

## Every Student Succeeds Act

**Central Message:** When Congress passed the Every Student Succeeds Act to replace the failed No Child Left Behind, it was a rare bipartisan accomplishment that sent power back to the states to decide their own school accountability policies. It represents a once in a decade opportunity for Maryland to redefine school success so it emphasizes test scores less and focuses on opportunities to learn more. But there's also the very real danger that Gov. Hogan and his State Board of Education will use the new power to emphasize test scores to identify public schools as failing so they can convert them into charter schools or close them down in favor of private school vouchers. We need the General Assembly to pass a bill creating guardrails that prevents Hogan and the State Board from pursuing their radical privatization agenda.

**Supporting Message:** The last two decades of education policy have been dominated by a test and punish culture that has failed to improve student achievement. We need to move in a fundamentally different direction.

- Instead of focusing on just test scores, we have the chance to measure schools based on things like class size, attendance, access to both advanced coursework and career and technology programs, the number of school counselors and mental health professionals, and the other key ingredients proven to contribute to a high-quality education.
- We have tried to turn around schools based on test results for the last two decades and we haven't seen success because the scores don't tell us what is wrong with the schools. We should focus on measuring the inputs rather than outputs if we want to truly address challenges in our struggling schools.
- While there are some basic requirements in ESSA that require states to include test scores as a part of school accountability systems, it allows states to make more useful opportunity to learn indicators a significant part of the model. We're urging the General Assembly to ensure the state plan on ESSA implementation guarantees that 49% of the system is made up of these indicators of school success, with test scores and other academic factors making up the rest.
- We need the General Assembly to ensure there are at least three opportunity to learn indicators and that all indicators are weighted at the same value, so schools don't focus on some rather than others.
- There are also opportunities we should take to expand early childhood education, community schools, and professional development on restorative practices through school support and improvement interventions and available federal funding.

**Supporting Message:** The General Assembly has an obligation to step in and prevent Gov. Hogan and his State Board of Education from using ESSA to privatize our public schools.

- The Hogan-appointed president and vice-president of the State Board have expressed a strong interest in using ESSA to expand for-profit charter schools and private school vouchers. They aren't alone on the board in pursuing this agenda.

- Here's how it would work: under ESSA, districts have the first crack at improving their struggling schools. If they fail to create progress, then the state steps in. At either part of this process, the State Board could either incentivize the districts into using specific interventions—including privatization—or eventually step in and just do it themselves.
- The legislature can supersede their authority by passing legislation this year to prevent Gov. Hogan's appointees from using competitive grant programs to incentive districts into approving more charter schools or issuing private school vouchers. In fact, the General Assembly should prohibit the State Board from using any carrot or stick to compel districts to use specific school turnaround strategies.
- The legislature can also include language that limits what the State Board can choose to do in turning around schools that reach state-level intervention. They should prevent charter school conversion, the use of vouchers or tax credits scholarship programs, the creation of state-run districts, the hiring of for-profit companies to manage or consult on school turnaround projects, or any other avenue that allows private interests to profit off of our school support and improvement process.

**Supporting Message:** While the key parts of ESSA have to do with creating a state school accountability system, there are also other components of our state plan that will have a large influence on our schools.

- The first draft of our state plan, as written by the Maryland State Department of Education, waters down standards for gaining certification as a teacher in our public schools. Educators will work hard to inform legislators about the dangers of using online preparation programs or hiring untrained practitioners from other fields as teachers. Having a well-trained, highly certified educator workforce is an absolute necessity for world-class schools. If anything, we should use federal funding provided in ESSA to improve our new educator mentorship programs.
- There are ample opportunities in ESSA for reducing standardized testing. Maryland would be smart to position itself as a leader by becoming one of seven states to pilot innovative performance-based assessments in place of standardized tests. States are also no longer required to give a statewide test, like the PARCC test, in high school if they give the SAT, ACT, or another nationally recognized college readiness exam instead.