



## HEALTHY SCHOOLS CAMPAIGN

### Every Student Succeeds Act Frequently Asked Questions Updated April 16, 2018

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## 1) What is the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)?

The [Every Student Succeeds Act](#) (ESSA) was signed into law by President Obama on December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2015. This bipartisan measure reauthorized the 50-year-old Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the nation's education law. The reauthorized law reiterates the nation's longstanding commitment to equal opportunity for all students and contains policies that will help prepare all students for success in college and future careers. Under ESSA, states have more authority and flexibility in establishing their plans and strategies than they previously had under No Child Left Behind (NCLB). ESSA also provides new opportunities for states to support student health and school wellness. For instance, ESSA specifically mentions the need for states to support the whole child. In addition, for the first time in history, health education (HE) and physical education (PE) are included in the definition of a "well-rounded education."

## 2) What do we mean by student health and school wellness?

A healthy student is one who's physical and emotional health needs are met both inside and outside of school, and who has access to medical care for prevention, screening, and disease management, including vision, dental, and mental health. A school that supports wellness is one that provides and promotes a healthy environment—including good nutrition, physical activity, basic safety, clean air and water, and access to care—and helps to build the knowledge and skills for students to make healthy choices that allow them to thrive. In a healthy school, the [school climate/culture](#) positively impacts student learning, instruction, and achievement. This vision is outlined well by the [Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child Model](#), developed by the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) and the [Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development \(ASCD\)](#).

## 3) What are the different parts of ESSA and where are the opportunities to include student health and school wellness?

- Title I: Provides funding to State Education Agencies (SEA) to support Local Education Agencies (LEA) with high percentages of children from low-income families. The aim of this funding is to ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards.
  - *State Accountability Systems*—Each SEA was required to create a state accountability system with five indicators, including four academic indicators and one additional indicator, a measure of school quality or student success. SEAs could opt to utilize a health or wellness metric (such as access to PE or student fitness assessment) or a metric such as chronic absenteeism, which has many health-related causes, for this fifth indicator.
  - *School Improvement*—SEAs must reserve 7% of their Title I funding to support comprehensive support and improvement for their lowest performing schools. SEAs can use this funding to support student engagement and to promote healthy, safe, and supportive school environments. The choice of how to spend this funding at the school level must be based upon a [comprehensive needs assessment](#) (resource from the [Colorado Department of Education](#)), which ideally will look at all factors (including health-related factors) that contribute to poor performance in school. Based upon the needs assessment, the school must develop a school improvement plan (SIP).
  - *Schoolwide Title I Programs*—LEAs can combine Title I and other federal, state, and local funds for schoolwide programs if more than 40% of their students are from low-income families. This funding can be used to implement health programs, such as hiring a school nurse to serve all students, a school wellness coordinator, or implementing a strong physical education program.

- *State Report Cards*—State report cards must be widely disseminated to the public in a format and language that parents can understand. They need to be concise, include a one-page overview section, and show data disaggregated for the following groups of students: migrant, homeless, foster care, and military families. States can choose to require schools to report on measures beyond accountability metrics. Including health and wellness measures on state report cards is a way of holding schools accountable to families and the community for the health and wellness environment that they provide to students.
- Title II: Provides funding for professional development for teachers and school staff.
  - SEAs may use these funds to provide high-quality professional development for all school staff, including health and physical education teachers, and specialized instructional support personnel (school nurses, school psychologists, etc.). This funding can be used to provide training on supporting student health and wellness. Title II funding also supports leadership training, recruitment of high-quality teachers (for all subjects), and class size reduction (often an issue in PE classes).
- Title IV: Provides funding for a variety of grant programs.
  - *Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants (SSAEG)*—Title IV, Part A consolidated 49 grant programs, some of which focused on student health, into the SSEAG. LEAs can use this funding to support student health and increase access to a well-rounded education. Any school district receiving more than \$30,000 from this grant program must conduct a needs assessment and use the funds to address the needs identified. At least 20% of this funding must be allocated to improving the safety and health of students and at least 20% must be allocated to providing a well-rounded education.
    - The previous Carol E. White Physical Education Program (PEP) funding was subsumed under Title IV, Part A. This may be disappointing to some districts who utilized this funding to support physical education programming. However, the funding from SSAEG can still be used to support physical education.
    - As per the original law, this funding was converted to a block grant. This means that every state and district will receive a portion of these funds. Although amounts may be lower than under NCLB, this funding approach provides sustainable funding to all school districts.
    - Based upon regulations released by US Department of Education (US ED), states were given the ability to competitively grant the funds for FY 2017 if they chose to do so. [Seven states](#) decided to do this. Within the confines of the regulations, states can choose to only allow expenditures on certain areas under these grants and this may present opportunities for advocacy.
    - For more information about the SSAEG, review this [FAQ](#) from the [Title IV-A Coalition](#).
  - *21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers (CLC)*—ESSA authorized funding to support [21<sup>st</sup> Century CLCs](#), which provide academic, artistic, and cultural enrichment opportunities for children, particularly students who attend high-poverty and low-performing schools. CLCs provide enrichment after school and during the summer. One of the goals of the CLCs is to mobilize the school, community, and private sector, and health services support and resources, in order to remove barriers that impede students' learning. Programs that provide nutrition and physical activity can be supported through this funding.



