



Background

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed by President Obama on December 10, 2015, and represents good news for our nation's schools. This bipartisan measure reauthorizes the 50-year-old Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the nation's national education law and longstanding commitment to equal opportunity for all students.

ESSA includes provisions that will help to ensure success for students and schools. Below are just a few. The law:

- Advances equity by upholding critical protections for America's disadvantaged and high-need students.
- Ensures that vital information is provided to educators, families, students, and communities through annual statewide assessments that measure students' progress toward high academic standards that will prepare them to succeed in college and careers.
- Helps to support and grow local innovations—including evidence-based and place-based interventions developed by local leaders and educators.
- Maintains an expectation that there will be accountability and action to effect positive change in our lowest-performing schools, where groups of students are not making progress, and where graduation rates are low over extended periods of time.

The PA Comprehensive School Improvement Initiative

ESSA presents an opportunity for Pennsylvania to provide tailored, evidence-based interventions and supports for local education agency (LEA) and school improvement efforts. ESSA increases flexibility for how LEAs support school improvement – moving away from a one-size fits all approach.

To support LEAs in this work, PDE has researched and designed a system for differentiated and scalable solutions – focused on evidence-based conditions and practices that are most critical for improved teaching and learning for all students. PDE has approached its efforts to strengthen school improvement by focusing on improving school and LEA capacity to diagnose and address the root causes of school performance challenges.

In Spring 2018, PDE launched a 19-school, three-district pilot to test processes and tools for an evidence-based assessment of 18 essential practices with educators prior to larger scale rollout and implementation statewide. The pilot districts—Pittsburgh Public Schools, Juniata County School District and Allentown School District—were selected from across the state and represent a variety of characteristics including size, urbanicity, student demographics, and other contextual factors related to underperforming schools. PDE provided these districts and schools with resources and targeted funding to partner in the transition to the new school improvement framework under ESSA. PDE also trained facilitators from the Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PaTTAN) to coach the pilot districts and schools through the new improvement process. Finally, PDE sought feedback from the educators in the pilot. This approach to meaningfully engaging with educators gave teachers, administrators and district-level leaders an important voice in shaping the process so that the state's tools and procedures are responsive to their needs.

More information about this pilot can be found in **“Engaging Educators to Strengthen School Improvement”** (http://bit.ly/pdesipilot_macc) by the Mid-Atlantic Comprehensive Center.

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“Engaging Educators to Strengthen School Improvement”
Mid-Atlantic Comprehensive Center