**What is the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)?**

ESSA is a reauthorization of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, which was last reauthorized in 2001 as the No Child Left Behind Act. ESSA maintains the original law’s intent of advancing equity and opportunity for all students, with a particular focus on disadvantaged and other high need students. The law consists of a number of programs, the majority of which provide funding to states and local school districts to support education in preschool through grade 12. ESSA was signed into law by President Obama in December 2015 and most of its provisions will take effect at the beginning of the 2017-18 school year.

**What does ESSA require?**

Accountability and support for struggling schools are at the core of ESSA. Key requirements include:

* High academic standards to help prepare all students for success in college and careers
* Annual assessments in grades 3-8 and high school that measure students’ progress toward reaching the state’s academic standards
* Long-term goals and interim measures of progress for improving outcomes for all students in all public schools
* Accountability, interventions, and supports for struggling schools
* Public reporting on student and school performance, the professional qualifications of educators, and district and school spending

**Will ESSA change the core work of Massachusetts public schools?**

Overall the law aligns well with districts’ ongoing work and the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s strategic plan to help improve educational outcomes for students in our state’s public schools. Under that plan, the goal of Massachusetts’ public PK-12 education system is to **prepare all students for success after high school**. The state has identified five primary strategies to accelerate the pace of school improvement towards this goal:

* *Strengthen standards, curriculum, instruction, and assessment*
* *Promote educator development*
* *Turn around the lowest performing districts and schools*
* *Use technology and data to support teaching and learning*
* *Support social-emotional learning, health, and safety*

While ESSA will not bring major changes to the core work of our public schools, it does provide the opportunity to reflect on and improve certain areas.

**What opportunities does ESSA provide Massachusetts?**

Massachusetts has identified the following key opportunities under the law:

* The opportunity to reconsider the design of the state’s school & district accountability and assistance system, including support for low performing schools
* The opportunity for the state and school districts to plan more strategically for the use of federal funds, and to provide more transparency around school level funding
* The opportunity to direct more attention to students’ learning experiences, and their access to effective educators
* The opportunity to advance student access to a well-rounded curriculum, improve school conditions for student learning, and improve the use of technology in order to improve students’ academic achievement and digital literacy

**What is the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) doing to prepare for the new law?**

ESE is using the 2016 calendar year to plan for its transition to the requirements of ESSA, and to begin preparing a consolidated state plan that we expect to submit to the U.S. Department of Education in March 2017. With a few exceptions, ESSA will first take effect at the beginning of the 2017-18 school year. For Massachusetts schools and districts, the most notable changes under the law will relate to the design of the state’s school and district accountability and assistance system; ESE began its transition to ESSA by focusing on changes to the current system. The work has been organized into four phases:

* *Listening (Spring 2016):* Asking a broad range of stakeholders for their thoughts about the purpose and design of the state’s school and district accountability and assistance system
* *Modeling (Summer/Fall 2016):* Developing specific proposals based on the feedback we heard in the listening phase
* *Listening (Fall 2016):* Sharing our draft proposals with stakeholders to gain further feedback
* *Revising (Winter 2016-17):* Refining and improving proposed modifications based on additional feedback from stakeholders

**What kinds of changes are being considered for the school & district accountability system?**

We believe that our state’s accountability and assistance system should support the overarching goal of success for all students after high school, and thus we have adopted these key principles to help guide potential changes to the system:

* The system must focus on closing proficiency gaps and preparing all students for success at the next level
* The system must clearly identify our highest and lowest performing schools, and provide a clear signal to schools about areas where improvement is needed
* Measures included must be supported by research showing evidence of improved student outcomes
* Measures included must be actionable at the district or school level
* Growth and improvement matter—the system must measure improvement across all measures

The table below demonstrates measures under consideration.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Criteria for success** | **Proposed measures** | **Grade span** |
| All students perform well against challenging grade-level expectations | * Next-generation MCAS results for English language arts, math, science
* Student growth on MCAS tests in ELA & math
 | All |
| All English language learners make progress towards English proficiency | * ACCESS results
 | All |
| All students graduate from high school | * 4-year cohort graduation rate and 5-year graduation plus still enrolled rate
* Annual dropout rate
 | High school |
| All students attend school regularly | * Chronic absenteeism
 | All |
| All students experience a broad and challenging curriculum | * Access to the arts
* Access to a well-rounded curriculum
* Passing all grade 9 courses
* Access to advanced coursework
 | AllHigh schoolHigh schoolHigh school |
| Schools support all students in attaining these goals | * School climate survey (under development and testing)
 | All |

**How can I help Massachusetts plan for implementation of the new law?**

In spring 2016, ESE heard from approximately 2,200 groups and individuals who responded to a survey on issues such as priorities for the state’s accountability & assistance system, specific accountability measures used, and the types of supports and assistance that schools and district should receive. In spring and summer ESE staff also met with approximately 20 different stakeholder groups. In fall 2016 ESE will develop specific proposals based on the input collected during the initial listening phase and will share draft proposals with stakeholders for additional feedback. To have your organization added to the list of stakeholders to be notified, or to provide feedback at any time, please email essa@doe.mass.edu.

In November and December 2016, ESE will be hosting a series of public community forums on ESSA. To participate in a forum, please register online at <http://DESE.ESSA.sgizmo.com/s3>.