Ensuring Effective Implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act

Frequently Asked Questions

School psychologists are in a unique position to help contribute to the critical conversations shaping ESSA implementation and to help design and implement various evidence-based school improvement efforts. This document is intended to help you contribute to the critical conversations shaping ESSA implementation, including design and implementation of various evidence-based school improvement efforts.

What is ESSA?

Passed in December, 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) replaces No Child Left Behind and 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 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 is critical to helping states and districts create and sustain meaningful change that will improve outcomes for all students. For additional information on specific components of ESSA and the role of the school psychologist, visit: http://www.nasponline.org/research-and-policy/current-law-and-policy-priorities/policy-priorities/the-every-student-succeeds-act/essa-implementation-resources

What is the timeline for ESSA Implementation?

States must submit their comprehensive state plans to the Department of Education for review by either May or September 2017. States are required to demonstrate how they have engaged with a diverse group of stakeholders and sought feedback from the public on these state plans. As such, many states are in the process of finalizing their state plans based on feedback received over the last year.

States must identify schools in need of comprehensive or targeted support and improvement no later than the beginning of the 2018–2019 school year, although states may identify schools earlier than this if they choose to do so. These schools must be identified based on the indicators of academic achievement and school quality that are included in the accountability system, and states must have a plan for assisting struggling schools.

Are school psychologists specifically mentioned in the law?

Yes. School psychologists are included in the definition of “school based mental health services provider” and “specialized instructional support personnel.” The term specialized instructional support personnel, or SISP, is a new term that includes school psychologists, school
counselors, school social workers, speech language pathologists, and others who provide specialized support to students and teachers.

SISP are mentioned in the law over 40 times, including in reference to the development of various school improvement plans and professional development opportunities. To learn more about specialized instructional support personnel, visit www.nasisp.org.

**What do school psychologists need to know about ESSA?**

ESSA presents an excellent opportunity to advance the comprehensive role of the school psychologist, increase access to comprehensive school psychological services, and advance implementation of the NASP Practice Model. It is important that school psychologists understand the key elements of ESSA and how they are relevant to school psychology, school psychologists, the priorities of state associations, and most importantly, improved outcomes for students.

*Relevant Resources:*

- **NASP Fact Sheets for School Psychologists.** These fact sheets contain key information that school psychologists need to know about specific elements of ESSA.

- **Webinar: School Psychologists and ESSA.** This webinar provides a brief overview of ESSA and the key opportunities for school psychology and school psychologists.

- **ESSA/MTSS/Practice Model Crosswalk.** This crosswalk outlines how ESSA connects with multitiered systems of support (MTSS), essential school practices, and the broad role of school psychologists working within the scope of services described in the NASP Practice Model.

**How can I educate decision makers about the value of school psychologists and ESSA?**

School psychologists have specific expertise to facilitate the development, implementation, and evaluation of various efforts to improve school and student outcomes prioritized by state and local decision makers, authorized by ESSA, including MTSS, efforts to improve school climate and safety, positive behavior interventions and supports, early intervening services, and comprehensive mental and behavioral health services.

