaway Building, 2nd Floor  
Cheyenne, WY 82002-2060

Dear Dr. Balow,

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and the organizations listed below, we urge you to ensure that children receive the support and attention they deserve through the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in Wyoming. As you prepare to submit your plan to the U.S Department of Education for review and approval before the September 18, 2017 deadline, it is critical that your plan meets the letter and purpose of the law to provide, “all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and close educational achievement gaps.” Given your role as a state leader and educator, you have a responsibility to students and taxpayers and we wanted to call your attention to the following state plan elements that are critical for realizing the promise of the law to support the education of all children in your state.

Your ESSA plan is a declaration of your commitment to the education of all children. This plan should set meaningful, aggressive, consistent, and achievable goals for ensuring children are prepared for future success and explain how the state will hold schools and districts responsible for educating *all* students. Parents and communities send children to school every day with the expectation that that school is doing its job and preparing their children for future success. They have the right to know that their state is committed to their children’s education and has a plan for what to do when a school is not educating well and needs help. The ESSA state plan is one way your state can demonstrate a serious commitment to the future success of all children, by creating a plan that explains how you will identify schools and districts that are not doing well and what you will do to help them improve.

Your state plan for ensuring all schools and districts are educating children well is only as good as the goals your plan sets for schools to improve and the degree to which goals drive the accountability system. Making sure that all children have a high-quality education that prepares them for the future is a responsibility that we all share—parents, grandparents, teachers, neighbors, advocates and state officials—we urge to you hold schools and districts accountable for their vital roles in ensuring all children can succeed.

Every child, no matter their unique challenges, their unique needs, or where they come from, should have the opportunity to grow up to be what they dream. The chances a child has to pursue their dreams should not depend on their zip code or their background. ***An ESSA plan that allows schools to shirk their responsibility to all children, especially groups of children who have been shortchanged for too long, fails to meet the intent of the law.***

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Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund  
The Education Trust  
Educators for Excellence  
Judge David L. Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law  
Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law  
League of United Latin American Citizens  
NAACP  
National Center for Learning Disabilities  
National Down Syndrome Congress  
National Indian Education Association  
National Urban League  
New Leaders  
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center  
Southern Poverty Law Center  
Teach Plus  
TNTP  
UnidosUS (formerly NCLR)