



## **Chambers of Commerce and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)** Considerations for Chambers to Ensure All Students Graduate Ready for College and a Career

By the year 2020, 68 percent of all jobs will require postsecondary education and training beyond high school.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, nearly 750,000 students drop out of high school every year in the United States. This not only impacts their prospects for future employment, but it also takes a significant toll on the economy. If the national high school graduation rate for the Class of 2015 had been 90 percent instead of 83.2 percent, there would likely be an increase of \$332 million annually in federal, state, and local taxes and \$5.7 billion added to the gross domestic product.<sup>2</sup>

The Every Students Succeeds Act (ESSA) provides an opportunity for the business community, including chambers of commerce, to play an active role in shaping policy that will improve these outcomes—ensuring more students graduate from high school ready for college and a career, with the deeper learning skills and competencies that will prepare them for the twenty-first-century economy.

The Alliance for Excellent Education and the Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives provide the following considerations for the business community to inform ESSA implementation at the state and local levels:

- Include evidence-based indicators of college and career readiness.
- Implement high-quality college and career pathways for school improvement.
- Ensure states and local school districts measure the performance of all students, including students of color and students from low-income families, in a meaningful way.

### **Include evidence-based indicators of college and career readiness.**

ESSA requires states to select and include at least one indicator of *school quality or student success* in their accountability systems. Chambers can encourage states to include measures of college and career readiness as one of these indicators, such as

- enrollment in and completion of dual enrollment course work;
- enrollment and performance in advanced course work (e.g., Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate);
- enrollment in and completion of a college and career pathway/career and technical education (CTE) program of study, in addition to earning an industry-recognized credential or certification and/or completing an integrated and rigorous work-based learning experience (e.g., internship or apprenticeship);
- percentage of students completing a college- and career-ready course of study; and
- enrollment, remediation, persistence, and completion of postsecondary education.

Below are two good examples of states that measure college and career readiness beyond the high school diploma:

1. Louisiana incorporates a “strength of diploma” indicator that measures the quality of a student’s diploma, rather than simply whether a student receives one. In addition to receiving points for students who graduate, schools receive points in the school rating system based on the acquisition of credentials, including advanced course work, dual enrollment, and industry recognized credentials.<sup>3</sup>
2. Tennessee uses a “ready graduate” indicator that provides an incentive for students to acquire postsecondary experiences while still in high school through a calculation that awards schools and districts when students succeed in rigorous course work, earn industry certifications, and/or perform at the “college-ready” level on the SAT or ACT.<sup>4</sup>

**Implement high-quality college and career pathways for school improvement.**

States must spend at least 7 percent of their Title I allocation on school improvement to improve the performance of low-performing students. Additionally, states have the flexibility to spend an additional 3 percent on Direct Student Services to implement activities such as advanced course work, CTE course work that leads to an industry-recognized credential, advanced course work with corresponding exams, and others.

Chambers can encourage states to use the aforementioned resources to implement high-quality college- and career-pathways systems that bring together school districts, employers, postsecondary institutions, community-based organizations, and intermediaries to help students earn industry-recognized credentials and/or credit toward a postsecondary degree or certificate.

Here are two examples of systems that are transforming college and career preparation for students across the country:

1. The [Pathways to Prosperity Network](#) is a collaboration of states and regions that work to ensure more youth complete high school attaining postsecondary credentials with currency in the labor market.
2. The [Linked Learning](#) approach, implemented across the country, integrates rigorous college- and career-ready courses of study, high-quality CTE, work-based learning, and student supports to transform the learning experience and postsecondary outcomes for students.

**Ensure states and local school districts measure the performance of all students, including students of color and students from low-income families, in a meaningful way.**

For accountability purposes, ESSA requires states to measure each of their indicators separately for different groups of students, including students of color and students from low-income families. As a result, states must prioritize students who are historically underserved in their accountability systems. Although required by law, several state ESSA plans have room to improve in this regard. State ESSA plans should ensure transparency for the performance of historically underserved

students and ensure they receive additional support when necessary through the following considerations:

- To the extent that states use a rating system (e.g., A–F grades), rather than a dashboard with multiple measures but no overall index, consideration must be given to specific groups of students who are historically underserved. For example, in Louisiana, schools cannot receive an “A” in the state’s rating system if African American students, Latino students, or other historically underserved groups underperform. In Tennessee, 40 percent of the state’s accountability index is based on the performance of historically underserved students.<sup>5</sup> In Washington, DC, 25 percent of the index is based on the performance of these students.<sup>6</sup>
- States must have clear and meaningful ways to identify and support historically underserved students when they consistently underperform. This is a requirement under the law, but some states have stronger policies than others. In Nevada, for example, student subgroups are identified for support if they do not meet a state-set measure of progress for two consecutive years in English and math.<sup>7</sup> In Oregon, student subgroups are identified for support if the high school graduation rate is at or below 67 percent.<sup>8</sup> These are policies that should be emulated by other states.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> A.P. Carnavale, N. Smith, and J. Strohl, *Recovery: Job Growth and Education Requirements Through 2020* (Washington, DC: Center on Education and the Workforce, Georgetown University, 2013) <https://cew.georgetown.edu/cew-reports/recovery-job-growth-and-education-requirements-through-2020/> (accessed October 2, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> Alliance for Excellent Education, “The Graduation Effect,” <http://impact.all4ed.org/> (accessed October 2, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Education, “Louisiana’s Elementary & Secondary Education Plan Pursuant to the Federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA),” <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/lastateplan882017.pdf> (accessed October 2, 2017).

<sup>4</sup> Tennessee Department of Education, “Every Student Succeeds Act: Building on Success in Tennessee. ESSA State Plan,” [http://www.tennessee.gov/assets/entities/education/attachments/TN\\_ESSA\\_State\\_Plan\\_Approved.pdf](http://www.tennessee.gov/assets/entities/education/attachments/TN_ESSA_State_Plan_Approved.pdf) (accessed October 2, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Office of the State Superintendent of Education, “District of Columbia Revised State Template for the Consolidated State Plan The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as Amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act,” [https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/page\\_content/attachments/OSSE%20ESSA%20State%20Plan\\_%20August%2028\\_Clean.pdf](https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/page_content/attachments/OSSE%20ESSA%20State%20Plan_%20August%2028_Clean.pdf) (accessed October 6, 2017)

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of Education, “Nevada Department of Education Consolidated State Plan Under the Every Student Succeeds Act,” <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/nvconsolidatedstateplan.pdf> (accessed October 5, 2017).

<sup>8</sup> ———, “Oregon’s Consolidated State Plan Under the Every Student Succeeds Act,” <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/orconsolidatedstateplan.pdf> (accessed October 5, 2017).