- *Community Schools and Promise Neighborhoods*—Title IV, Part B established funding for full-service [Community Schools](#) and [Promise Neighborhoods](#). This funding supports “pipeline services,” defined as a continuum of coordinated supports, services, and opportunities for children from birth through entry into and success in postsecondary education and career attainment. Both full-service Community Schools and Promise Neighborhoods present tremendous opportunities for collaboration between health and education.

#### **4) What is a state accountability system?**

A state accountability system is used to determine school performance. In addition to providing information about the student population as a whole, schools must also track the performance of individual subgroups, such as economically disadvantaged students, students from racial and ethnic subgroups, students with disabilities, and students learning English. Beginning with the 2017-2018 school year, and each three years thereafter, each state will determine how its schools have performed on its accountability system and then provide more intensive support to the lowest performers.

#### **5) Which school health measures did states choose for the indicator of school quality or student success?**

Thirty six states and the District of Columbia utilized chronic absenteeism as part of their accountability systems. In addition, five states included a measure of access to physical education (KY, MD, GA, MI, and LA) and three states included a measure of physical fitness (CT, VT, and ND). Finally, six states included a measure of school climate (IA, ID, IL, MD, NM and NV). Not all states included a health or wellness measure in their accountability systems. This is discussed in [How Did ESSA's "Non-Academic" Indicator Get So Academic?](#) by [FutureEd](#).

#### **6) What is the timeline for ESSA implementation?**

Each state was required to submit an ESSA State Plan to US ED by September of 2017. Not all of the plans have been approved, but the states are already gearing up for full implementation. [ESSA on the Runway](#), a report by [Education Week](#), provides an excellent overview of some of the challenges facing states as they begin ESSA implementation.

Though each state will create their own process, a typical timeline for implementing the accountability systems required by ESSA might look like:

- 2017-18 school year: collect data used for initial accountability system ratings
- Fall 2018: publish a graded or ranked list of schools, based on their accountability system performance
- Winter 2019: work with schools to conduct needs assessments and develop a SIP
- 2019-20 school year: work with schools to implement the SIP
- Fall 2021: publish the next graded or ranked list of schools, based on their accountability system performance

For more information on how your state is doing, visit [ESSA Implementation in Your State](#), a resource from the [National Education Association](#).



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### 7) What is chronic absenteeism? How do health and wellness impact school attendance?

Chronic absenteeism is most commonly defined as missing 10 percent or more of school days for any reason: excused, unexcused, or suspension. There is no nationally accepted definition of chronic absenteeism, so some states may define it another way. Chronic absenteeism is a proven early warning sign of academic risk and school dropout. While the causes of chronic absenteeism are multifold, research shows that student health and a [school's health and wellness environment are key factors](#) that can contribute to a student being chronically absent. For more information, read [Framework for Action: Addressing Chronic Absenteeism through ESSA Implementation](#) from the [Alliance for a Healthier Generation](#) (Healthier Generation) and the [Healthy Schools Campaign](#). To see whether your state included chronic absenteeism, review [Who's In: Chronic Absenteeism Under ESSA](#) by [FutureEd](#).

### 8) What is a needs assessment and how can a needs assessment support health and wellness?

A needs assessment is a systematic process for identifying problems, gaps, and opportunities so that an organization or entity can make meaningful improvements. Needs assessments are frequently required for federal and state education grant programs and for non-governmental funders, so it is a well-accepted means of collecting data and guiding improvement efforts in education. As part of ESSA, LEA and school-level needs assessments will be utilized to develop SIPs and allocate funding. SIPs should contain evidence-based interventions to address the gaps identified through the needs assessments.

