

## THE BIG PICTURE

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) presents significant opportunity to increase access to comprehensive school psychological services and to advance the role of school psychologists to help improve student and school outcomes. The new federal law, which takes effect at the beginning of the 2017–2018 school year, includes a number of important structural changes, the most significant of which returns to states and local jurisdictions substantial control for designing program and accountability systems and determining use of funds. The voice and leadership of school psychologists will be critical to ensuring that states’ ESSA implementation efforts reflect best practice and equal opportunity for all students.

## KEY POLICIES RELEVANT TO SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES

*Unless explicitly noted, the policies listed below do not represent mandated activities. Rather, they are authorized activities that states and districts may choose to implement using federal funds.*

### 1. Assessment and Accountability Systems

- ESSA replaces annual yearly performance (AYP) requirements with a comprehensive model that seeks to support struggling schools.
- States and local education agencies (LEAs) *must* engage in meaningful consultation with appropriate specialized instructional support personnel when designing state and local Title I plans to improve student outcomes and school success.
- States *must* develop an accountability system that:
  - Includes performance goals for subgroups of students
  - Annually measures student performance based on
    - Performance on state assessments, and
    - At least one other valid and reliable academic indicator that can include student growth
  - Include at least one indicator of school quality or student success that allows for meaningful differentiation, such as student engagement, or school climate and safety

### 2. School Improvement and Support

ESSA requires states to establish a system of meaningfully differentiating school performance offering support to schools in need of improvement.

**Comprehensive Support and Improvement.** At least once every 3 years, states must identify schools that fall in this category. Minimum criteria include: the bottom 5% of schools, high schools with graduation rates below 67%, and schools with subgroups of students that have consistently underperformed. Comprehensive support and improvement plans are approved and monitored by the state. If a school fails to make progress, the state may take additional actions. Schools identified for comprehensive support and improvement must:

- conduct a needs assessment,

### Key Definitions

**School-based mental health services provider** includes a State-licensed or State-certified school counselor, school psychologist, school social worker, or other State licensed or certified mental health professional qualified under State law to provide mental health services to children and adolescents.

**Specialized instructional support personnel** means (i) school counselors, school social workers, and school psychologists; and “(ii) other qualified professional personnel, such as school nurses, speech language pathologists, and school librarians, involved in providing assessment, diagnosis, counseling, educational, therapeutic, and other necessary services (including related services as that term is defined in section 602 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C. 1401)) as part of a comprehensive program to meet student needs.

## Every Student Succeeds Act Opportunities: Overview for School Psychologists

- implement evidence-based comprehensive learning supports based on the results, and
- identify and plan to address resource inequity, which *could* include staffing ratios.

**Targeted Support and Improvement.** *Every year*, states must identify individual schools in which any subgroup of students is consistently underperforming. In collaboration with the LEA, these schools must develop a plan to improve outcomes for the subgroup of students identified as underperforming. The district determines appropriate timelines for improvement and actions if schools fail to make progress.

- In schools operating a targeted assistance program, plans must outline how specialized instructional support personnel will be involved in helping identify and intervene with students most at risk of school failure.
- Schools may use Title I funds to implement comprehensive school mental health services as a school improvement strategy.

### 3. Improving School Climate, School Safety, and Access to High Quality Comprehensive Learning Supports

States must annually report school climate, bullying, and harassment data and articulate how they will assist LEA efforts to address bullying, harassment, and discipline. However, ESSA allows great flexibility for states and districts to determine specific practices to improve school climate, school safety, and the delivery of comprehensive learning supports.

States and districts can use Title I, Title II, and/or Title IV\* funds to:

- Implement multitiered systems of support to address the academic, social-emotional, behavioral, and mental health needs of all students.
- Implement positive behavior interventions and support and early intervening services.
- Improve school climate and comprehensive safety.
- Increase access to comprehensive school mental and behavioral health services.
- Implement trauma informed practices, and mental health first aid.
- Improve quality and effectiveness of school community partnerships.
- Offer ongoing and job embedded professional development for all relevant school staff that facilitates:
  - Alignment of activities to specific school improvement efforts;
  - Collaborative data collection and decision making;
  - Increased educator capacity within multitiered systems of support;
  - Effective classroom discipline and behavior management;
  - High quality instruction, supports, and interventions for diverse learners, including students with disabilities; and
  - Knowledge of culturally competent practices.

#### Multitiered Systems of Support (MTSS)

*MTSS are comprehensive systems of differentiated supports. Data-driven decisions regarding instruction and intervention are provided in increasing intensity (i.e., tiers) based on student need. Tier 1 typically refers to services available to all students (e.g., wellness/skills promotion and school-wide programs). Tier 2 services are available to some students identified as needing some additional services or supports. Tier 3 refers to more intensive services for individuals or small groups and is usually limited to only 5–10% of students. An effective MTSS approach includes four essential components:*

- 1. a school-wide, multilevel instructional and behavioral system for preventing school failure;*
- 2. screening;*
- 3. progress monitoring; and*
- 4. data-based decision making for instruction, movement within the multilevel system, and disability identification (in accordance with state law).*

\*Title IV Part A funds are awarded to states and districts based on the funding formula used to allocate Title I funds. States must spend at least 20% on activities to support safe and health students, and 20% on activities to expand access to a well-rounded education (e.g., music, arts, civics).

### RELEVANT RESOURCES

Resources related to the Every Student Succeeds Act and school psychological services are available on the NASP website (<http://www.nasponline.org/essa>). These resources include:

- Topic-specific ESSA fact sheets
- ESSA/MTSS/NASP Practice Model Crosswalk
- Resources and guidance from the U.S. Department of Education
- Information about specific funding sources in ESSA
- NASP Practice Model Guide