

The Every Student Succeeds Act: Fixing NCLB for Washington State Students, Parents, Teachers, and Communities

Senator Murray's bipartisan bill gives Washington state and schools student-focused flexibility, ends the need for NCLB-era waivers, and helps ensure all students have access to a quality education

Every child deserves a high-quality education, regardless of where they live, how they learn, or how much money their parents make. Unfortunately, the country's current K-12 education law, No Child Left Behind (NCLB), is badly broken, hurting students and communities, and it is long-past due to be fixed.

Senator Patty Murray (D-WA), the top Democrat on the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee, worked with Chairman Lamar Alexander (R-TN), as well as Chairman John Kline and Ranking Member Robert C. "Bobby" Scott (D-VA) in the House and other members of the Committees to negotiate a bipartisan agreement that reduce the burdensome requirements of NCLB, help reduce reliance on high-stakes testing, and expand access to a quality education for all students.

Ensuring more students have the opportunity to learn, grow, and thrive, is a critical investment that will pay off for the nation's middle class and for long-term economic competitiveness in the years to come.

Ending the Need for State Waivers:

The waivers that exempt states from No Child Left Behind's requirements have created uncertainty for schools, teachers, and parents in Washington state. When Washington state lost its waiver in 2014, 88 percent of schools in the state were labeled as failing. ESSA would eliminate the need for state waivers, and it would grant states increased flexibility to design their own accountability systems, allowing for evidence-based, locally designed solutions that meet the unique needs of schools and communities.

Student-Focused Flexibility:

ESSA gives states and school districts greater flexibility to improve student achievement.

Under NCLB, all schools were forced into rigid state accountability systems, and if schools were deemed "in need of improvement," they were subject to one-size-fits-all interventions. This punitive system hindered, rather than helped, a school's efforts to increase student achievement. ESSA removes the current law's one-size-fits-all approach on school interventions. Instead, it gives states the flexibility to design and establish accountability systems, allowing for evidence-based, locally designed solutions that meet the unique needs of the schools and communities.

To reduce the role that high-stakes testing plays, ESSA allows states to design accountability systems that include multiple measures of school success, instead of just test scores.

NCLB over-emphasized test scores as one of the only indicators of school success. While annual assessments provide valuable data to teachers and parents about student performance, assessments provide just one piece of information about student learning and school quality. ESSA broadens the focus of accountability beyond just test scores. This will lower the stakes of testing and will reduce pressure on students, teachers, and parents, so they can spend less time on test prep and more time on learning. The state-based accountability systems supported by this law will provide more flexibility to implement meaningful solutions to address a school's unique challenges, instead of singularly focusing on test proficiency. In addition, ESSA would create a pilot program to provide states with additional flexibility to design and administer innovative local assessments. To further reduce the stakes on testing, ESSA allows, but does not require teacher evaluations based on multiple measures.

Increasing Access to Early Learning:

ESSA recognizes the importance of high-quality early childhood education to help young learners build their skills to start school on strong footing and to succeed later in life. For the first time ever, the nation's primary elementary and secondary education legislation includes dedicated funding to support early learning.

The bill establishes a competitive grant program to provide funding for states that propose to improve coordination, quality, and access for early childhood education for low- and moderate-income children from birth to age five. This will help states like Washington, which despite a strong application for the Preschool Development Grants program, did not receive funding last year. These grants will help Washington build on progress to increase access to high-quality preschool programs. This new program recognizes the urgent need to expand access to preschool by authorizing \$250 million.

Affirming our national commitment to a high-quality education for all students:

ESSA takes important steps to include federal protections for state-designed accountability systems.

In developing this bipartisan bill to fix the law, some argued for removing all federal requirements in state-designed accountability systems for schools. Without basic federal guardrails and protections, there would be no accountability for federal taxpayers' largest investment in K-12 education, and states would be entirely left to their own devices to identify and address low performance.

ESSA provides states with flexibility to design their accountability systems, but also includes strong federal guardrails to ensure states include student performance, graduation rates for all students and subgroups of students, and other important measures of school performance in their accountability systems. These measures will help make sure all students have the opportunity to graduate from high school college-and-career ready, so they can take on the jobs of the 21st century global economy.

Expanding opportunities for all students to learn, grow, and thrive:

The bill maintains the intent of the nation's K-12 law to meet the diverse needs of all children and young adults.