Because this law is implemented at the state level and with vast amounts of local control, school psychologists need to be involved at the local and state levels to ensure implementation efforts are aligned with what the law intends. Best practices will be critical to this law’s success in schools, and school psychologists know a significant amount about systems prevention and response and should share information with decision-makers about best practices for schools. It is imperative that school psychologists continue to demonstrate their value through action and educate key stakeholders about how school psychologists contribute to improved school and student outcomes. Examples include:
● Share information, such as ESSA fact sheets, with building principals, district superintendents and other leaders, and state level officials (e.g., legislators, state department of education officials).
● Foster relationships with key members of ESSA stakeholder groups and other policy makers with influence over state plans. This is especially important if your state association is not represented on state ESSA planning teams.
● Participate in town hall and related meetings to provide input and/or feedback on proposed state plans.
● Continue to share your state association priorities with members of the state legislature and other key stakeholders.
● Create talking points that reflect the priorities of your state association and demonstrate the value of school psychologists. Share these with all relevant stakeholders (Note. The ESSA Fact Sheets include key messages that can be adapted to create talking points).
● Maintain regular contact with your federal elected officials. Congress has an unprecedented level of involvement in the implementation of this law. They are committed to ensuring it is implemented as intended, and they want to know what is and what isn’t working in their states and districts.
● Continue to build relationships with superintendents, principals, and other key decision-makers. Provide resources to your members to help them do so as well. It is equally important that we work to influence the school improvement plans of states/districts/schools, but we also need to be sure that those ‘on the ground’ understand the value of utilizing their school psychologists to improve student outcomes.
● Consider forming informal coalitions with allies around shared issues in your state/district.
● Monitor state legislation and regulation that has the potential to impact school psychologists and/or the priorities of your state association.
● Engage your NASP delegate in the activities mentioned above and in other relevant work of the state association.

Relevant Resources:

**NASP ESSA Fact Sheets for Decision Makers.** These Fact Sheets outline how school psychologists can support effective development, implementation, and evaluation of various school improvement efforts prioritized in ESSA. These facts sheets contain valuable information for legislators, state education officials, superintendents, principals, and other key stakeholder groups.

**Communication Planning Resources.** These tools can help you refine your key messages and map out an effective communication plan.

**NASP Statements and Formal ESSA Comments.** NASP was actively engaged in the development and passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act and continues to be engaged in the development of regulations, guidance, and technical assistance. These documents contain
policy and practice recommendations that you can adapt to include in the development of your state association’s messaging regarding ESSA.

**Who are the key decision-makers and stakeholders?**

Many states have formed, or plan to form, various working groups or task forces to help inform the development of state and local ESSA implementation plans*. It is crucial to advocate for state association leaders and/or members with specific expertise to be included as members of these working groups. At a minimum, it will be incredibly important to identify and engage with members of these groups to share your ideas about appropriate policy and practice needed to meet the needs of students in your state. Furthermore, each state has its own unique structure for creating, funding, and enforcing education policies. It is important that you know and connect with those who have the authority and responsibility for ESSA implementation and other relevant education initiatives. The National Association of State Boards of Education has two resources regarding the education governance models used in each state.

*Information about ESSA, including members of various working groups or task forces, should be publically available on state education department websites.

**Relevant Resources:**

**Key Stakeholder Information.** Numerous stakeholders representing diverse perspectives and priorities are working to influence ESSA implementation. This document contains details about these stakeholder groups and contact information for state affiliates and leaders.

**How do I know if my state has started developing plans for ESSA implementation?**

States are in various stages of planning for ESSA implementation, with many states well into the development of their draft plans. Most states have a website dedicated to keeping the public informed about ESSA implementation efforts. A spreadsheet containing information about the status of each state (as of November 30, 2016) is available at www.nasponline.org/ESSA (See “State ESSA Information” under Advocacy Tools & Resources).

**What if my state association has not engaged in any conversations around ESSA at the state level?**

Time is of the essence. If your state association has not engaged in conversations related to ESSA, it is imperative that you begin to do so. Please refer to the information above for key actions to take. If you are not at the table, you may be on the menu!

**What if school psychologists were not consulted in the development of state plans?**

If school psychologists or members of your state association were not consulted in the development of state plans, you can still wield significant influence on the implementation of the law at the district level. It will be important for you to gain a solid understanding of what is contained in your state’s plan and the priorities related to improving school and student
outcomes. Determine how school psychologists can contribute to the success of specific initiatives within your state’s plan, and make connections with local superintendents, principals, and other key stakeholders to let them know of your expertise and specific ways you can help contribute to student success.

Relevant Resources:

**NASP Practice Model Implementation Guide.** This guide is designed to help move toward the implementation of the NASP Practice Model by setting goals that best meet the needs of your school building, district, or state.

