

FOUR WAYS TO ADVANCE EQUITY IN THIS YEAR'S STATE BUDGET

The Opportunities and Risks for Educational Equity in New York State Under ESSA

While the new federal education law called the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) may be best known for its requirement that states redesign their accountability systems, ESSA also includes other important opportunities for states to advance equity. From innovative approaches to funding, to powerful rules for additional transparency, ESSA gives New York and other states more tools to improve instruction and achievement for all students — particularly low-income students, students of color, English learners, and students with disabilities, who have been historically underserved by our education system.

Many of New York State's key decisions about how to take advantage of the levers in ESSA to advance equity and opportunity — through accountability, school support and improvement, and data reporting — will be incorporated in the ESSA state plan that New York finalizes later this year. But as the governor and legislators craft the state's FY17-18 budget, there are critical opportunities to help students and educators immediately.

Our coalition of civil rights, education, and parent and business organizations believe that:

- The state must keep student achievement and attainment front and center in our

accountability system, while also including a limited number of key additional indicators;

- To help schools improve, the state must generate additional data beyond test scores;
- It is the state's responsibility to ensure that teachers receive the support they need in the classroom; and
- Families and educators must be full partners through transparency and inclusion, including through a school report card that gives parents clear information about how their school is doing in a variety of areas.

To achieve these principles for ESSA implementation, and in addition to other investment priorities that individual members of this coalition may advance, we recommend that state policymakers use the FY17-18 budget to:

1 Invest Federal Funds to Support Teachers and School Leaders

ESSA allows New York to “set aside” certain funds for state-directed activities and support. New York should take advantage of these opportunities, including by setting aside up to 5 percent of Title II-A funds to support and develop strong teachers and up

The bottom line: There are important steps New York can take in this year's budget to advance equity under ESSA — supporting students now while preparing for a new, stronger accountability system.



to 3 percent of Title II-A funds to support principals and other school leaders. Title II-A funds also present a vital opportunity for the state to invest in evidence-based strategies for educators who teach English learners, support innovative teacher and school leader preparation programs, and establish high-quality human capital systems that recruit, train, and retain strong and diverse educators. Lawmakers should ensure that these resources are invested in effective and innovative strategies that improve teaching and learning — not to maintain the status quo.

2 Expand Access to Courses that Prepare Students for College

In a **recent poll**, New York public school parents — and especially parents of color and low-income parents — said that expanding access to courses that prepare students for college is highly important for improving school performance. New York can allocate up to 3 percent of Title I funds for a new innovation-focused program called Direct Student Services. These resources should be used to encourage enrollment and participation by historically underserved students in academic courses that help prepare students for college, including by covering Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and dual enrollment fees. Direct Student Services can also support evidence-based credit recovery programs and personalized learning.

3 Address Resource Equity at the School and District Levels

ESSA requires more transparency about school funding inequities and ensures that school districts consider these resource gaps

as part of the improvement process when a school is not meeting expectations for any group of students. However, to take advantage of these important provisions, New York must ensure the quality and consistency of the data used to calculate accurate school-level, per-pupil spending levels. The state should insert language in the FY17-18 budget to ensure that this is accomplished, such as through common charts of accounts and reporting templates with appropriate validation.

4 Ensure Transparency on Other Key Measures of School Quality and Student Success

Our coalition has recommended that the state establish new accountability indicators for college and career readiness, chronic absenteeism, and student discipline (including out-of-school suspensions). These indicators will only be as valuable as the data behind them, and lawmakers should include budget language establishing a process to ensure the integrity of these data elements.

These four recommendations will enable the state to put ESSA to work immediately on behalf of New York students. Yet they are only the beginning of the critical federal investment decisions facing state policymakers. As New York crafts its draft accountability plan in the coming months, our coalition will provide recommendations for longer term funding priorities, including improving the use of federal school improvement funds, by learning from other states and investing in evidence-based programs and strategies.