
The Every Student Succeeds Act

Rhode Island State Implementation Plan: Frequently Asked Questions from Public Forums

1. What is ESSA?

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) is a new federal education law (replacing No Child Left Behind) that provides states with flexibility in a number of key areas, including academic standards, accountability, support for school improvement, student and educator support, and use of federal education funds.

2. How is ESSA different from No Child Left Behind (NCLB)?

ESSA returns more control to states and districts to implement educational programs and decide how to use their federal funds. For example, in NCLB, states had few choices in how to intervene in lower performing schools, which ESSA no longer requires. ESSA requires state accountability systems to take into account more than just test scores in determining which schools need extra help and which are excelling. One prominent complaint about NCLB was its reliance on high-stakes testing.

3. What are the implications of a new administration on RI's ESSA implementation?

Quite honestly, we just don't know, yet. It is unlikely that anything will happen to the law - ESSA - but the new Secretary of Education may make changes to the regulations. We are carrying on with developing our state plan in accordance with the underlying law unless and until there is a change and will continue to focus our plan around the pursuit of the vision outlined in our state's [Strategic Plan for education](#).

4. What is the ESSA state plan and implementation process?

To get widespread input and feedback, RIDE, with the Committee of Practitioners, hosted open community forums in Fall 2016, will launch a public survey in Winter 2017, and will hold a public comment period in Spring 2017. Additionally, RIDE will be meeting frequently with critical stakeholder groups on pertinent topics to gain understanding and advice on how the state plan can support current practice. RIDE also convenes a Committee of Practitioners who meet monthly to discuss the components of the ESSA state plan. RIDE's internal ESSA Team will incorporate all of this feedback, input, and guidance into several drafts of an ESSA state plan and submit to the U.S. Department of Education for the September 18, 2017 deadline. More information about our process can be [found here](#).

5. What is RI's Strategic Plan and 2020 Vision for Education and how will ESSA support this?

ESSA gives an opportunity for Rhode Island to further develop and resource Rhode Island's Strategic Plan for PK-12 Education, completed in 2015. As a part of our state plan, we will build upon the strategic plan to carefully consider our state's long- and short-term goals, the metrics by which we will hold schools and districts accountable, and the means by which we will assess

our progress toward these goals for all students and subgroups of students. We will also determine how we can best utilize federal funding to support students, educators and schools in reaching these goals. In the end, Rhode Island's state plan for ESSA will outline critical steps to realizing the vision set forth in our state's strategic plan and ensure that every Rhode Island graduate is prepared to take on life and career as a critical and creative thinker, collaborative and self-motivated learner, and culturally competent active citizen. [To read RI's Strategic Plan and 2020 Vision for Education, click here.](#)

6. Who are the Committee of Practitioners? What are their responsibilities, and what experience do they bring to their role?

The Committee of Practitioners meets monthly to give the RIDE team input on high-level questions concerning ESSA, to serve as liaisons to the community at large regarding our planning process, and to weigh in on multiple drafts of the Rhode Island State ESSA Plan. [To read more about current members of the Committee of Practitioners, click here.](#)

7. How can we ensure that ESSA implementation will be in service to all students, inclusively and equitably?

Some of the law's requirements are aimed at ensuring equitable services: the accountability system and report cards must include information about the achievement of many subgroups of students - English Learners, students in special education, students belonging to minority groups, economically disadvantaged students. In addition, many of the funding sources in ESSA are targeted towards schools with high levels of low-income students. While RIDE is committed to ensuring that all students have an opportunity to be prepared for college and career, community members can help ensure equitable implementation by attending community forums, submitting surveys, and providing other feedback on our state plan to help us determine the best way to carry out that commitment.

Public Engagement for ESSA

8. What engagement opportunities exist for the public-at-large to lend their voice to the ESSA planning process?

The general public will be given multiple opportunities to weigh in on the ESSA state plan, including input forums (Fall 2016), surveys (Winter 2017), forums to give suggestions (Spring 2017), and a public comment period (Summer 2017).

9. How will RIDE ensure that students, parents, teachers, and school administrators are all able to participate in this process?

All community outreach opportunities are free and open to the public. RIDE collaborates with community organizations, institutions, and local schools to make sure public engagement events are accessible. Additionally, RIDE meets with critical stakeholder groups that include parent, teacher, and student-led organizations. If there are specific groups that you believe should be especially involved, please let us know at ESSA@ride.ri.gov.

Academic Standards & Assessments

10. Will ESSA affect RI use of Common Core State Standards (CCSS)?

Rhode Island will continue to support the Common Core State Standards and the Next Generation Science Standards by aligning curricula, proficiency expectations, assessments, and state level professional resources around the concepts inherent in this set of standards.

11. What does ESSA stipulate with regards to curriculum and programming? What subject standards are required under ESSA?

ESSA requires that states provide students with challenging academic learning standards in Math, English Language Arts, and Science [*§ 1111(b)(1)(A)*], as well as proficiency standards to support English Learners (ELs) [*§ 1111(b)(1)(F)(i)-(iii)*]. ESSA does not require any specific curriculum or programming for students, though Rhode Island will ensure that all students are given adequate support in their instructional program to meet the state standards.

12. Are there opportunities for students to study subjects outside of core content? (e.g. arts, music, physical education, health)

ESSA and the Rhode Island strategic plan for education are consistent in their support of a well-rounded education. Title IV(A) Student Success and Academic Enrichment Grants is one example of a source of federal funding that specifically supports a well-rounded education. Some options for the use of these funds included the study of world languages, access to advanced coursework, or courses in music and other forms of art.