**NASP Advocacy Roadmaps** NASP Advocacy Roadmaps contain a set of tools and resources to help you plan effective advocacy strategies for specific issues important to school psychology.

**Who can I contact if my state needs assistance?**

NASP staff and leaders are available to answer specific questions and provide consultation and support to facilitate your advocacy efforts. Please contact Kelly Vaillancourt Strobach (kvaillancourt@naspweb.org), NASP Director of Government Relations, or Katie Eklund (eklundk@missouri.edu), Chair of the NASP Government and Professional Relations Committee if you need assistance or support.

**How can I stay informed about ESSA and access new and updated resources?**

All ESSA information, including new resources, will be shared via NASP In Brief, the Communities, and posted online at [www.nasponline.org/ESSA](http://www.nasponline.org/ESSA).

**KEY TOPIC AREAS**

**Accountability**

**Why should school psychologists be consulted on matters related to accountability?**

School psychologists play a critical role in creating ongoing, meaningful assessments of student learning and progress as a key feature of effective educational systems. ESSA broadens the definition of school success beyond traditional measures of student achievement, such as standardized test scores. Now, in addition to measuring student achievement and high school graduation rates, states must identify another indicator that measures school success, such as school climate, school safety, student engagement, or access to advanced coursework, among others. This is often referred to as the “fifth indicator.” States can choose any indicator they like, as long as there is evidence connecting the specific indicator to improvement in student learning or student success. This indicator must allow for meaningful differentiation of school performance, and schools must be able to disaggregate the data to show how it affects students in different subgroups.
Many schools and districts currently collect this data, but using it for accountability purposes is uncharted territory. ESSA requires states and local education agencies (LEAs) *engage in meaningful consultation* with appropriate specialized instructional support personnel when designing state and local Title I accountability plans to improve student outcomes and school success. School psychologists are experts in assessment, with particular expertise in appropriate measurement of nonacademic characteristics of student performance and systems-level factors, such as school climate, that can affect student performance. This expertise should be used to ensure unintended consequences of nonacademic measures (e.g., lack of reliability, inflation of rating of personal adjustment scores, and interventions focused on increasing ratings rather than instilling concepts) are avoided. It will be essential for school psychologists to work with school leadership to critically examine each indicator to determine the reliability and validity of each measure to avoid response biases, inflated scores, and misinterpretation of results.

State ESSA workgroups have made four recommendations for the state accountability systems. First, the foundation of the accountability system needs to be student-centered, taking a holistic view of students’ academic, personal, and cultural experiences in their learning environments. While research supports the link between academic success and holistic student supports, there is little evidence of how those factors can be used within accountability systems. Second, academic and nonacademic accountability indicators need to contribute to identifying schools for supports and recognition, the timely reporting of information to education stakeholders, and establishment of meaningful education goals and interim targets for the state and its school communities. Third, the system needs to provide timely, meaningful feedback to all stakeholders in education. Doing so will enable continuous and sustainable improvement of the entire system, an adaptive and necessary factor for positive student outcomes long term. Essential data infrastructure, timely delivery of results, and adequate time and training for educators to use data are crucial to the support of statewide education improvements. Finally, accountability systems should use evidence-based interventions that are responsive to the unique needs of students and school communities and are sensitive to meet the needs of every child.

**What is school climate?**

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) explicitly recognizes the strong relationship between positive school climate and student learning and success. A strong system of comprehensive social, emotional, and behavioral supports is as important as effective teaching to creating the conditions for learning required to help students achieve their academic potential. School psychologists play a critical role in creating these safe and supportive learning environments. They are essential partners with teachers, administrators, families, and other relevant stakeholders in working to ensure schools implement comprehensive, evidence-based initiatives to improve school climate. In particular, school psychologists should ensure school leaders understand their relevant skills, such as those related to needs assessment, mental and behavioral health, violence prevention, discipline, cultural responsiveness, and school–home–community collaboration.
Why is it important to include school climate in a state accountability system?

Positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS) and academic achievement have been reviewed extensively in the national landscape. Overall, many studies have correlated a relationship between a positive behavior framework and academic achievement (e.g., Bradshaw, Mitchell, & Leaf, 2010; Childs, Kincaid, & George, 2010; Horner, Sugai, Smolkowski, Eber, Nakasato, Todd, & Esperanza, 2009; Simonsen, Eber, Black, Sugai, Lewandowski, Sims, & Myers, 2012). States acknowledge that measuring a school’s success is more than just academic achievement scores, so ESSA requires an additional measure of school quality to be included in an accountability system. This is designed to gain a better picture of what it means to be a successful school.

How can states, districts, and schools measure school climate in a valid and reliable manner?

Measuring school quality is a multifaceted issue that is presently being explored to ensure measures are reliable and valid. States are exploring a combination of attendance data, chronic absenteeism, suspension data, expulsion data, as well as perception data. Several research-based* available school climate measures can be found here:

- [https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/edscls](https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/edscls)

School psychologists can help states select measures that are psychometrically defensible and appropriate for use with students in schools. Moreover, school psychologists can serve as experts in the actual implementation of school climate interventions and assessment measures at the school level, assisting with data collection, interpretation, and intervention.

*It should be noted that these measures may not be appropriate to use within a statewide accountability system. It is imperative that school psychologists review the psychometric properties of any assessment tool they may recommend to be used for accountability purposes.

Educator Quality/Evaluations

How should school psychologists be evaluated?

Personnel evaluations should be used to provide meaningful feedback to improve the performance of all school psychologists. To accomplish this, evaluation systems need to provide opportunities for reflection, feedback, instruction, and supportive practice. As such, the evaluation tools must be linked to their specific roles and the full range of services that can be reasonably expected from school psychologists. Individual school psychologists should consider the breadth of needs of the students they serve in relation to the services that they have been
trained to deliver in response to these needs. Critical to this is the workload and capacity necessary for an individual to provide those services (e.g., time, resources, and ratios).

Related Resources:

This link contains several examples of district and state school psychology evaluations and extensive information about how to align personnel evaluations with the NASP Practice Model.

Comprehensive School Mental and Behavioral Health

Why is important for schools to address the mental and behavioral health needs of students?

Mental and behavioral wellness is directly linked to overall positive student achievement, school climate, high school graduation rates, and the prevention of risky behaviors, disciplinary incidents, and substance abuse (Center for Health and Healthcare in Schools, 2014). These factors, in turn, are associated with such important life outcomes as improved interpersonal relationships, higher earnings, greater employment stability, and lower likelihood of involvement with the criminal justice system (Aos, Lieb, Mayfield, Miller, & Pennucci, 2004). Approximately 75–80% of children and youth in need of mental health services do not receive them because existing mental health services are inadequate (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001). Of those who do receive assistance, the vast majority (70–80%) receive mental health services in schools (Farmer, Burns, Philip, Angold, & Costello, 2003; Rones & Hoagwood, 2000). In fact, students were found to be 21 times more likely to visit school-based health centers for mental health concerns than community-based centers (Juszczak, Melinkovich, & Kaplan, 2003). As such, schools have been identified as the natural and best setting for mental health prevention and treatment services (Anglin, 2003) and can provide comprehensive prevention and early intervention services for all students, including those with and without identified education disabilities. For those students in need of more intensive services, school psychologists can help coordinate school-based services and community-based services to facilitate a wraparound system of care approach to support families.

What does a comprehensive school mental health system look like?

