



Framework for Meaningful Parent Engagement Under ESSA

The following is an evidence-based framework that state education agencies (SEAs) and their partner organizations can use to engage parents in a meaningful discussion around the Every Student Succeeds Act. The framework is based on research conducted with parents in multiple states. The majority of this research was conducted by Learning Heroes, which has conducted more than 50 parent focus groups across multiple states and multiple national surveys over the past 18 months.

This Framework is comprised of questions, designed to guide valuable discussions with parents to elicit meaningful input during ESSA parent engagement sessions. The questions align to the ESSA-required areas so the answers received can be used as evidence of stakeholder engagement to include as an Appendix to your state plan. Please note: The questions are designed to be shared sequentially, progressing from the broader school system as a whole to more specific areas of ESSA. Each set of questions aligns with a required area and contains a contextual opening to frame the discussion with parents.

“Parents and their children are the consumers of our nation’s public education system, and parents have always been essential partners in education. However, they haven’t always been included at the decision-making table. This has caused confusion, mistrust and backlash when new initiatives — whether at the federal, state or local level — have been considered and implemented. ESSA now provides a unique opportunity for parents and families to give their input and to hold states and districts accountable for their children’s educational experience.”

– Laura Bay, President of National PTA, in *Family Engagement is Critical to Education*, September 13, 2016

Context for Parents

Before you begin to engage parents in a conversation, be sure to set the context for why you are asking questions, and how you plan to use their feedback. The following is an example of introductory language you could use. Please customize to align with your state’s vision and context:

In late 2015, a new education law was passed by Congress known as the Every Student Succeeds Act or ESSA. This law replaces No Child Left Behind and gives states more control and power over their school systems. The goal of ESSA is to make sure that every student in the state has the opportunity to receive a high-quality education. It calls for much of the same work that schools are already doing, such as holding all students to

high standards and using quality tests to better understand where students need to improve. It requires states to hold schools accountable—evaluating them the same way schools evaluate and give grades to students.

ESSA also requires input from parents, teachers, and other community members as states set their long and short-term educational goals. New funding and programs for school improvement under ESSA provide more flexibility for Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and school leaders to craft solutions tailored to their local context. Together, we can develop goals for our schools that will strengthen your child’s education, and parent feedback is so important in this process. There are several topics we want your thoughts on, to help us develop meaningful goals and better inform the decisions we make.

1. Required Area for Parent and Family Feedback: School Accountability System

Context: Let’s start by getting your overall opinion on how you think our schools are performing.

Questions:

- a) What letter grade would you give the state’s schools?
- b) What are schools doing well and how can they be improved?
- c) What letter grade would you give your child’s school?
- d) What defines a good school?

1) Required Area for Parent and Family Feedback: Reporting on School Performance

Context: Under ESSA, states are required to report on how each school is performing, how the district is performing, and how the state school system is doing overall. ESSA requires that schools be measured on specific academic indicators but also at least one state selected academic or non-academic indicator.

Questions:

- a) When thinking about your child’s school, what are the things that matter most to you? What are the things that matter the least? Why?
- b) Under ESSA, schools now can be measured on academic and non-academic indicators. An academic indicator would be something like a test score or graduation rate. A non-academic indicator would be something like school safety, learning environment, discipline rates, attendance rates, parent satisfaction, family engagement or resource equity. Knowing that, how do you think schools should be measured? What are the academic and non-academic indicators that should be considered?

2) Required Area for Parent and Family Feedback: Report Card

Context: ESSA also requires that states publically share how every school and district in the state performs on an annual report card. Giving adequate funding to every school is critical to ensure that all schools and students have the opportunity to meet high standards. ESSA can shine a light when funding is not equally distributed and target supports to the schools that need them the most. For example, state report cards must include how much money is spent per student, by federal, state and local funds. This must then be broken down to show how much of the funds are spent on staff as well as how much funding came from each level of government.

NOTE: We strongly recommend sharing an example school report card.

Questions:

- a) What kind of information would you want to see on a school report card?
- b) How would you like to receive the report card? (i.e. direct mail, e-mail, the backpack channel, in-person during parent/teacher conference)
- c) Would you rather see a collection of different kinds of data on your child's school? Or an overall rating, like a number or letter grade so that you could easily rank schools across the state? Or a combination of the two?
- d) How might our state prioritize or target funding to close gaps? Which students, schools, districts, and issue areas need the most attention? What state programs can augment ESSA's focus to accelerate funding equity?

Only to be asked if sharing a sample report card:

- e) Is this information easy to understand? What is confusing to you? What would make this easier to understand?
- f) Is there any information about the school that you would like to know that is missing?

3) Required Area for Parent and Family Feedback: Supporting Effective Teachers

Context: ESSA specifically asks states to describe how they will recruit, train, retain and support their teachers.

Questions:

- a) What role do teachers play in determining a school's performance?
- b) What type of additional support do you think your child's teachers need? (i.e. more planning time, more resources, more professional learning)

4) Required Area for Parent Feedback: Academic Standards and English Language Proficiency

Context: Standards are the learning goals in each subject and grade that outline what a child should know and be able to do at the end of each school year.

Questions:

- a) Do you think all students in the state are currently held to the same standards? Are those standards challenging enough?
- b) How important is it that every student across the state is held to the same expectations?
- c) Students who are not proficient in English, known as English language learners, have a separate set of standards to make sure they learn and master the English language. What do you think is the best way to measure how well they are learning English?

5) Required Area for Parent and Family Feedback: School Improvement

Context: ESSA reinforces the work that states have been doing to help low-performing schools improve.

Questions:

- a) If your child's school received an unsatisfactory rating [*state can insert state-specific ratings*] on the report card, what would you do?
- b) If your child's school received an unsatisfactory rating [*state can insert state-specific ratings*] on the report card, what would you want to know?

- c) What do you think should be done to support low-performing schools?
- d) Whose responsibility is it to help your child's school improve? (i.e. parents, teachers, principals, district leaders, state leaders)
- e) What role should parents play in helping their child's school schools improve?

6) Required Area for Parent Feedback: Overall State Education Plan

Context: ESSA allows each state to develop its own educational plan, with a set of goals and then decide how to measure the achieved goals.

Questions:

- a) What do you think is the biggest issue facing students in our state?
- b) An achievement gap is when some student populations, such as low-income, special education, or communities of color have lower achievement scores than their peers. How serious of a problem do you think this is for our state? What student populations need the most support?

7) Continued Parent and Family Engagement

Context: As we continue to work on developing our goals, we will need to create a detailed plan for the state, and want to continue getting your feedback.

Questions:

- a) Would you like to keep informed, moving forward?
- b) What is the best way to keep you informed moving forward?
- c) What is the best way to engage parents in education decisions long term?
- d) What education decisions do you want to be engaged in?
- e) What do you expect to happen as a result of being engaged in this process?

Conclusion

After your discussion with parents, states are encouraged to conclude the conversation with information on how they will provide parents with feedback and how parents can engage with the state education agency around ESSA and other education topics. The following is an example of closing language you could use. Please customize to align with your state's vision and context:

Thank you for your feedback and a robust discussion about education in [STATE] and how we can best help your child succeed. We will use the comments you have provided us today to inform our state's plan to improve education for all students, including the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act in our state. Based on the answers you provided us today, we will connect with you again on how we will be using your feedback now and in the future.

We hope that this conversation is just the beginning of an ongoing partnership with parents across the state to continue to improve our schools for every child. We encourage all parents to contact [name and title of individual] of [name of state education agency] and [contact information].