The [Health Impact Project](#), a collaboration of the [Robert Wood Johnson Foundation](#) and The [Pew Charitable Trusts](#), conducted a [Health Impact Assessment \(HIA\)](#) in 2016. The report concluded that LEAs could more effectively improve schools if they used their needs assessment process to examine factors outside of the classroom that affect academic achievement. [Healthier Generation](#) and [Healthy Schools Campaign](#) have developed [Using Needs Assessments to Connect Learning + Health: Opportunities in the Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\)](#) which provides guidance on conducting a needs assessment that incorporates student health and wellness. In addition, it recommends partners and approaches for ensuring that the needs assessment is comprehensive. [A Guide for Integrating Health & Wellness into School Improvement Plans](#) by the [National Association of Chronic Disease Directors \(NACDD\)](#) provides guidance on addressing the needs of the whole child when designing SIPs.

### 9) When does ESSA require a needs assessment?

ESSA requires a needs assessment in several circumstances, including:

- When a school is identified for comprehensive support and improvement by their SEA due to their performance on the state accountability system, the LEA must develop and implement a SIP that is based on a school-level needs assessment. Schools identified for targeted support and improvement may be required or strongly encouraged to complete a needs assessment.
- When Title I schools decide to use their Title I funds to operate a schoolwide program, a needs assessment must be conducted and used to inform the program.
- When health, nutrition, and/or other social services are not available to eligible children in a school operating a Title I targeted assistance program, the law requires a needs assessment in order to use a portion of the Title I funds as a last resort to provide these services.
- LEAs that receive at least \$30,000 in funding from the SSAEG must complete a needs assessment each year.



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### 10) How can ESSA be leveraged in support of health education (HE), physical education (PE), and physical activity?

HE and PE provide students with a planned, sequential, K-12 standards-based program of curricula and instruction designed to develop motor skills, knowledge and behaviors for healthy and active living, physical fitness, sportsmanship, self-efficacy, and emotional intelligence. HE and PE are included in ESSA's definition of a well-rounded education. Therefore, ESSA opens up access to funding streams in Title I and Title II that were not previously available to support these subjects.

ESSA-required needs assessments should identify program gaps in the areas of instructional minutes offered, evidence-based curriculum, state standards, and student assessments and measurable outcomes for HE and PE. Measures that could be reported on state report cards in support of HE and PE include student fitness data, whether certified HE and PE teachers are instructing courses, minutes/week of class time, and/or class size. Professional development funding could be used to provide training for HE and PE teachers, and also to provide training to all school staff on promoting physical activity before, during, and after the school day. HE and PE programs can be funded under all three areas of the SSAEG.

Health and physical educators can be strong advocates for the need to allocate funding to HE and PE programs in order to maximize academic outcomes and school attendance, and support lifelong healthy habits. For more information on leveraging ESSA in support of HE, PE, and physical activity, read [Framework for Action: Addressing Physical Activity and Nutrition through ESSA Implementation](#) from [Healthier Generation](#) and the [Healthy Schools Campaign](#).

### 11) How can ESSA be leveraged in support of federal nutrition programs and nutrition education?

Proper nutrition improves academic outcomes and school attendance, and nutrition education supports lifelong healthy habits. ESSA-required needs assessments should identify gaps in the availability of and participation in federal nutrition programs (including school lunch and breakfast, afterschool snacks and meals, and summer meals) and in the amount of nutrition education provided to students.

Measures that could be reported on state report cards in support of nutrition include free- and reduced-price meal rates, meal participation rates, the presence of alternative breakfast models such as breakfast in the classroom or grab-and-go carts, and/or the amount of nutrition education that students receive per year. Professional development funds could be used to train teachers on integrating nutrition into other areas of the curriculum, or to provide training to all school staff on promoting federal meal programs, as well as proper nutrition throughout the school environment (including classroom rewards, parties, and

ESSA state plans must describe how SEA funding will be used to provide support to LEAs to ensure that homeless students are properly identified and have access to a high-quality education in coordination with the services provided under the [McKinney-Vento Act](#). LEAs should directly certify homeless students for free school meals. Direct certification ensures that homeless students are properly identified to receive free school meals without a school meals application. A number of state plans direct the homeless liaison, or other LEA professional who works with homeless students, to collaborate with their school nutrition department to ensure all homeless students receive free meals through federal child nutrition programs.



