The Every Student Succeeds Act

On December 10th, President Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), bipartisan, bicameral legislation that would expand access to a quality education for all students, reduce NCLB's burdensome requirements, and help reduce unnecessary testing. This legislation would eliminate the need for state waivers, and it would grant states increased flexibility to design their own accountability systems, allowing for evidence-based, locally designed solutions that meet the unique needs of schools and communities. In addition, ESSA:

Continues high standards for students – ESSA requires states to have challenging academic standards that are aligned to entrance requirements for credit-bearing coursework at public institutions of higher education and relevant career and technical education standards in the State. ESSA also prohibits the Secretary from mandating or incentivizing Common Core.

Maintains important information about student performance and school quality – ESSA maintains annual, statewide assessments in reading and math in grades 3 through 8 and once in high school, as well as science tests given three times between grades 3 and 12. States may pursue flexibility to develop and implement innovative statewide assessment systems like competency-based assessments through a pilot program, as well as flexibility to administer nationally recognized high school assessments, such as the ACT or SAT, in place of statewide assessments in high school, provided that the assessments meet certain requirements.

Replaces the one-size-fits-all adequate yearly progress system – ESSA replaces the one-size-fits-all "adequate yearly progress" federal accountability system in which schools were measured almost exclusively based on proficiency on annual statewide reading and math assessments. Instead, ESSA includes a comprehensive system that improves State capacity to identify and support struggling schools. ESSA requires states to use other indicators of student achievement and school quality, such as student engagement, access to and completion of advanced coursework, and school climate and safety to measure school success. Finally, ESSA requires action to improve student learning in the state's lowest-performing schools, dropout factories, and schools in which any subgroup of students is consistently underperforming.

Strengthens state and local responsibility for improving low-performing schools – Instead of federally dictated interventions, ESSA recognizes that local school districts, in consultation with teachers, principals, parents, and community stakeholders, are best equipped to decide which evidence-based interventions, supports, and resources will improve outcomes for students in struggling schools. ESSA requires the State to monitor these interventions and step in when schools fail to improve within a certain number of years.

Includes accountability for special populations – ESSA continues high standards for students with disabilities by requiring that no more than one percent of all students statewide take the alternative assessment for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. ESSA also moves accountability for English language proficiency from a separate system in Title III into the State-determined accountability system in Title I and requires States to measure *progress* toward reaching full English proficiency within a State-determined number of years, and not just meeting a proficiency bar.

Includes critical fiscal requirements to target funds to at-risk children – ESSA maintains vital fiscal requirements, such as maintenance of effort, supplement not supplant, and the 40 percent poverty threshold for operation of a schoolwide program, and it grants States, not school districts, the ability to waive that requirement for operation of schoolwide programs. ESSA does not include any portability option, which would have drained federal resources from the highest-needs schools.

Provides valuable information about school performance – To provide more valuable information to parents about school quality, ESSA requires states to report new information about actual per-pupil expenditures, student discipline rates, postsecondary enrollment rates where available, and critical resource equity indicators, such as access to preschool and advanced coursework.

Ends federal mandates on teacher evaluations and supports teachers – ESSA allows, but does not require, states to develop and implement teacher evaluation systems. ESSA provides resources to states and school districts to implement various activities to support teachers, principals, and other educators, including allowable

uses of funds for high-quality induction programs for new teachers, ongoing evidence-based professional development, and programs to recruit new educators to the profession.

Provides high-needs districts with formula funding to support students and schools – ESSA authorizes the new Student Support and Academic Enrichment (SSAE) grant program to distribute federal dollars based on need and population to fill resource and opportunity gaps identified by school districts in three areas: supports for safe and healthy students, well-rounded educational opportunities, and effective use of technology in schools. States may reserve 5 percent to implement programs that will support and benefit all school districts. Additionally, districts receiving an SSAE grant in an amount more than $30,000 must spend at least 20 percent of the grant amount on activities to support safe and healthy students, 20 percent on well-rounded educational opportunities, and no more than 15 percent on technology infrastructure.

Provides resources for STEM – ESSA provides States and districts with flexible grant funding that can be used to continue to support projects that improve student achievement and engagement in the STEM subjects, including computer science, to ensure students graduate with the skills they need to thrive in the 21st century economy. ESSA also includes an optional reservation for the Secretary to support States in implementing a statewide STEM Master Teacher Corps or to replicate or expand effective professional development programs to support STEM educators.

Updates and strengthens accountability and transparency within the charter school program – ESSA updates and strengthens the charter school program by increasing charter school quality, accountability, and transparency, including by strengthening requirements around financial audits for charter schools.

Title IV Reauthorizes critical programs – Programs such as 21st Century Community Learning Centers, Ready-to-Learn Television, Promise Neighborhoods, Full-Service Community Schools, Innovation and Research, and Project SERV are reauthorized in ESSA.

Supports programs for American Indian and Alaska Native students – ESSA provides formula grants and competitive grants to support programs, including language immersion schools for American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian students to ensure that schools address the unique academic and cultural needs of these students.

Updates the Impact Aid formula – ESSA updates and strengthens the Impact Aid program, which reimburses eligible local school districts that are near, or serve students from, military bases, federal lands, and tribal communities for the loss of property taxes due to certain activities of the federal government. ESSA provides improved flexibility and funding stability to eligible local school districts, eliminates the unfair "lockout" provision that bars eligible local school districts from receiving Impact Aid, and establishes a "hold harmless" to prevent eligible local school districts from experiencing a dramatic funding cliff because of base realignments, deployments, potential base closures, school consolidations or other unexpected local actions causing a drop in eligible federally connected students.

Ensures homeless students have access to critical supports to improve school stability and academic achievement – ESSA recognizes the unique challenges that homeless students face and provides the necessary supports for homeless students to enroll, attend, and succeed in school.

Provides dedicated funds for early learning –For the first time ever, the nation's primary elementary and secondary education law includes a competitive grant program to provide funding for states that propose to improve coordination, quality, and access for early childhood education. States will apply for an initial grant focused on planning, coordination, and quality improvements, with an option to apply for a renewal grant that would allow states to use 75 percent of funding to increase access to early learning. States like Washington, which did not receive a Preschool Development Grant, are prioritized in the competition.

Increases funding for key formula grant programs – ESSA increases the authorization levels for ESEA overall by 2 percent each year in 2018-2020. ESSA includes increases in Title I by more than $1.2 billion over the life of the authorization (four years), increased support for English learners (more than 20 percent increase) Title VI, American Indian and Alaska Native programs, Impact Aid for federally-connected schools, and McKinney Vento to provide services for the education of homeless children and youth.