13. What emphasis will there be on career pathways/vocational education?

The Rhode Island strategic plan puts a strong emphasis on ensuring the opportunity for students to pursue a pathway that prepares them for a career of their choosing. RIDE recommends incorporating the emphasis on student pathways into our ESSA state plan in a number of ways.

Accountability & Communication

14. How will schools, teachers, and state level decision makers be held accountable for mandates and policies?

Rhode Island will use the opportunity inherent in the ESSA state planning process to revise our current accountability system to focus more on a system of collective responsibility for our schools. The system will include a robust information set in the school, district, and state report cards that allows each community to understand its needs so they can work toward improvement.

15. How will the ESSA plan and its implications be communicated at the school level?

Drafts of the ESSA state plan will be available throughout Spring and Summer 2017 to collect input before submission on September 18, 2017. As soon as the plan is submitted, the federal government has 180 days to approve the plan. However, in the meantime, RIDE will be communicating the necessary information through a variety of methods, which may include

guidance documents, in person meetings, and webinars, to explain the parts of the plan that need to be implemented in a shorter timeline.

Supports for Educators and Leaders

16. What does ESSA say about teacher quality? What opportunities exist for professional development with regards to ESSA?

Resources will be provided to states and school districts to implement activities to support teachers, paraprofessionals, and other educators. Those resources will be used to support the entire talent management cycle, including preparing, recruiting, hiring, developing, and retaining teachers and school leaders. Additionally, a small portion of title II funds may be used for specific state-level strategies related to the training and development of school leaders. § 2103(b)(3); § 2101(c)(4)(B)

17. What opportunities exist for teachers to implement innovative and creative instruction? (e.g. project-based learning, outdoor learning, farm-to-school)

Decisions about instruction are usually made at the district or school level. ESSA Title IV(A) provides funds to support a well-rounded education for students; districts could opt to use some of these funds to support instruction beyond core subjects and traditional teaching methods. Title II funds can also be used to develop the capacity of teachers to deliver instruction in innovative ways.

18. How can we ensure teachers are qualified to serve students of all levels and abilities?

Under ESSA, states are required to define what an ineffective, out-of-field, and inexperienced teacher is and to determine the proportion of low-income and minority students being served by teachers under these categories. [§ 1111(g)(1)(B)] RIDE is currently taking input on recommendations to further develop the Ensuring Equitable Access to Excellent Educators plan that was approved by USDoe in 2015 and ensure equitable access to teachers.

Supports for All Students & Schools

19. How can ESSA ensure equitable and inclusive services to students with special needs re: assessment, instruction?

Assurances for students with disabilities are protected under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and ESSA has not significantly influenced the essential requirements of IDEA in the area of students with disabilities receiving a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). The least restrictive environment has consistently been interpreted as the general education setting which includes access to the same instruction, materials, resources and assessments as all students. The decisions about the level of access to the general education setting in order for students to make progress resides in the Individual Education Program (IEP) designed by a team of qualified professionals with the parent and (if appropriate and as required for transition planning over the age of 14) the student.

ESSA provides a new opportunity for states to consider how students are supported and how their progress is measured and shared with the public through the ESSA accountability system and school report cards. The US Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs has been moving beyond compliance for the IDEA for several years to include Results Driven Accountability (RDA - <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osep/rda/index.html>). This emphasis has shifted state and local special education accountability and resources from only compliance measures toward performance measures. ESSA provides an opportunity for these special education performance measures to be part of school report cards while general accountability measures for students with disabilities; such as performance on state assessments, graduation rates, etc. may to be woven into statewide accountability measures and presented as disaggregated populations in the accountability system.

20. How will ESSA affect English Learners, especially with respect to learning and assessment?

Rhode Island is part of the WIDA consortium of states, which supports teaching and learning for English Learners to all member states. As part of this consortium, RI has adopted the WIDA English Language Development standards and has aligned instruction around these standards. We also utilize the WIDA-aligned assessment ACCESS to annually assess the English proficiency level of each English Learner student. *§ 1111(b)(1)(F)(i)-(iii); § 1111(b)(2)(G)*

Additionally, Rhode Island will continue to offer the math PARCC exam in Spanish for Spanish-speaking students who are not yet proficient in English - at the discretion of the Local Education Agency or district. ESSA also allows for each state to choose to exclude English Learners (ELs) who have been enrolled for less than 12 months from one administration of an English Language Arts assessment - an option that we are currently assessing. *§ 1111(b)(2)(F)(i); § 1111(b)(3)*

21. What opportunities exist under ESSA for schools to offer wrap-around services?

The state will award 21st Century Community Learning Center grants on a competitive basis to support high-quality, effective programs, criteria for which shall take into consideration the likelihood that a proposed community learning center will help participating students meet the State's challenging academic standards and any local academic standards. The state must give priority to schools identified for targeted or comprehensive support and intervention. *§ 4203(a)(5)(A); § 4204(b)(2)(D); § 4204(i)(1)(A)*

22. How does ESSA support the use of technology in schools?

Each state must develop a plan for the use of a portion of their funds to improve students' academic achievement by increasing the capacity of states, LEAs, schools, and local communities to: (1) provide all students with access to a well-rounded education; (2) improve school conditions for student learning; and (3) improve the use of technology in order to improve the academic achievement and digital literacy of all students. *§ 4107(a); § 4108; § 4109(a)*