

# HEALTHY SCHOOLS CAMPAIGN

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May 19, 2016

## **Oral Testimony on Opportunities for Supporting Student Health Through ESSA** **Prepared By Healthy Schools Campaign for the Illinois State Board's May 19 Listening Session**

### Introduction

Hi, my name is Emily Carroll and I'm the Senior Campaign Manager with Healthy Schools Campaign—an organization whose work is based on the commonsense notion that healthy students are better learners and that health and wellness should be integrated into every part of the school experience. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) recognizes this link between student health and academic achievement and gives the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) the opportunity to prioritize the whole child when setting educational standards and directing federal funding for education in Illinois.

### Brief Context of ESSA

ISBE is responsible for the distribution of the federal funds established by ESSA. These funds, which are primarily directed to schools with a high proportion of low-income students, are meant to support the connection between health and learning and promote equitable access to high-quality learning for students across Illinois. ESSA recognizes that supporting the health of students supports their academic progress. Unlike No Child Left Behind, ESSA explicitly recognizes the importance of physical and mental health and wellness and emphasizes the importance of ensuring educational equity for all children.

Federal funding available through Title I, Title II and Title IV of ESSA is available to create and implement school health programs, accountability systems that include non-academic metrics, professional development focusing on behavioral and mental health, and school improvement plans for healthier school environments. It is key that ISBE engages a wide range of stakeholders in the process of implementing ESSA, most significantly in the development and implementation of Title I state plans. We strongly encourage that ISBE affirmatively creates a state plan for the implementation of ESSA that prioritizes the health and wellness of Illinois students.

### Recommendations

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I am here today to share our preliminary recommendations on implementing ESSA in Illinois:

- 1) ESSA requires that Illinois create school accountability systems that measure at least one non-academic indicator that facilitates student growth and improvement. We encourage ISBE to choose a non-academic indicator that does not increase the burden of testing on the students themselves. Instead, we recommend that ISBE chooses an indicator that is reflective of students' learning environment, such as school climate measures or rates of chronic absenteeism. With the establishment of the Illinois Attendance Commission, work is already underway to support school districts in supporting student attendance and those students' families.
- 2) Under ESSA, school improvement plans must be informed by a school-level needs assessment. In addition, schools deciding to implement a schoolwide program using Title I funding must also conduct a needs assessment. Based on the needs assessment, each school is responsible for creating a comprehensive plan to fund school programs and improvements. This funding can be explicitly used to implement schoolwide health programs. Thus, we strongly recommend that this needs assessment includes student health data as well as data on how schools are supporting student health .
- 3) In accordance with ESSA, ISBE is required to create an annual state report card of school performance and disseminate it widely. While this state report card must show rates of chronic absenteeism and violence at the minimum, it can and should include additional measures of health and wellness in Illinois schools. The Illinois legislature has already recognized the importance of letting the public know how schools are supporting student health and wellness; in 2012 they passed an amendment to the School Code requiring that the state report card include data health and wellness initiatives. We recommend that the ISBE's state report card include several measures of health and wellness in order to increase the likelihood that students will succeed academically. Examples of additional health and wellness metrics could include days of physical education per week, measures of school climate, whether or not a school has a full-time school nurse, and whether or not a school provides students with access to mental health services.

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Lastly, Healthy Schools Campaign urges ISBE to leverage the important opportunities ESSA presents for supporting the health and learning connection. We will be consulting with education and health experts to more fully develop these recommendations and we looking forward to sharing them with Illinois School Board of Education. Thank you.