

# ESSA Implementation: Key Opportunities to Support Health and Wellness

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# Key Opportunities: Title I

Implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) provides a number of policy levers for promoting healthy schools and student wellness.

## State Accountability Systems

Under ESSA, each State Education Agency (SEA) is required to create a state accountability system with at least four indicators, including three academic indicators and one non-academic indicator (a measure of school quality or success). Measurement of these non-academic indicators can bring attention to—and galvanize resources or support for—factors closely connected to health. Examples of non-academic indicators listed in ESSA include measures of school climate and safety such as chronic absenteeism and incidences of violence. Given that state accountability systems define the goals and activities of many Title I programs, the inclusion of a non-academic indicator presents an important opportunity to elevate awareness of the connection between health and learning and ensure SEAs and Local Education Agencies (LEAs) are held accountable for supporting the whole child. For more detail, see [Making the Grade: A 50-State Analysis of School Accountability Systems by the Center for American Progress](#).

## School Improvement Plans

SEAs must reserve 7 percent of their Title I funding for comprehensive support and improvement in the lowest performing schools. SEAs can use this funding

to support student engagement and promote healthy, safe and supportive school environments. LEAs, in partnership with stakeholders, must develop and implement a school improvement plan that:

- is informed by the indicators in the statewide accountability system;
- is based on a school-level needs assessment;
- includes evidence-based interventions;
- identifies resource inequities.

Given that students in the lowest performing schools are disproportionately affected by health conditions that impact their ability to learn, including health and wellness as a part of this school improvement plan is a key strategy for supporting student success.

## Schoolwide Title I Programs

In schools where at least 40 percent of the students are from low-income families, funding from Title I and other federal, state and local funds may be consolidated and used for school-wide programs (rather than only for targeted support to students who are struggling). An eligible school must develop a comprehensive plan with input from parents and community members and base the plan on a comprehensive needs assessment of the entire school. Allowable uses of this funding include counseling, school-based mental health programs, specialized instructional support services, implementation of a tiered model to prevent and address problem behavior and early intervention services. For example, this includes health-promoting measures such as hiring a school nurse to serve all

### Terms and Abbreviations

**Chronic Absenteeism:** Missing 10 percent or more of school days for any reason, excused or unexcused. For more, see Healthy Schools Campaign's [Chronic Absenteeism Toolkit](#).

**ESSA:** Every Student Succeeds Act. The 2015 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the bill that authorizes the federal government's role in education. Its last prior

reauthorization was as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

**LEA:** Local Education Agency. The local body, such as a school district, responsible for implementing ESSA.

**SEA:** State Education Agency. The state-level body, such as a state board of education, responsible for implementing ESSA.

students or implementing a strong physical education program. Services may be delivered by external providers, creating an opportunity for collaboration between the health and education sectors.

### **Early Childhood Programs and School Readiness**

ESSA includes a new focus on early childhood transitions and school readiness. LEA plans for using Title I funding must describe how Title I services will support, coordinate and integrate with early childhood education programs at the LEA or individual school level, including plans for the transition from early childhood programs to local elementary schools. Schoolwide Title I programs can also include strategies for assisting preschool children in the transition from early childhood education programs to local elementary schools. Through this provision, states can help ensure that the programs and services children have access to in early childhood programs are also available in elementary school. For example, if children have access to behavioral health services in their early childhood program, this provision could be used to help ensure the same services are offered once the children enroll in kindergarten at their local elementary school. In addition, this provision could be used to support data sharing between early childhood programs run by an LEA and local elementary schools. This can help the elementary school better understand a child's needs once they arrive, and plan to address them accordingly.

### **Parent and Family Engagement**

LEAs must reserve 1 percent of their Title I funding to support parent and family engagement. LEAs can use this funding to:

- support schools and nonprofit organizations in providing professional development in this area;
- support programs to reach parents and family members at home;
- disseminate best practices on parent and family engagement;
- collaborate with entities with a record of success in improving and increasing parent and family engagement.

This presents an important opportunity for SEAs

and LEAs to support schools in engaging parents and families in efforts to create healthy school environments.

For more information on Title 1, see the presentation [Title I Part A: School Improvement](#) by Dana Carr.

## **Key Opportunities: Title II**

Title II provides funding to SEAs and LEAs to support professional development for principals, teachers, early childhood educators and other school personnel. This includes professional development to support school staff in addressing student behavioral and mental health needs and chronic absenteeism.

### **Professional Development**

Title II provides funding to SEAs and LEAs to support professional development for principals, teachers, early childhood educators and other school personnel, including professional development to support school staff in addressing student behavioral and mental health needs and chronic absenteeism. ESSA presents an opportunity to inform this professional development programming and ensure that school staff have the knowledge and skills to support student health and wellness.

### **Educator Support and Working Conditions**

In addition to supporting professional development programming, Title II funds can be used by states and school districts to conduct and publicly report on an assessment of educator support and working conditions that would be developed with teachers, leaders, parents, students and the community. For example, funds could be used to develop and conduct an evaluation of teacher stress levels to better understand teacher's working conditions. Assessing school staff's working conditions can be a critical step toward identifying strategies to improve overall working conditions and increase staff retention. In addition, promoting workplace wellness is a proven strategy for supporting student health and learning.

### **Literacy Education Programs**

Title II funding is included for literacy education programs in 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. Eligible programs also include 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.

## **Key Opportunities: Title IV**

Title IV is a new block grant that SEAs and LEAs can use to support student health and other academic enrichment programs. Title IV includes grants to support community partnerships.

### **Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants**

ESSA consolidates 49 grant programs, some of which previously focused on student health, into a new grant program called Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants. SEAs and LEAs can use this to promote student health, increase access to well-rounded education and improve 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 lifestyle; and mentoring and school counseling for children at risk of academic failure, dropping out of school or delinquency.

### **Community Support for School Success**

Title IV establishes funding for full-service Community Schools and Promise Neighborhoods. Funding for both programs supports 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 the health and education sectors.

## **Key Opportunities: Throughout ESSA**

### **Well-Rounded Education**

The term “well-rounded education” replaces the previous use of the term “core subject.” The definition of well-rounded education includes health education and physical education. 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.

### **Focus on Equity**

ESSA emphasizes the importance of ensuring educational equity for all children. For example, under ESSA, the purpose of Title I is “to provide all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable and high-quality education, and to close the academic achievement gaps.” Title II emphasizes the need to improve equitable access to quality teachers and Title IV highlights the importance of ensuring equitable access to programming.

### **About Healthy Schools Campaign**

*Healthy Schools Campaign (HSC) is dedicated to making schools healthier places where all children can learn and thrive. HSC advocates for children to have access to nutritious school food, physical activity, school health resources, green schoolyards and clean air. HSC has a special focus on the wellness and environmental health issues affecting low-income students of color.*

*We start with a social justice perspective and believe this focus is especially critical in light of the vast health disparities our nation faces. HSC facilitates collaboration among parents, educators, students and policymakers to help prepare this diverse group of stakeholders to lead change for healthier schools at the school, district, state and national levels.*

## Stay connected!

For questions or to discuss this issue, please contact Ryan Mann at [ryan@healthyschoolscampaign.org](mailto:ryan@healthyschoolscampaign.org).

Learn more and sign up for updates from HSC at [healthyschoolscampaign.org](http://healthyschoolscampaign.org).

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