

Protecting Our Schools, Expanding Opportunity

IMPLEMENTING THE EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT IN MARYLAND



In late 2015, President Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) into law, replacing its failed predecessor, No Child Left Behind. For the last 15 years, school accountability has been based completely on test scores—with very little focus on providing targeted, research-based resources to help the students facing the most challenges to become proficient.

We see No Child Left Behind's consequences play out in Maryland schools today. We have school systems with 30, 40, even 50+ hours of mandated standardized testing. Our state's classroom autonomy for teachers ranks 49th in the country due to an overwhelming focus on testing rather than enabling creative, challenging teaching. And achievement gaps based on income, race, and disabilities persist.

ESSA represents a once in a generation opportunity for Maryland to redefine and improve public school success, with less emphasis on testing and a greater focus on closing opportunity gaps. But there's also the very real danger that Gov. Hogan and his State Board of Education will use the law to paint public schools as "failing" so they can convert them into for-profit charters schools or close them down in favor of private school vouchers.

RE-FOCUSING SCHOOL SUCCESS ON OPPORTUNITY

Under ESSA, the state school accountability system doesn't have to be based entirely or even predominantly on test scores. Instead, states have the chance to include new indicators of school success in their measurement—inputs that we know make for really great schools, like small class sizes or access to quality pre-kindergarten.

In order for these indicators to really count, Maryland's system needs to do three very important things:

1. Make each indicator the same weight (so schools don't focus on one over another).

2. Give the "opportunity" indicators as much value as ESSA allows (just under half of the overall weighting).
3. Include three or more "opportunity" indicators for every school in the model.

Only then will districts and schools be truly incentivized to focus on filling these opportunity gaps.

"[ESSA] makes long-overdue fixes to the last education law, replacing the one-size-fits-all approach to reform with a commitment to provide every student with a well-rounded education."

—President Obama

PREVENTING SCHOOL PRIVATIZATION

ESSA requires states to use their indicators to identify which schools need support and improvement. It lists three major groups for school turnaround: the bottom 5% of Title I schools, high schools that fail to graduate 67% or more of their students, and schools with "underperforming" student subgroups as defined by the state.

But it's up to the state to design how to support schools as they try to improve. That opportunity has leaders on the State Board of Education—now controlled by appointees of Gov. Hogan—working towards school interventions that would systematically privatize our public schools.

According to *The Baltimore Sun*, "The state school board is considering bold measures—offering vouchers, creating new charter programs and establishing a statewide school district—to improve consistently low-performing schools."



Example of Maryland Indicators, Refocused on Opportunity

ACADEMIC INDICATORS 51% of Total Score	OPPORTUNITY INDICATORS* 49% of Total Score
PARCC Proficiency*	Class Size and Caseload Ratios
PARCC Student Growth (Elementary/Middle)*	Access to Pre-Kindergarten (Elementary)
English Proficiency for ESOL Students*	School Climate Survey Results
Graduation Rate (High)*	Access to Advanced Courses
Chronic Absenteeism Rate	Access to Related Arts Courses
Career and Technology Certification Rate	Advanced Teacher Certification Rate

*Required by ESSA (ESSA requires one or more non-academic indicators of school success)

Educators, public education advocates, and elected officials can prevent these failed, far right-wing ideas from happening by:

1. Stopping the State Board from using any carrot or stick to compel districts to use specific school turnaround strategies, especially the distribution of Title I funding reserved for school improvement strategies through a competitive grant program.
2. Preventing the State Board or Maryland State Department of Education from using the following strategies for schools that qualify for state-level intervention: forced 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 from our school support and improvement process.

OTHER ESSA IMPLEMENTATION OPPORTUNITIES

While the core of ESSA is school accountability, there are other opportunities to improve Maryland's public schools through effective implementation of this law. Here are two key ways:

Increase Professionalization of Educators

We should prevent any attempts to water down teacher certification requirements—like using online preparation programs or hiring untrained practitioners from other fields as teachers—that allow unqualified teachers into the profession. Instead, we should focus on raising the stature of Maryland's educator workforce, such as by using federal funding provided in ESSA to improve our new educator mentorship programs.

Reduce Testing, Improve Assessment 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. Districts 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.

This moment presents an opportunity to refocus our schools on the opportunities that truly make a difference in our children's lives, but also a dangerous path toward a school privatization agenda. The direction we choose during ESSA implementation will shape Maryland's schools—for better or worse—far into the future. We must get ESSA right.

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