

Overview of August 11 ESSA Strategy Session

Convened by Healthy Schools Campaign and the Alliance for a Healthier Generation

Background

On August 11, Healthy Schools Campaign (HSC) and the Alliance for a Healthier Generation (the Alliance) hosted an Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) strategy session to explore ways in which health and wellness can be integrated under ESSA. The purpose of this meeting was to solicit feedback from education and health experts to develop a comprehensive health and wellness framework to support states and school districts in fully utilizing ESSA to integrate health and wellness into education policy and practice.

Forty-eight individuals attended the meeting representing health, education and school health organizations including the American Federation of Teachers, National Education Association, Council of Chief State School Officers, National Governors Association, NAACP and National Council of La Raza. Key focus areas discussed at the meeting included state accountability systems, state school report cards, needs assessments, equity, professional development and early childhood education.

Key Meeting Takeaways

HSC and the Alliance learned the following during the strategy session:

1. There is strong interest in identifying strategies to ensure ESSA implementation supports healthy schools and student health and wellness.
2. Stakeholder engagement at every level is critical to supporting the effective implementation of ESSA and ensuring health and wellness are included in state level implementation. Quality stakeholder engagement will also help ensure partnerships between education and different sectors are in place to support schools in fully leveraging these opportunities.
3. It is critical for state advocates to understand what data is currently being collected and what policies are in place to inform the recommendations they are making about ESSA implementation. For example, if data is already being collected about chronic absenteeism or measures of school climate and if policies are in place around social and emotional learning, it is important to consider how state accountability systems and report cards can align with the data and policies. This will also help advance a broader health and education agenda.

4. Additional criteria to consider when selecting effective measures for inclusion in state accountability systems and report cards are selecting measures that resonate with the public, are proxies for multiple issues, are of concern to different sectors and will help leverage resources to support a shared goal.
5. There is a lack of confidence in the education system, especially the capacity of state agencies to implement ESSA in a way that will truly transform education. As a result, there are concerns that integrating health and wellness into education policy and practice will not be sufficient to create the impact needed. This raises the question of whether or not advocates should engage in issues that go beyond health and wellness in order to work to improve the broader system. For example, should advocates provide input on issues such as the weighting of indicators within the new state accountability systems or whether or not a summative measure of all indicators should be used in ESSA implementation.
6. Recommendations for implementing ESSA in a way that supports student health and wellness should not be prescriptive and instead should provide options that can be tailored based on the individual needs of states and communities.
7. There is a need to provide concrete examples of how measures of school climate or student success, needs assessments, professional development programs or school improvement models that include a health and wellness component have been used in the past and have helped improve academic achievement.
8. The high interest in this work from meeting attendees suggests the possibility of establishing a strong, broad coalition to advance this work in the future.

Next Steps

Based on the information gathered through the August 11 strategy session, HSC and the Alliance will be developing a comprehensive health and wellness framework to support states and school districts in fully utilizing ESSA to integrate health and wellness into education policy and practice. The framework will integrate the key meeting takeaways and ensure states have access to best practices and models for implementing ESSA provisions in a way that supports student health and wellness.