

ESSA TASK FORCE MEMBERS

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A WHITE PAPER ON THE EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT (ESSA)

Introduction and Background

In December 2015, President Barack Obama signed into law a bipartisan bill to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. The new reauthorization legislation is known as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and it will replace the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

The new law, ESSA represents a significant and positive shift in allowing states and their districts more autonomy and flexibility in school improvement, assessments, teacher evaluation, student services and early childhood education. This new approach recognizes the concerns of parents, students and educators about the one-size-fits-all approach that has been the present during the era of NCLB and it helps return us to the original intent of ESEA, which was to ensure that all children receive an opportunity for a high-quality education that will prepare them for college, career and life. With the flexibility allowed in ESSA, states should resist maintaining the old NCLB practices of predetermining specific budget requirements without allowing for creative ideas, innovative approaches or customization based on student needs.

An Opportunity for Action

One of the earmarks of ESSA is the increased flexibility the law gives to states, and states, in turn, give to districts to help shape requirements. This flexibility is manifested in several ways. First, ESSA allows states and districts to take advantage of a new level of autonomy as defined in the law. Instead of top-down mandates, ESSA makes room for a conversation that has the potential to dramatically impact our schools. ESSA gives districts such as Shaker Heights the opportunity to highlight recommendations and best practices from front-line practitioners with the goal of providing all Ohio students a high-quality education. Instead of relying on trends, ESSA embraces the tradition of excellence through advocacy, analysis and best educational practices. Because of these qualities, ESSA — if implemented correctly — can and should be a driver for excellence, equity and exploration.

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Shaker's ESSA Advisory Group Recommendations

In February 2016, Dr. Gregory C. Hutchings, Jr., commissioned the formation of an advisory group with the purpose of creating an Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) White Paper. The 28-member ESSA Advisory Group consisted of central and school-based administrators, school board members, teachers (general education, English language learners (ELL), special education and gifted), association representatives, Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) members, students, community members and higher education faculty members.

The Ohio Department of Education provided topics for feedback. The following are six of those topics and Shaker's recommendations for change:

ACCOUNTABILITY:

ODE's Guidance:

- The law takes effect beginning with the 2017-2018 school year.
- Report cards must "meaningfully differentiate" school performance and must contain at least four measures.

Shaker's Statement: The ODE should ensure districts and schools are held accountable for providing high-quality education for all students regardless of their life circumstances, socio-economics or learning ability.

Shaker Recommendations:

- The ODE should provide multiple measures from various reliable qualitative and quantitative sources for report cards for schools and districts.
- ODE should empower districts with the flexibility, resources and accountability they need to customize their work, be accountable to their stakeholders for student achievement, and be leaders in their district's strategic vision and mission.
- Districts who receive accreditation and are in good standing with research-based and highly regarded organizations should be granted a waiver from some of ODE's accountability measures (e.g. *AdvancED* (a non-profit, non-partisan organization that conducts rigorous, on-site external reviews of PreK-12 schools and school systems to ensure that all learners realize their full potential or *International Baccalaureate*® (a non-profit international organization with an earned reputation for high standards of teaching, pedagogical leadership and student achievement.)

ASSESSMENT:

ODE's Guidance:

- Retains current testing requirements by grade level and subject area and the results are disaggregated by student subgroups.
- Permits use of national assessments such as ACT or SAT.
- Permits adaptive testing but maintains the requirement that 95 percent of students participate.

***Shaker's Statement:** ODE should not require any assessments beyond those required by federal law. The ODE should ensure required assessments are timely, appropriate and effective.*

Shaker's Recommendations:

- ODE should permit individual districts to submit assessment plans to the ODE for approval, rather than a one-size-fits-all ODE plan. These accountability plans would allow districts the flexibility to determine which assessments provide the most valuable instructional information in the subjects of English/ Language Arts, Math, and Science, yet still meet Federal law. (Social Studies assessment are not a component of ESSA)
- ODE should include a very flexible opt-out option for parents and the opt-out option should not penalize school districts for supporting parental rights to opt out of state testing.
- Assessments should have time restrictions and results should be available to teachers within 10 days of administration.
- Assessments should be used at the district level to make informed instructional decisions to impact student achievement.

EARLY CHILDHOOD:

ODE's Guidance:

- Creates preschool grant programs.
- Early childhood programs are eligible for literacy funding.

***Shaker's Statement:** ODE should provide districts funding for their efforts in providing the highest-quality early childhood curriculum, employing outstanding educators and seeking partnerships with families to help them understand and participate effectively in the early learning process.*

Shaker's Recommendations:

- Districts who have an approved plan for working toward or have achieved the *Step Up To Quality* (SUTQ) rating should receive full funding for all students at age 3. (*SUTQ is a five-star quality rating and improvement system that is based on national research identifying standards which lead to improved outcomes for children.*)

EDUCATOR EFFECTIVENESS:

ODE's Guidance:

- Examine teacher and principal effectiveness.
- All students must have equitable access to effective, experienced teachers, principals and other school leaders.

Shaker's Statement: The ODE should allow Districts to select research-based evaluation systems.

Shaker's Recommendations:

- Working collaboratively with the district teachers and administrators, districts should determine which research-based methodology best aligns with its vision for the evaluation of high-quality teaching and effective administration of their schools.
- Funding for research-based professional learning should increase.
- Increased flexibility should be allowed to ensure individualized and customized professional learning.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT:

ODE's Guidance:

- States must identify schools for “comprehensive support and improvement.”
- At a minimum, states must identify the lowest performing schools and districts must develop a plan for improvement.

Shaker's Statement: ODE should provide districts with appropriate guidance, increased flexibility, additional funding and research-based supports for all students, schools and districts.

Shaker's Recommendations:

- Allow districts to identify areas for improvement based on multiple, valid and meaningful data points and provide resources at no charge to districts and their schools for unique, innovative or customized support.



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- Provide data analysis software and resources to districts for storage of data and data disaggregation.
- ODE should establish a real-time monitoring system that uses multiple/meaningful data points and cohort analysis throughout at least two years.

WRAPAROUND AND COMMUNITY SUPPORTS:

ODE’s Guidance:

- Establish and expand community learning centers and family engagement opportunities.

***Shaker’s Statement:** The ODE should support districts in their partnerships with organizations that focus on social, emotional and behavioral needs of all PreK – grade 12 students.*

Shaker’s Recommendations:

- The ODE should provide adequate funding for social, emotional and behavioral needs of students through partnerships and memorandum of agreements.
- Strengthen laws and resources to assist in addressing the causes and problems of chronic and excessive student tardiness/absenteeism (e.g. family engagement coordinators, additional funding for PreK-12 guidance counselors and social workers).
- Provide funding for districts to select and implement research-based practices/tools to measure school climate and student engagement.

CONCLUSION

America’s educators, students and parents have made great progress in raising student outcomes across the state and throughout the nation. ESSA provides states and schools an unprecedented opportunity to shape state accountability systems. By collaborating with partners in Columbus and Washington, local school districts can offer the insights of front-line practitioners to ensure that all children — their own and others — are afforded high-quality educational opportunities. These 17 recommendations represent the best collaborative thinking of Shaker Heights educators, parents and community members whose sole aim to help all Ohio students succeed.



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