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This approach also increases the total percentage of students who are certified for free school meals, making [Community Eligibility](#), which allows high-needs schools to offer school meals at no cost to all students and dramatically increases student participation in school breakfast and lunch, a more viable option for some schools. For more information, read [ESSA Plans: Best Practices for Ensuring Homeless Student Access to School, Afterschool, and Summer Nutrition Programs](#) by the [Food Research and Action Center \(FRAC\)](#).

Foodservice Directors, HE and PE teachers, school nurses, and other nutrition advocates can be a strong voice for the need to ensure that all students have access to sufficient, healthy food and nutrition education. For more information on leveraging ESSA in support of nutrition read, [Framework for Action: Addressing Physical Activity and Nutrition through ESSA Implementation](#) by [Healthier Generation](#) and the [Healthy Schools Campaign](#).

### **12) How can ESSA be leveraged in support of mental and physical health?**

ESSA-required needs assessments should identify whether students have access to school nurses, psychologists, and/or social workers. Other factors to consider include how the school approaches discipline, what percentage of students have been exposed to adverse childhood experiences, and whether students have access to medical services for the prevention and management of chronic diseases such as asthma and obesity. All of these things can interfere with school attendance and academic achievement.

Measures that could be reported on state report cards in support of mental and physical health include the presence of a school nurse, incidences of in-school and out-of-school suspensions, results of school climate surveys, and/or whether the school has an asthma management plan. Professional development funds could be used to provide training to all school staff on positive behavioral interventions and supports, and building a [school culture](#) that positively impacts student learning, instruction, and student achievement.

Teachers, school nurses, psychologists, and social workers, health and physical educators, and school wellness leads can be a strong voice for the need to ensure that all students have access to a positive school environment, mental and physical health services, and safe places after school and during school breaks and summer vacation. For more information on leveraging ESSA in support of mental and physical health, read [Framework for Action: Addressing Mental Health and Wellbeing through ESSA Implementation](#) by [Healthier Generation](#) and the [Healthy Schools Campaign](#).

### **13) How can ESSA be leveraged in support of social and emotional learning (SEL)?**

ESSA-required needs assessments should identify whether the school has initiatives to promote social and emotional learning (SEL). According to the [RAND Corporation](#), “schools’ emphasis on SEL can promote academic achievement, and evidence suggests that explicit SEL interventions are effective in helping students develop social and emotional competencies, and improve other aspects of students’ lives above and beyond the effects of academic achievement.”

The types of SEL activities that a school employs could be reported on state report cards. SEAs may use Title II funds to provide high-quality professional development for all school staff, including nurses, psychologists, and social workers, on social and emotional learning, which is one of the first steps and best practices in integrating a strong SEL initiative.



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ESSA's support for 21<sup>st</sup> Century CLCs, Community Schools, and Promise Neighborhoods, as well as teacher and staff professional development can also be leveraged to support SEL activities. Teachers, school nurses, psychologists, and social workers, health and physical educators, and school wellness leads can be a strong voice for the need to ensure that all students are given the opportunity to develop social and emotional skills.

For more information on leveraging ESSA in support of SEL, read [Social and Emotional Learning Interventions Under the Every Student Succeeds Act](#) from the [RAND Corporation](#) and [The Practice Base For How We Learn: Supporting Students' Social, Emotional, and Academic Development](#) from the [ASPEN National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development](#).

### **14) How can ESSA be leveraged in support of out-of-school time (OST) programming?**

For decades, park and recreation agencies, summer camps, and other OST providers have played a critical role in providing children nutritious meals, promoting physical activity, and supplementing the work of schools to make sure that every child receives a quality, well-rounded education. In addition, OST can help create supportive environments that cultivate resiliency, foster belonging, and counter adverse childhood experiences. They provide a safe and supportive environment with trusted adults. There is also evidence that students who participate in quality afterschool programming have [better rates of school attendance](#).

