



The Education Trust

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# THE EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT: WHAT'S IN IT? WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR EQUITY?

## OVERVIEW

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On Dec. 10, President Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) into law. ESSA is the most recent version of the federal government's biggest K-12 law, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which came into effect in 1965.

ESSA contains a number of meaningful levers that education leaders, parents, members of the business and civil rights communities, and advocates can use to advance education equity. These levers, covered in detail on the following pages, include:

- Consistent, state-adopted **standards** for all students that are aligned with the demands of postsecondary education and work;
- Statewide annual **assessments** aligned with statewide standards;
- Clear requirements that statewide **accountability systems** must expect more progress for the groups of students who have been behind, base school ratings on the progress of all groups of students, and expect action when any group of students is consistently underperforming;
- Richer **public reporting** on academic outcomes and opportunities to learn for all groups of students, including, for the first time, school-level per-pupil spending and access to rigorous coursework;
- Resources to support **teachers and leaders**, and a demand that states and districts<sup>1</sup> report on and address inequities in the rates at which low-income students and students of color are assigned to ineffective, out-of-field, or inexperienced teachers; and
- Continued targeting of federal **funding** to the highest poverty schools and districts.

To be clear, none of these levers will guarantee gap-closing and improved achievement for all. No law, no matter how strong, could ever do that.

But taken together, they represent key building blocks for an equity-focused school system — one that sets high expectations for all students, provides resources necessary for meeting those expectations, measures and reports progress toward them, and ensures action when any school — or any group of students — falls off track.

We at The Education Trust look forward to working alongside equity advocates from all corners — from classrooms to statehouses, community centers to boardrooms — to take hold of these blocks and together build the schools and systems all students need and deserve.

The following pages include more information on each of these levers, including information on what ESSA requires and questions equity-minded advocates should be asking. Those looking for even more detail about the specifics of ESSA can check out our **detailed summary**.

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1. When used in this document, the term “district” refers to both traditional public school districts and charters.