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- ESSA supports students in poverty by maintaining disaggregation of assessments by groups of students, including low-income students. This will provide parents with key information on how their students are performing year to year. In addition, ESSA maintains key fiscal protections to ensure funding is directed toward students in poverty.
- The bill improves supports for homeless children by ensuring homeless liaisons have the training they need to fulfill their responsibilities. It strengthens requirements that provide homeless students and children in foster care with more stability, and it provides supports to ensure these at-risk students can enroll and excel in school.
- The bipartisan bill serves English-language learners by ensuring states measure students' progress toward English proficiency and holds districts accountable for designing and implementing effective English-language programs. In Washington state, the number and percentage of students who are English learners has been steadily increasing over the past decade. This bill will help more than 100,000 English learners in Washington state receive the language and academic supports they need to succeed.
- ESSA ensures that tribal students get the support they need by involving tribes in designing education programs that serve tribal communities and by including a program to build tribal educational agency capacity to run federal education programs.
- The bill provides critical support to school districts that serve high populations of military families and children living in tribal communities by strengthening and updating the Impact Aid program. These updates will provide speedier payments and funding stability for districts across the country. Washington state has 53 school districts that rely on Impact Aid support to provide quality education and critical services to students.
- ESSA provides much-needed relief to the Central Kitsap School District by directing the Secretary of Education to release \$14 million in unobligated funds to CKSD for the fiscal years in which they were deemed ineligible for Heavy Impact Aid.
- ESSA ensures that only students with the most significant cognitive disabilities take easier, alternate assessments so that more students with disabilities stay on track to earn a regular high school diploma and have broader career and college opportunities when they graduate.

ESSA includes important programs to support students' well-being and enhance learning and student achievement.

Literacy: To improve student achievement in reading and writing, ESSA would provide federal grants to implement comprehensive literacy programs. These grants would help improve literacy instruction plans and would be targeted toward areas serving disadvantaged children.

Afterschool programs: ESSA supports learning opportunities in afterschool programs by reauthorizing and strengthening the 21st Century Community Learning Center program. This

program is the only dedicated federal funding source that specifically supports before-school, afterschool, and summer learning programs for students attending high-poverty and low-performing schools. The program also allows funds to be used for some expanded learning program activities. It will provide much needed services to help students improve their academic achievement and well-being.

Innovation: ESSA provides funding for the development, implementation, replication, or scaling and rigorous testing of entrepreneurial, evidence-based, innovations to improve student achievement and attainment for high-need students. This program will help build a base of best practices in education that will help students across the country excel.

Community Involvement in Schools: ESSA provides dedicated funding for school districts to partner with community-based organizations to improve the coordination, integration, and effectiveness of student and family support services. These partnerships, whether as full neighborhood or individual school strategy, will improve community engagement and ensure that children and families have the supports they need to excel.

Native American and Alaska Native Language Immersion Schools: ESSA includes dedicated funding to support schools that use tribal languages as the primary language of instruction. This funding will help tribes around the country preserve their tribal languages and provide culturally appropriate instruction to students.

ESSA provides flexible grant funding to ensure students have access to a well-rounded education. Providing students with quality instruction in diverse subjects is key to ensuring a well-rounded and comprehensive education. ESSA provides funding to districts to tailor programs based on need and support a variety of programs to improve student learning, including a variety of accelerated learning programs which include Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate and dual enrollment programs and activities in music and the arts, financial literacy and college and career guidance counseling, foreign language instruction, and other activities to support student access and success in a variety of well-rounded education experiences.

Maintains support for STEM: Ensuring students have the skills they'll need to take on the jobs of tomorrow, especially in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM), is an economic imperative, especially for Washington state. By 2018, STEM jobs in Washington state will increase by 24 percent, according to the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce. ESSA would provide States and districts with flexible grant funding that can be used to continue to support projects that improve student achievement in the STEM subjects, including computer science, to ensure students graduate with the skills they need to thrive in the 21st century economy. ESSA also includes optional reservation for the Secretary to support States in implementing a statewide STEM Master Teacher Corps in order to attract and retain top STEM educators or to support the implementation, replication or expansion of other effective professional development programs for STEM teachers.

ESSA provides flexible grant funding to States and districts to improve school climate and learning conditions so that all students succeed. Students need access to support services and

programs that create a positive school climate and address their comprehensive needs. ESSA provides support for programs that remove barriers to learning and improve the overall health and safety of students, including programs or activities related to violence prevention, mental health awareness and training programs, bullying and harassment prevention, reducing exclusionary discipline practices, physical education and fitness, and other activities that improve student health and well-being.

ESSA provides flexible grant funding to improve the use of technology and improve student academic achievement. Washington state is on the forefront of the education technology movement. But while some schools in Washington state have access to innovative technologies to help students learn, too many schools have not been able to keep pace. ESSA helps to close this digital divide by providing flexible funding that states and school districts can utilize to improve access to education technology and provide professional learning opportunities to help educators, school leaders, and administrators use technology effectively and support digital learning.