



THE EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT: WHAT'S IN IT? WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR EQUITY?

OVERVIEW

The federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was approved by the U.S. Congress and signed into law on December 10, 2015. It is the most recent version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which came into effect in 1965.

ESSA contains a number of meaningful mechanisms that education leaders, parents, members of the business and civil rights communities, and advocates can use to advance education equity. These mechanisms include:

- Consistent, state-adopted **standards** for all students that are aligned with the demands of postsecondary education and work;
- Statewide annual **assessments** aligned with statewide standards;
- Clear requirements that statewide **accountability systems** must expect more progress for the groups of students who have been behind, base school ratings on the progress of all groups of students, and expect action when any group of students is consistently underperforming;
- Richer **public reporting** on academic outcomes and opportunities to learn for all groups of students, including, for the first time, school-level per-pupil spending and access to rigorous coursework;
- Resources to support **teachers and leaders**, and a demand that states and districts report on and address inequities in the rates at which low-income students and students of color are assigned to ineffective, out-of-field, or inexperienced teachers; and
- Continued targeting of federal **funding** to the highest poverty schools and districts.

To be clear, none of these mechanisms will guarantee gap-closing and improved achievement for all. No law, no matter how strong, could ever do that.

But taken together, they represent key building blocks for an equity-focused school system — one that sets high expectations for all students, provides resources necessary for meeting those expectations, measures and reports progress toward them, and ensures action when any school — or any group of students — falls off track.