A comprehensive school mental health system begins with a framework of prevention and follows with layered responses based on need. Prevention systems begin with identifying a problem’s risk and protective factors (Doll & Cummings, 2008). Following identification of factors that contribute to a problem, schools develop universal, selected, and indicated (or intensive) prevention at every level of need. School psychologists can be a part of implementation at each level, which may include the following.
Tier 1, **universal services** are part of a school-wide effort to promote mental and behavioral wellness and prevent mental and behavioral health problems for all students. Key elements of Tier 1 include:

- Universal screening for academic, behavioral, and emotional barriers to learning to ensure early identification and early intervention.
- Infusion of social–emotional learning into the classroom/curriculum.
- Staff development related to identification of mental health concerns and referral processes.
- School-wide positive behavior interventions and supports with a focus on creating a positive school climate.

Tier 2, **targeted services** address identified or emerging mental and behavioral health problems, prevent risky behaviors, and increase protective factors for students and their families. Examples of evidence-based Tier 2 services include:

- Suicide risk/threat assessment.
- Individual/group counseling and skill building groups.
- Development and monitoring of individual student behavior intervention plans.
- Consultation with teachers and/or families to address mental and behavioral health problems.

Tier 3, **intensive services** focus on direct and indirect services to address identified mental and behavioral health problems. Examples of evidence-based Tier 3 services include:

- Direct therapeutic services to all students in need, including individual and group counseling, even in the absence of a clinical diagnosis or identified educational disability.
- Psychological assessment of social, emotional, and behavioral problems.
- Crisis intervention/crisis response.
- Facilitation of collaboration between school professionals and community agencies and other outside mental and behavioral health providers.

**Why are school psychologists and other school employed mental health professionals so critical to schools?**

School psychologists are uniquely positioned in schools to facilitate the development, delivery, and monitoring of prompt, effective, and culturally responsive mental and behavioral health services of prevention and intervention. Some districts mistakenly consider outsourcing all mental health services to community providers as way to save money. This approach runs contrary to long-term sustainability, availability of services to all students, and relevance to the learning environment. Just as children are not merely small adults, schools are not simply clinics with blackboards and desks. Community partnerships to improve student mental health are most effective when school psychologists and other school-employed mental health professionals are integrally involved in the design, implementation, and evaluation of comprehensive school mental health service delivery systems. School psychologists are already part of the school team and are able to provide appropriate, sustainable supports to students, staff, and families that reinforce student well-being and learning. School psychologists’ broadly
focused preparation as academic, mental, and behavioral health service providers, coupled with their engagement in and familiarity with schools' organizational and cultural contexts, equips them to play a primary role in multitiered and responsive school-based mental and behavioral health programs.

**What funds are available to help support and sustain these efforts?**

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) authorizes various funding streams (e.g., Title I, Title II, and Title IV), including funds specifically reserved for schools identified for targeted support and improvement, to support state and district efforts to improve access to coordinated comprehensive school mental health services. Tapping into school psychologists’ expertise can be an incredibly powerful tool to develop and implement comprehensive and integrated services that are connected with student learning and school improvement. These highly trained professionals are uniquely positioned in schools to facilitate the development, delivery, and monitoring of prompt, effective, and culturally responsive mental and behavioral health services that are effectively coordinated with needed community services.

**Supporting Diverse Learners**

**How can we be sure that states and districts are upholding requirements of ESSA to meet the needs of all students, including those with disabilities and those of diverse racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds?**

**Model Policy Language**

The language below is intended to serve as a guide to help you craft state and district level policy on various topics. In some cases, this language may need to be adapted to fit the specific needs of your state/district.

**Model Credentialing Language**

"School psychology services" refers to the activities and services provided by school psychologists as consistent with the National Association of School Psychologist’s (NASP) *Model for Comprehensive and Integrated School Psychological Services*, or its successor.

**School Community Partnerships Model Language**

“(A) That the applicant will ensure that, in carrying out activities under this section, the local educational agency involved will enter into a memorandum of understanding—

“(i) with at least one public or private mental health entity, health care entity, law enforcement or juvenile justice entity, child welfare agency, family-based mental health entity, family or family organization, trauma network, or other community-based entity; and

“(ii) that clearly states—
“(I) how school employed mental health professionals will be utilized for carrying out such responsibilities;
“(II) the responsibilities of each partner with respect to the activities to be carried out;
“(III) how each such partner will be accountable for carrying out such responsibilities; and
“(IV) the amount of non-Federal funding or in-kind contributions that each such partner will contribute in order to sustain the program.

