



School Climate Checklist for Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) State Plans



The Dignity in Schools Campaign (DSC) is a national coalition of over 100 organizations in 30 states dedicated to dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline. DSC fights for the human right of every young person to a quality education and to be treated with dignity.

In December 2015, Congress passed and President Obama signed into law the *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)*ⁱ, which replaces the No Child Left Behind Act. DSC members were actively engaged in the development of ESSA, which includes several important provisions relating to school climate and discipline. States are now in the process of developing their ESSA plans to submit to the U.S. Department of Education on April 3 or September 18, 2017. These plans will take effect at the beginning of the 2017-18 school year.

This tool, co-authored by the NAACP Legal Defense Fund (LDF), outlines key elements that a strong state plan should include in order to promote positive school climates, reduce the use of exclusionary discipline practices and the disproportionate impact of these practices on students of color, students with disabilities, and students who identify as LGBTQ. This checklist can assist advocates as they analyze their state's draft ESSA plan and develop recommendations for improvement.

I. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION

- Outreach and Input

ESSA requires state education departments to engage in timely and meaningful consultation with community stakeholders as they develop their state plans. - §1111(a)(1)(A)

Did your state:

- ✓ Describe how the state conducted outreach to, and solicited input from, historically underrepresented groups (e.g. low-income communities of color)?
- ✓ Describe multiple methods for collecting community feedback (e.g. focus groups, surveys following stakeholder meetings and posted online, and written comments submitted after meetings)?
- ✓ Describe strategies the state used to ensure meetings were accessible to a diverse group of stakeholders (e.g. holding meetings in the evening in geographically diverse communities)?

- Review and Approval of LEA (Local Education Agency) Plans

When a school is identified for comprehensive support and improvement, the district must work with the community to conduct a needs assessment and develop an improvement plan with evidence-based interventions. - §1111(d)(1)(B)

Did your state:

- ✓ Include a plan to encourage districts to:
 - Consider school climate indicators (e.g. discipline data, student surveys, school climate walkthroughs, etc.) in needs assessments; and
 - Include strategies to reduce exclusionary discipline practices and disparities across student subgroups, as well as request funds for restorative practices and SWPBIS, in improvement plans?

- Monitoring

ESSA requires states and districts to publish annual report cards that include discipline data (i.e. suspensions, expulsions, school-based arrests, and referrals to law-enforcement). - §1111(h)(1)(C)

Did your state:

- ✓ Describe how it will use the discipline data on annual report cards to assess the effectiveness of state and local strategies and progress toward improving student outcomes?

II. ACCOUNTABILITY, SUPPORT, AND IMPROVEMENT FOR SCHOOLS

- Measure(s) for School Quality or Student Success Indicator(s)
ESSA requires states to use a minimum of four indicators, including a measure of school quality or student success, in their accountability systems. One way that states can demonstrate school quality is by measuring “school climate and safety”. - §1111(c)(4)(B)
Did your state:
 - ✓ Include school climate as an accountability indicator?
 - ✓ Include a definition for positive school climate that was developed in consultation with community stakeholders in the state plan?ⁱⁱ
 - ✓ Include school discipline data (e.g. suspensions, expulsions, and referrals to law enforcement) and school climate surveys as measures of school quality? (e.g. Georgia and a consortium of school districts in California currently use school discipline data in their accountability systems.ⁱⁱⁱ)
- Subgroups of Students
ESSA requires states to capture and report the performance of all students and student subgroups (e.g. major racial groups and economically disadvantaged students). - §1111(c)(2)
Did your state:
 - ✓ Also include students who self-identify as LGBTQ as a subgroup the state uses in its accountability system?
- Minimum Number of Students
ESSA requires states to determine the minimum number of students a subgroup must have to be included for accountability purposes. – §1111(c)(3)(A)
Did your state:
 - ✓ Set an n-size as small as possible (ideally 10 or less) to ensure that students in subgroups are not excluded from accountability systems? There is research supporting an n-size of 10, and several states (e.g. Maryland, Florida, Mississippi, and Utah) have previously had an N-size of 10 or less.^{iv}

III. SUPPORTING ALL STUDENTS

- School Conditions to Improve Student Learning
ESSA requires states to describe how they will support districts to improve conditions for student learning (including through reducing the overuse of exclusionary discipline practices). - §1111(g)(1)(C)
Did your state:
 - ✓ Describe how it will use ESSA funds to provide meaningful supports to districts to assist them with improving school conditions for student learning? (e.g. providing monitoring and technical assistance to support the effective implementation of restorative practices, SWPBIS, and school-based mental health services, etc.)?
- Transition Services and Improved Outcomes for Neglected and Delinquent Children and Youth
ESSA requires states requesting Title I, Part D (Prevention and Intervention Programs for Children and Youth Who are Neglected, Delinquent or At Risk) funds to establish procedures to ensure the timely re-enrollment of students who become involved in the juvenile justice system. - §1414(a)(1)(E)
Did your state:
 - ✓ Apply for Title I, Part D funds?
 - ✓ Describe policies for improving the quality of coursework offered in facilities and ensure alignment with challenging state academic standards?

IV. LOCAL PRIORITIES

- Include priorities specific to local community needs and campaigns below:
Did your state:

✓ _____

✓ _____

✓ _____

✓ _____

ⁱ Every Student Succeeds Act, Public Law No. 114.95, S. 1177, 114th Cong. (Dec. 10, 2015).

ⁱⁱ *DSC's Model Code on Education and Dignity urges states and districts to create a climate where students feel socially, emotionally and physically safe, there is mutual respect between teachers, students, parents or guardians, and students' self-expression and self-esteem are supported*, The Dignity in Schools Campaign, A Model Code on Education and Dignity, Revised October 2013, at 18, www.dignityinschools.org/files/Model_Code_2013.pdf.

ⁱⁱⁱ See, Georgia Department of Education, School Climate, <https://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/Policy/Pages/School-Climate.aspx>; and The CORE Districts, Data Collaborative, <http://coredistricts.org/>.

^{iv} Jessica Cardichon, Ensuring Equity in ESSA: The Role of N-Size in Subgroup Accountability, Alliance for Excellent Education, 7 (June 2016). <http://all4ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/NSize.pdf>.