



What is ESSA?

If you could improve the way Ohio does public education, what would you change?

ESSA (the Every Student Succeeds Act) opens doors to tremendous opportunities to improve the way states do education - perhaps the greatest opportunity of our careers to influence better education policy. ESSA must truly be a reset of education policies, not a repeat of failed ones. This reset must address the teacher evaluation process, how testing is used, interventions to raise school performance and the role of teachers in shaping both local and state policy.

We as educators must speak up about what's needed or others who do not have the best interests of either students or teachers will determine the outcome.

The challenge: If we do not share our expertise and insert our voices into this process, others will. And they may not speak for the best interests of either students or teachers. We need OFT members to share your voice, your ideas and expertise. In fact, ESSA requires states to collaborate with stakeholders - that includes you and me as educators.

Our strategy: OFT's strategy around ESSA includes meetings in your locals where you can learn and share input, teletown hall conference calls, workgroups to focus on specific issues, and a process to share your expertise with those who will decide how to change Ohio's education policies.

Background: Signed by President Obama on Dec. 10, 2015, ESSA (Every Student Succeeds Act) is the latest reauthorization of ESEA (Elementary and Secondary Education Act), the 1965 legislation that increased the federal role in education and prioritized full educational opportunity for all. Prior to ESSA, the most recent reauthorization of ESEA was in 2001 and was known as NCLB (No Child Left Behind). NCLB created the test and punish system under which we are currently working.

What changes under ESSA?

The possibilities for change are numerous and will be explored with our members as we gather your input. These possibilities are a result of three major shifts:

1. **A reduced role of the federal government.** Decisions around issues such as teacher evaluation and interventions in schools are now left to states.
2. **An expanded role for stakeholders.** Stakeholder engagement is required in at least 20 different areas under ESSA. We must advocate for our ideas to be reflected in the state plan.
3. **A shift in mindset** from punishment and one-size fits all under NCLB to a mindset of support and innovation under ESSA.

Which areas offer potential for change?

Attached is a chart that includes more detail. Some areas of potential change include the following:

1. **Evaluations/testing** - The federal mandate for linking testing to evaluations has been removed. We now have the opportunity to reshape evaluation systems to become tools for professional growth as they were originally intended. Additionally, we have the opportunity to re-evaluate both the frequency of testing and the purpose of testing.
2. **School accountability** - ESSA requires **at least one** non-academic indicator of school quality or success. We have an opportunity to help determine what factor/factors that should be.
3. **Interventions** - ESSA removes the federal prescriptive models that included school closings, changing personnel and punitive sanctions. We now have the opportunity to put in place interventions that are evidence-based, teacher-led, and student-centered.
4. **Local control** - Since ESSA puts many decisions back on the states, we have the opportunity to help shape which decisions should be made at a state level and which are better made at a local level.
5. **Teacher role in shaping policy** - The intent of ESSA is to focus more on supports and innovations at a local level. We have the opportunity to use our professional knowledge and expertise to shape what is happening in education at both a state and local level.

Why do you keep saying “we have the opportunity...?”

We must understand that while ESSA reduces federal government role, expands stakeholder role, and shifts the mindset to a more supportive environment, **it does not require that any of these changes actually take place.**

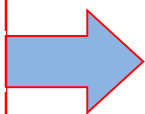
ESSA simply puts the decision making into the control of the states. Ohio can decide to keep much of what is in current law and still be in compliance with ESSA. Even the mandates for stakeholder engagement can be easily

manipulated. It is our responsibility to make sure that this does not happen. ESSA opens the door to reshaping education. As professionals in the field, we have to insert our voices in making changes that improve teaching and learning conditions in Ohio.

ESSA is perhaps the greatest opportunity of our careers to influence better education policy.

What is the threat from ESSA?

The threat is status quo or worse. As stated above, Ohio could keep most of what is currently in law and be in compliance. In addition, there are still many reformers, legislators, board members, department members, and others who have different views on education policy than we do. They will be making their voices heard. If we sit back and wait to see what happens, we will once again be forced to live with policy that we know does not work.



Think of something else to share? Send President Melissa Cropper an email with your additional thoughts at mcropper@oft-aft.org.

For more detailed and updated information about ESSA and OFT's work to influence positive changes in education policy, visit www.oft-aft.org.