There are 10.2 million children in afterschool programs and making intentional linkages between school and out-of-school time (OST) ensures consistent quality experiences that promote wellness. ESSA helps support those connections by encouraging partnerships between community-based organizations like libraries, camps, and schools. In addition to encouraging partnerships with outdoor learning and recreation, ESSA includes more opportunities for science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) – a critical topic in education. Ensuring that all children have access to STEM education fits perfectly within ESSA, as ESSA is intended to ensure educational equity. For more information about STEM and equity, read [STEM and Wellness: A Powerful Equation for Equity](#) from [Healthier Generation](#), the [National Girls Collaborative Project](#), the [National Afterschool Association](#), and the [Afterschool Alliance](#). ESSA-required needs assessments should identify whether students have access to high-quality programming in a safe environment after school and during school breaks and summer. This information could also be reported on state report cards.

ESSA authorized funding to support [21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers](#). CLCs provide academic, artistic, and cultural enrichment opportunities for children, particularly students who attend high-poverty and low-performing schools. CLC's provide enrichment after school and during the summer. One of the goals of the CLCs is to "mobilize the school, community, and private sector, and health services support and resources in order to remove barriers that impede students' learning." ESSA also established funding for full-service [Community Schools](#) and [Promise Neighborhoods](#). Funding for both programs supports "pipeline services," defined as a continuum of coordinated supports, services, and opportunities for children from birth through entry into and success in postsecondary education and career attainment. Both full-service Community Schools and Promise Neighborhoods present opportunities for OST.

OST providers can be a strong voice for the need to ensure that all students have access to safe and supportive places after school, and during school breaks and summer vacation. For more information on the how ESSA can support the OST environment, review this [ESSA Toolkit](#) from the [Afterschool Alliance](#).





### **15) How can my Local Wellness Committee assist with ESSA implementation?**

As the experts in health and wellness for the district, Local Wellness Committees (LWC) have a large role to play during ESSA implementation. They bring school staff, families, students, and community members together to address pressing student health issues. They advise the school board/district on school/community health issues, coordinate efforts and programs that exist in the district and the community, identify student/staff health needs, and monitor and evaluate implementation of district health and wellness policies and programs. The LWCs can inform district and school-level needs assessments, and identify sources of health and wellness data and evidence-based programming. They can also support family and student engagement in school-level planning. School-level wellness committees can have a similar impact.

### **16) How can I advocate for health and wellness as my state implements ESSA?**

- The best way to start is to look up your state ESSA page. You can simply type the name of your state and ESSA into a browser and it should come up. Your SEA should have the state ESSA Plan posted there along with other important information about ESSA implementation.
- Another great resource is [ESSA Implementation in Your State](#) from the [National Education Association](#).
- It will also be helpful to know what other health policies are in place in your state that can be leveraged in support of the integration of health and wellness into ESSA. You can find out more about researching health policies in your state on pages 6-7 of [State ESSA Plans to Support Student Health and Wellness: A Framework for Action](#) by [Healthier Generation](#) and the [Healthy Schools Campaign](#).
- Read [State ESSA Plans to Support Student Health and Wellness: A Framework for Action](#) and [Using Needs Assessments to Connect Learning + Health: Opportunities in the Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\)](#) by [Healthier Generation](#) and the [Healthy Schools Campaign](#).
- Connect with other state-level partners who may also be working on this issue. Here are some examples of potential partners:
  - Title I and Student Support Staff at your SEA (you should be able to find these people on the SEA website)
  - Health and Wellness Staff at your SEA (for example, the State Health Education and/or Physical Education Coordinator or State Nutrition Director)
  - State School Nurse Consultant
  - Staff at your State Department of Health
  - State [American Heart Association](#) (AHA) affiliates
  - State [Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance \(AHPERD\)/Society for Health and Physical Educators \(SHAPE\)](#) affiliates
  - State [Parent Teacher Association](#) (PTA) affiliates
  - State [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) (AAP) Affiliates
  - State teachers' union affiliates ([American Federation of Teachers](#), [National Education Association](#))
  - State affiliates of the [National Association for School Nurses](#)
  - [Alliance for a Healthier Generation](#) field staff
  - Childhood obesity advocates or coalitions in your state
  - Local hospital systems
  - Local universities
- Talk about ESSA in meetings with education stakeholders (state and local Superintendents, State Board of Education members, and SEA staff) and remind them of the importance of integrating health and wellness into the academic environment.



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### **17) How can I continue to get updates about the role of health and wellness in ESSA implementation?**

Sign up [here](#) to get regular updates from [Healthier Generation](#) and the [Healthy Schools Campaign](#) on how states are implementing ESSA in a way that supports student health and wellness. If you have questions about getting involved in your state's ESSA implementation or need additional resources, contact [Nancy Katz](#) or [Alex Mays](#).