

ESSA and Early Childhood Education: Opportunities for State Leadership

As state education agencies develop plans to implement the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), this brief highlights opportunities to strengthen the contribution of high quality early childhood education in school reform and improvement efforts. It summarizes key ESSA provisions related to early childhood funding, policy opportunities and mandates, and suggests key questions for state ESSA planners.

ESSA Early Childhood Funding Opportunities

1. Title I funds may be used for early childhood programming. States must provide guidance to LEAs choosing to use Title I funds to improve or expand early childhood programs (Sec 1111(g)(1)(Sec 1007(3)(A) and Sec 1008 (1)(c)) as well as providing information on family engagement and child development to early childhood and K-12 teachers and principals.
2. States may use Migrant Education funds for early childhood, preschool, and family literacy programs. (Title I, Part C)
3. SEA professional development plans may include early childhood education and school readiness as priorities and may provide training for early childhood education teachers and administrators. The Act specifically authorizes support for joint efforts to address the transition to elementary school, including issues related to school readiness. (Title II, and specifically section 2101(c)(4)(B)(xvi))
4. States may apply for Literacy Education for All, Results for the Nation (LEARN) grants which include a set-aside of 15% of funding for birth-to- kindergarten activities, with a priority for evidence-based activities. (Title II, Part B, Subpart 2)
5. States and LEAs may invest in early childhood education programs for English Learners (ELs), Dual Language Learners (DLLs) and may apply in consortium with institutions of higher education or other entities for National Professional Development Project grants that may support early childhood professional development. (Title III)
6. Programs for American Indian, Native Hawaiian, and Alaskan Native students may support early childhood education programs. (Title VI, Sec 6115(a)(3), 6121(b)(7), 6205(a)(3)(A), and 6304(a)(3)(C))
7. States may support early childhood education through 21st Century Community Learning Centers (Title IV, Part B, Expanding Opportunity for Quality Charter Schools (Sec 4310((2)(M)), Promise Neighborhoods (Sec 4624), Full-Service Community Schools (Sec 4625), and Ready to Learning Programming. (Sec 4643) (Title IV)
8. States may apply for Preschool Development Grants to support one year of statewide needs assessment, strategic planning and initiatives to enhance parental choice, followed by three years of support to expand access and improve the quality of early education programs. Current grantees are eligible to compete for renewal grants. (Title IX, Section 9212)
9. Under the Education for Homeless Children and Youth program, states and LEA may serve preschool-aged homeless children and youth. (McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, Sec 722(d)(2))

ESSA Early Childhood Policy Opportunities

1. States may consider including evidence of Pre-K-3rd grade classroom quality or student progress as an indicator in their revised state accountability systems.
2. As states revise their educator evaluation systems, they may create new tools, methods or guidance on how to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of PreK-3rd grade teachers.
3. As states revise their school improvement and support efforts, they may incorporate data on Pre-K-2nd grade learning opportunities/student progress in school-level needs assessments or diagnostic reviews, and use of evidence-based early childhood interventions to assist their lowest performing schools.

ESSA Early Childhood Policy Mandates

1. State Title I plans must describe how they will (a) support LEAs and schools that choose to use Title I funds to support early childhood programs (Sec 111(g)(1)(A) and (b) provide information on effective parent and family engagement strategies (Sec 111(g)(2)(F).
2. The Title I state plan must also be coordinated with programs under the Head Start Act and the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act (Sec 1111(a)(1)(B)).
3. State plans under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act must include strategies to ensure that homeless children have the same access to SEA- or LEA-funded public preschool programs as other children (McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, Sec 722(g)(1)(F)(i)).
4. Title I State report cards must include number and percentage of students enrolled in preschool programs, presented in the same manner that these data are submitted to the U.S. Department of Education/Office for Civil Rights (Section 1111(h)(1)(C)(viii)(II)(aa)).
5. LEAs (and schools who opt to provide early childhood programming in their schoolwide model) are required to create agreements to coordinate services with Head Start agencies, and must ensure that ESSA-funded early childhood services comply with Head Start performance standards.

Key Questions for State ESSA Planners

State Strategic Vision

1. How can improvements in early childhood program quality, effectiveness and access contribute to your state's overall vision for improving public education?
2. How can ESSA funding and policies strengthen and accelerate efforts by state pre-k, Head Start, child care, early childhood special education, home visitation, and grade level reading programs to eliminate opportunity and achievement gaps and improve outcomes for young children?

Funding and Policy Issues

3. How can you help local school districts make the best decisions about using ESSA funding to expand access to high quality early childhood programs?
4. As you revise your accountability system, how can you create incentives to improve teaching and learning in Pre-K-2nd grade classrooms?
5. How can you incorporate efforts to improve early childhood program quality, effectiveness and access in school improvement and support efforts?
6. How can you connect plans to improve teacher and administrator effectiveness with state initiatives to improve the early childhood workforce?
7. How can you support collection of data on young children, early childhood programs, funding and the early childhood workforce; linking early childhood and K-12 data systems; and use of data to improve early childhood teaching and learning?

Communications and Stakeholder Engagement

8. How can you inform and engage early childhood leaders, experts and practitioners to strengthen your state ESSA plan?

For additional CCSSO ESSA materials, see:

http://www.ccsso.org/Resources/Programs/Every_Student_Succeeds_Act.html