“(B) That the comprehensive school-based mental health program carried out under this section supports the flexible use of funds to address—
“(i) the promotion of the social, emotional, and behavioral health of all students in an environment that is conducive to learning;
“(ii) the reduction in the likelihood of at-risk students developing social, emotional, behavioral health problems, or substance use disorders;
“(iii) the early identification of social, emotional, behavioral problems, or substance use disorders and the provision of early intervention services;
“(iv) the treatment or referral for treatment of students with existing social, emotional, behavioral health problems, or substance use disorders; and
“(v) the development and implementation of programs to assist children in dealing with trauma and violence.

“(C) That the comprehensive school-based mental health program carried out under this section will provide for inservice training of all school personnel, including ancillary staff and volunteers, in—
“(i) the techniques and supports needed to identify early children with trauma histories and children with, or at risk of, mental illness;
“(ii) the use of referral mechanisms that effectively link such children to appropriate treatment and intervention services in the school and in the community and to follow up when services are not available;
“(iii) strategies that promote a school-wide positive environment;
“(iv) strategies for promoting the social, emotional, mental, and behavioral health of all students; and
“(v) strategies to increase the knowledge and skills of school and community leaders about the impact of trauma and violence and on the application of a public health approach to comprehensive school-based mental health programs.

“(D) That the comprehensive school-based mental health program carried out under this section will include comprehensive training for parents, siblings, and other family members of children with mental health disorders, and for concerned members of the community in—
“(i) the techniques and supports needed to identify early children with trauma histories, and children with, or at risk of, mental illness;
“(ii) the use of referral mechanisms that effectively link such children to appropriate treatment and intervention services in the school and in the community and follow up when such services are not available; and
“(iii) strategies that promote a school-wide positive environment.
“(E) That the comprehensive school-based mental health program carried out under this
section will demonstrate the measures to be taken to sustain the program after funding under
this section terminates.
“(F) That the local educational agency partnership involved is supported by the State
educational and mental health system to ensure that the sustainability of the program is
established after funding under this section terminates.
“(G) That the comprehensive school-based mental health program carried out under this
section will be based on trauma-informed and evidence-based practices.
“(H) That the comprehensive school-based mental health program carried out under this
section will be coordinated with early intervening activities carried out under the Individuals
with Disabilities Education Act.
“(I) That the comprehensive school-based mental health program carried out under this
section will be trauma-informed and culturally and linguistically appropriate.
“(J) That the comprehensive school-based mental health program carried out under this
section will include a broad needs assessment of youth who drop out of school due to policies
of ‘zero tolerance’ with respect to drugs, alcohol, or weapons and an inability to obtain
appropriate services.
“(K) That the mental health services provided through the comprehensive school-based
mental health program carried out under this section will be provided by qualified mental and
behavioral health professionals who are certified or licensed by the State involved and
practicing within their area of expertise.

Qualified Provider of Medicaid Services in the Schools—School Psychologist
Model State Policy

“School psychologist” is defined as an individual with a graduate or postgraduate degree from
an accredited institution of higher education in school psychology who—
1. has received specialized training or clinical experience in child and adolescent mental
   health in school psychology; and
2. has a license or certification in a State to practice school psychology.

“Qualified school psychological practitioner” is defined as—
1. a licensed or certified school psychologist who holds a current, valid license or certificate
to practice school psychology issued by the State, who is employed or contracted with
the Medicaid provider, and who is acting within the scope of his or her practice under
state law.

“School psychological services” are defined as—
1. the application of school psychological procedures to assess, diagnose, prevent, treat,
or ameliorate psychological problems or emotional or mental disorders of individuals or
groups; or to assess or improve psychological adjustment or functioning of individuals or
groups.