



CHILDREN NOW



August 1, 2016

Ms. Meredith Miller
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW Room 3C106
Washington, DC 20202

**Re: Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) - Accountability, State Plans and Data
Docket ID ED-2016-OESE-0032 RIN1810-AB27**

Dear Ms. Miller:

We represent California policy, advocacy, early learning and K12 education organizations committed to eliminating achievement gaps and promoting stronger PreK-elementary collaboration to ensure all children enter school ready to learn. We have worked together and individually for many years to address equity, access, and quality in California's early learning system. More recently, we've come together on efforts to ensure early learning opportunities and perspectives are considered as our state policymakers make implementation decisions on a local, state, and federal system of accountability and continuous improvement.¹ The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) represents a welcome opportunity to strengthen the PreK-3rd grade continuum and the transitions of children from preschool into elementary. We appreciate this opportunity to comment on the proposed ESSA regulations on accountability, state plans, and data reporting and share perspectives based upon our work in California.

Our comments center on ways to clarify, improve, and strengthen the PreK-K12 provisions that are the topics of the proposed regulations and are based upon our experiences in the largest, most diverse state in the nation and one with the greatest number of children who are dual language and English language learners. Since 2013, California has been implementing local control in education with a focus on providing greater services and support for students with greater challenges, specifically children from low-income families, foster youth, and students who are English language learners. This experience and these goals are consistent with the overall goals of ESSA and provide valuable learnings on challenges and opportunities to strengthen coherence and collaboration of early childhood and K12 education that inform our recommendations.

¹ See letters from PreK, K12 & social justice groups to the [California State Board of Education](#) and [State Superintendent of Public Instruction](#) of [July 8, 2016](#) and [May 6, 2016](#).

Strengthen and clarify the role of early childhood and preschool educators and parents in the required collaboration and stakeholder engagement noted in the regulations.

There are numerous provisions listing specific groups or individuals with whom local education agencies and state education agencies must collaborate or engage in development of plans and plan revisions. We recommend that early childhood educators (including administrators) and parents be specifically identified. Involving those with experience and expertise in early learning in these processes will provide valuable perspectives and will serve to strengthen coherence between early learning and the K12 system.

Recognize children who are dual language learners and their learning and development.

As organizations working to promote high-quality early learning in the state with the greatest number of students who are English language learners, we recommend that the regulations make explicit the need for early learning programs and educators to have the skills to support learning and development of children who are dual language learners. The recent joint policy statement² from the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Education contains valuable research references and policy recommendations for states to help in creation of high-quality systems that meet the developmental and learning needs of all children, including children who are dual language learners. One element is the need to establish strong partnerships with families and recognize ways to reach out to families of children who are dual language learners. A second element is the need to support early childhood educators with professional development that addresses learning and development of children who are dual language learners.

Include school quality measures that improve student outcomes and support continuous improvement.

ESSA regulations require, in addition to indicators of student achievement, an indicator of school quality. The law allows states to include more than academic measures, and supports a more holistic view of accountability indicators. Early childhood educators are well aware that child development and learning require attention to the whole child, including social-emotional development and executive function/self-regulation. Our concern is that language in Section 200.14(d) requires that school quality measures be supported by research that indicates progress or performance on the measures is likely to increase “student achievement.” We believe this language may be interpreted to restrict school quality indicators to measures of academic achievement instead of more holistic measures that are suited to young children. We recommend the language on school quality indicators be clarified and augmented to support efforts at the state and local levels for a broader range of indicators that encompass developmentally appropriate measures and promote high quality.

We believe this change will allow states to develop systems that best meet local and state contexts for improving young children’s opportunities and readiness for success in K12 and beyond. California’s early learning community is actively engaged in multiple venues with K12 partners and state policymakers as the state develops a new local, state and federal system of accountability and continuous improvement. For example, efforts at quality improvement in PreK build upon regional Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) that include elements of child development, professional practice and qualification. Today, the large majority of counties in California are participating in these voluntary efforts and these connections of preschools and local education agencies provide valuable foundations

² [Policy Statement on Supporting the Development of Children Who Are Dual Language Learners in Early Childhood Programs, US Department of Health and Human Services and US Department of Education \(2016\).](#)

for improving the PreK-3rd grade continuum. In addition, PreK and K12 partners continue to be active in policy development of our Local Control Evaluation Rubrics and the state plan for ESSA to advance opportunities for early learning.

Our efforts to strengthen the PreK-3rd grade continuum include considerations of promoting more comprehensive understanding of kindergarten readiness. We recommend that ESSA regulations allow states flexibility in recognizing the role for development of statewide indicators for kindergarten readiness. In California's system of local control, efforts to establish a statewide measure of kindergarten readiness are in relatively early stages. There is widespread recognition that an age-appropriate kindergarten readiness assessment tool that is aligned to California's state standards would provide valuable information to parents, teachers, administrators, and state and local policymakers to improve systems of support for students in the classroom, school, district, region, and state.³ In a state as large as California and with its diverse population and mixed delivery system, it is critical to ensure engagement of stakeholders and consideration of tools that are used or available to assess children's readiness and to ensure these tools are valid, reliable, and appropriate for such diversity, including for children who are dual language learners.⁴

State and local efforts in support of educators' professional development and advancement should include early childhood educators and administrators.

ESSA's encouragement to include preschool teachers and administrators in educator professional development and growth offers an important means of promoting high quality early learning experiences and successful transitions for children into early elementary. As we noted earlier, quality improvement efforts through California's QRIS include approaches to supporting professional development and growth and increased qualifications for adults working in early childhood settings. We welcome the many statutory provisions in ESSA that recognize the value of and encourage inclusion of early childhood teachers and administrators in collaborative professional development opportunities.

Valuable new data reporting requirements on preschool enrollment as part of State and Local Education Agencies' Annual Report Cards should be supported with additional guidance.

ESSA contains new provisions for state and local annual report cards to include data on the number and percentage of students enrolled in preschool programs and to report this data in accordance with the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) currently conducted by the Department's Office of Civil Rights.⁵ California has made progress in meeting the need for greater access to quality preschool programs for children from low-income families but there remains substantial unmet need.⁶ We believe this new reporting requirement, and the accompanying provisions in the regulations on state and local assessment of resource inequities related to preschool,⁷ will help to highlight continued unmet need and make these issues more transparent to families, communities, and policymakers. We recommend that the Department provide additional guidance to ensure the collection, including definitions and data, are used to address issues of equity, access, and quality in early learning programs.

³ [California State Senate Concurrent Resolution 125 \(Allen\) \(2016\)](#).

⁴ See for example, [Preparing All Students for College, Career, Life and Leadership the 21st Century](#), Superintendent's Advisory Task Force on Accountability and Continuous Improvement. Appendix A. Early Learning: The First Step in a Continuously Improving System. pp. 35-40. (May 2016).

⁵ ESSA, Section 1111(h)(1)(C)(viii)(II)(aa) and 1111(h)(2)(C).

⁶ [Unmet Need for Preschool Services in California: Statewide and Local Analysis](#), American Institutes for Research (2016).

⁷ See proposed regulations at Sections 200.21(d)(4)(ii)(B); 200.22(c)(7)(ii)(B); and 299.19(a)(3)(D).

Thank you for your consideration of these comments and for the continued leadership of the Department in promoting quality learning opportunities and addressing gaps in achievement and opportunity for the nation's students.

Sincerely,

Early Edge California

Advancement Project

Children Now

Common Sense: Kids Action

First 5 Association of California

First 5 California

First 5 Los Angeles

LAUP

The Opportunity Institute