

# Parent, Family, and Community Engagement and Consultation

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) gives states and school districts significantly more flexibility to make decisions about education policy than the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which makes the engagement and consultation of community stakeholders even more essential to ensuring a quality education for *all* children. This section is designed to inform you about the requirements the new law sets forth for states, districts, and schools to meaningfully engage parents and community members in the critical decisionmaking that will affect the education of all children.

## Funding Available

**Title I Parent and Family Engagement Set-Aside:** Each district is required to reserve at least 1 percent of its Title I funds to carry out parent and family engagement activities, including those described in the written policy section below. The law further requires that parents and family members of low-income children must be involved in decisions regarding how these engagement funds are spent.

These parent and family engagement funds must be used for at least one of the below activities:

- Supporting programs that reach families at home, in the community, and at school
- Disseminating information on best practices focused on engagement, especially for increasing engagement of economically disadvantaged families
- Giving subgrants to schools to collaborate with community-based organizations or businesses that have a track record of improving family engagement
- Any other activities that the district believes are appropriate to increase engagement

## Written Policies

Each district must jointly develop with and distribute to families, in a language they can understand, a written parent and family engagement policy. The engagement policy must be periodically updated to reflect the needs



### Here's What You Can Do About This:

- Visit your state department of education website to identify opportunities to join a working group or advisory board.
- Contact your school district to find out who the point of contact is for parent engagement. Meet with them to share your perspective on parent engagement in the district.
- Contact your Title I Director to learn how, and on what, Title I funds are being distributed in your district and school and how you can influence those decisions.
- Ask your district or school about current strategies being used to engage advocates and parents of English learners, students with disabilities, and non-English speaking families.

of families and be incorporated into the district plans described below. Title I receiving schools in the district must also distribute parent and family engagement policies agreed to by the parents.

The district parent and family engagement policy must describe how the district will:

- Involve parents in the joint development of the district plan and support in its implementation
- Involve families in school activities, which may include establishing an advisory board to develop, revise, and review the engagement policy

The school parent and family engagement policy must describe how the school will:

- Convene an annual meeting at a convenient time, to which all parents of low-income children are encouraged to attend, in order to inform parents that their school receives Title I funds, that these funds come with requirements of the school, and that parents have the right to be involved in decisions about the use of the funds
- Ensure effective involvement of parents and support a partnership among the school, parents, and the community to improve student academic achievement by the following required and allowed activities:
  - *Required:*
    - Ensuring that information is sent to parents in a format and a language the parents can understand
    - Providing opportunities for the informed participation of families with limited English proficiency or disabilities in a format and language they understand
    - Providing reasonable support for engagement activities as requested
  - *Allowed* (voluntary for the school):
    - Involving parents in the development of engagement training for staff
    - Paying reasonable and necessary costs associated with engagement activities, including transportation and child care costs, to allow parents to participate

### Consultation Required

*State Plans:* In order to receive funding under Title I, each state must submit a state plan to the U.S. Department of Education (ED). ED has the authority to approve, deny, or ask a state to revise the plan. The department can also take action when states fail to comply with their own approved plans. When developing plans, states must meaningfully consult with parents.

*District Plans:* Each district must submit a plan to the state. The state has the same authority over district plans as ED has over state plans. When developing plans, districts must meaningfully consult parents of children in schools receiving Title I funds. Among other requirements, district plans must describe the strategies the district will employ to meet the parent and family engagement requirements. If the district plan is not satisfactory to the parents of low-income students, the school district must submit any parent comments to the state.

### Conclusion

The civil rights community has long recognized the impact of families as central to our struggle to achieve equality for all Americans. If states do not meaningfully engage families while implementing ESSA, we will have missed a crucial opportunity and the students we represent will continue to be denied the full protections they are entitled to under federal law. Demanding inclusion in the implementation of ESSA and policies and practices that promote equity puts schools, districts, and states on notice that deviating from the needs and priorities of those students the law was designed to help will be accepted no longer. The stakes are high, family engagement is critical to closing the achievement gap, and our children deserve our best.

# Checklist for ESSA Implementation

In December 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed into law, replacing the No Child Left Behind Act. The law provides federal funding to schools, districts, and states to raise achievement for low-income students and other historically marginalized students. That funding has to be spent according to requirements in the law.

ESSA has the potential to address longstanding educational inequalities and make a fairer and more effective system of public education, but that potential will only be realized if the right policies are put in place. As states and school districts begin to implement the law and make changes to their own policies and practices to comply with ESSA's requirements and maintain eligibility for federal funding, it is critical that decisions help to build a more equitable education system for all children.

This checklist provides civil rights advocates and others fighting for educational equity with a framework through which they can review state policy decisions to see whether or not they are likely to make our educational system work better for low-income students, students of color, students with disabilities, English learners and other marginalized students.

## 1

**Engage Parents, Families, and Communities:** States, districts, and schools should robustly engage parents, families, and communities in the development, implementation, and review of policies and practices to implement ESSA

### Consultation in Plan and Policy Development and Public Reporting

- State, district, and school [Title I plans](#) are developed in consultation with parents and communities, including civil rights organizations, tribes, and other community-based organizations representing underserved communities. Consultation is meaningful, early, and frequent.
- Opportunities to share priorities and concerns, provide feedback, and offer perspectives are made widely available, occur at convenient times and locations, and include sufficient information for parents and communities to meaningfully contribute.
- Formal working groups, committees, and advisory structures include representation from the civil rights community, tribes, and community based organizations representing historically marginalized students and families.
- Parents, families, and communities, including civil rights organizations and tribes, are involved in the development of school, district, and state report cards.
- There is evidence of the involvement of parents and families of historically marginalized students including low-income students, students of color, English learners, and students with disabilities in the development of district, parent, and family engagement policies, which are periodically reviewed and updated.

### Engagement at the School and District Level

- The process for deciding how the parent engagement 1 percent set-aside will be spent is transparent and inclusive of low-income parents.
- The process for deciding how all Title I funds will be spent is transparent and inclusive of low-income parents.
- Parent and family engagement policies are distributed in a language parents can understand.
- Parent and family engagement activities are held at convenient times and locations, low-income parents are encouraged to attend, and information about the activities is made available in places and languages accessed and used by parents.
- Parents and families receive regular information about their child's progress in school and what is being done to raise their child's achievement.
- Parents and families receive regular information about student achievement and other data about student opportunities and outcomes in their child's school and what is being done to address challenges with the school.