

Supporting Children's Health through the Every Student Succeeds Act

On December 10, 2015, President Obama signed into law the bipartisan Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act which was last reauthorized in 2001 as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. While both NCLB and ESSA have the shared goal of promoting academic achievement, ESSA provides a new framework that recognizes the need for schools to support the whole child. The passage of ESSA at the federal level and the subsequent rollout of the new law to state education agencies (SEAs) and local education agencies (LEAs) provides an important opportunity to change the education landscape to more fully integrate student health into education policy and practice.

In addition, ESSA creates important opportunities for collaboration between schools and community partners, including local health providers and organizations, to support student success. As SEAs and LEAs move forward with implementing this new law, it is important for the health sector to understand the opportunities ESSA creates for establishing partnerships between local health providers and schools to support the connection between health and learning. An overview of the key opportunities ESSA presents for supporting children's health and wellness and for health and education to work together follows.

Opportunities in Title I

Title I of ESSA provides funding to SEAs to support LEAs with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards. Title I of ESSA provides key opportunities for SEAs and LEAs to support the connection between health and learning and recognizes the important role community health partners can play in supporting the success of vulnerable children. These opportunities include:

- *School improvement:* SEAs must reserve seven percent of their Title I funding to support school improvement in the lowest performing schools. This funding can be used to support healthy, supportive and drug-free environments through activities that might include establishing school-based mental health partnerships, implementing mental health awareness training programs for school personnel, expanding access to school-based counseling and mental health resources and providing LEAs with evidence-based resources on how to integrate health and safety practices into school and athletic programs. The health sector can play an important role in collaborating with schools to design and implement this programming and ensure that student health needs are being met.
- *State Accountability Systems:* Under ESSA, each SEA must have a statewide accountability system with at least one non-academic indicator. The inclusion of a non-academic indicator in school accountability systems presents an important opportunity to elevate the connection between health and learning and ensure SEAs and LEAs are held accountable for supporting the whole child. Examples of non-academic indicators listed in ESSA include measures of

school climate, such as chronic absenteeism and incidences of violence. The health sector can play an important role in helping SEAs and LEAs identify and implement best practices to improve school performance on these measures, particularly these non-academic indicators.

- *Schoolwide Title I Programs:* LEAs can consolidate and use Title I and other federal, state and local funds for schoolwide Title I programs in schools where at least 40% of the students are from low-income families. An eligible school operating a schoolwide program must develop a comprehensive plan that is developed with input from parents and community members and is based on a comprehensive needs assessment of the entire school. By allowing schools to use this funding to implement schoolwide programs, this provides schools with the ability to use the funding to implement schoolwide health programs, such as hiring a school nurse to serve all students or implement a strong physical education program that benefits all students rather than only providing targeted support to the students that are struggling. ESSA specifically mentions that the services delivered under this provision may be delivered by a non-profit or for-profit external provider with experience in using evidence-based or other effective strategies to improve student achievement. In addition to supporting the implementation of programming, the health sector can also play a key role in helping schools in conducting their needs assessment to better understand their student health needs. As a result, this provision creates a tremendous opportunity to support student health and wellness and for collaboration between the local health and education sectors.

Opportunities in Title II

- *Professional development:* Title II of ESSA provides funding to SEAs and LEAs to support professional development programming for principals, teachers, and other school personnel. ESSA's Title II specifically highlights implementing professional development programming to support school staff in addressing student behavioral and mental health needs and chronic absenteeism as an allowable use of Title II funding. There is an opportunity for the health sector to work with the education sector to help inform the development of this professional development programming and ensure that school staff have the knowledge and skills needed to support student health and wellness.
- *Literacy education programs:* Title II funding is also included for literacy education programs that fall into three categories: birth through kindergarten, K-12 and innovative literacy programs. In addition to carrying out high quality professional development programming around evidence-based strategies to promote literacy, funding can be used to coordinate the involvement of families, early childhood education program staff, principals, teachers and specialized instructional support personnel in literacy development. In addition, eligible for funding are pediatric literacy programs through which, during well-child visits, medical providers trained in research-based methods of early language and literacy promotion provide developmentally appropriate books and recommendations to parents to encourage them to read aloud to their children starting in infancy.

Opportunities in Title IV

- *Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants:* ESSA consolidates 49 separate grant programs, some of which focused on student health, into a new block grant program under Title IV called Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants. SEAs and LEAs can use funding from this block grant to support efforts to promote student health, in addition to

increasing access to well-rounded education and improving the use of technology. Any school district that receives more than \$30,000 through this grant program must conduct a needs assessment and use the funding to address the needs identified. ESSA highlights the following examples of health programs that can be implemented using this funding: evidence-based drug and violence prevention programs; mental health services; programs that support a healthy, active lifestyles; and mentoring and school counseling for children at risk of academic failure or dropping out of school or delinquency. The health sector can play an important role in both helping LEAs conduct the required needs assessments and in implementing the subsequent programming. For example, information collected through non-profit hospital community health needs assessments can play an important role in informing the needs assessments LEAs are required to conduct under Title IV.

- *Community support for school success:* Title IV also establishes funding for full-service community schools and promise neighborhoods. Funding for both programs is focused on supporting the delivery of ‘pipeline services’ defined as a continuum of coordinated supports, services and opportunities for children from birth through entry into and success in postsecondary education and career attainment. Both full-service community schools and promise neighborhoods present tremendous opportunities for collaboration between health and education, in addition to other community partners.

Additional Opportunities

- *Well-rounded education:* In ESSA, the term ‘well-rounded education’ replaces the use of the term ‘core subject’ that was used in NCLB. Well-rounded education is defined as courses, activities, and programming in subjects such as English, reading or language arts, writing, science, technology, engineering, mathematics, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, geography, computer science, music, career and technical education, **health, physical education**, and any other subject, as determined by the State or local educational agency, with the purpose of providing all students access to an enriched curriculum and educational experience. The term well-rounded education appears throughout ESSA and creates an important opportunity to ensure SEAs and LEAs have the knowledge, resources and support needed to implement high quality health and physical education programs. The health sector can play a key role in supporting the implementation of these programs and ensuring that SEAs and LEAs are aware of the latest research and best practices around each issue.

Given these provisions, ESSA presents important opportunities for the health sector to work with the education sector to support the health and success of children across the country. If you are a local health provider or organization, consider reaching out to your local school district about ESSA to discuss the role you can play in meeting the new requirements under ESSA.

Additional information and resources regarding opportunities for the health and education sectors to collaborate to support student health are available through the U.S. Department of Education’s Healthy Students, Promising Futures toolkit and resources available [here](#).

Please contact Alex Mays at Healthy Schools Campaign (alex@healthyschoolscampaign.org) or Jack Rayburn at Trust for America’s Health (jrayburn@tfah.org) for additional information or with any questions.