

Starting to Plan for ESSA? Have You had a Critical Dialogue About Advancing Equity of Opportunity?

The call for equity of opportunity grows louder every day. But the road forward is filled with obstructions – obstructions in the form of limited understanding, inadequate funding, political machinations, counterproductive competition for sparse resources and for status . . . and more. The failure to deal with such obstructions makes calls for equity an exercise in futility. A key step forward is for state and district policy makers to engage now in a deep discussion of how to plan for the implementation of the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) in ways that significantly advance the agenda for equity.

If you value equity of opportunity, ask yourself:

Have I encouraged deep discussion by policy makers about the following propositions?

- Equity of opportunity is a civil right.
- The *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) can be used to end the marginalization of efforts to advance equity of opportunity for student success at school.
- The road to equity of opportunity includes making fundamental systemic changes in schools.
- A significant factor maintaining *inequities* is the inadequate role schools play in addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students.
- An essential facet of *cost-effectively* addressing barriers to learning and teaching involves transforming currently marginalized and fragmented student and learning supports and doing so in ways that *strategically* connects school and community resources.
- Such a transformation involves unifying student and learning supports and developing them into a comprehensive and equitable system.
- Accomplishing the transformation requires a major policy shift that expands school improvement policy and related accountability from a two- to a three-component framework.

Among those involved with school improvement, we find many remain reluctant to engage in a substantive dialogue about the above propositions. And while our related policy analyses are widely read and lauded, the implications have yet to become a significant part of the discussions about ESSA planning and implementation.*

Until the above matters are part of mainstream dialogues about planning school improvement, statements about advancing equity of opportunity will remain expressions of aspiration and hope rather than plans of action.

*For an example of the Center's analyses and some implications, see *ESSA, Equity of Opportunity, and Addressing Barriers to Learning* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/essaanal.pdf>

ESSA Provides a Time Frame for Deepening Understanding of System Changes Essential for Enhancing Equity of Opportunity

ESSA recognizes that significant numbers of students (1) encounter barriers to learning and some have become disengaged from classroom learning and (2) such students require student and learning supports to successfully meet challenging state academic standards. The legislation clearly underscores that student and learning supports permeate efforts to enhance equity of opportunity. However, the act muddies the nature and scope of such supports by scattering references to them throughout the various Titles, Parts, Subparts, and Sections. That is, by addressing barriers to learning in a piecemeal and mostly indirect manner, ESSA conveys a fragmented picture and a lack of coherence with respect to essential supports.

One of the opportunities of the shift to more local control is for state and local stakeholders to escape the limitations of the federal act and move away from existing fragmented and marginalized approaches for dealing with factors interfering with student success. A deepened understanding of what is required to enhance equity of opportunity includes recognition of the need to transform student and learning supports.

Dialoguing about Equity of Opportunity is a Readiness Step for ESSA Planning

How long since you and your colleagues have engaged in a dialogue about how schools can enhance equity of opportunity for all student to succeed at school and beyond?

If you think it is time for you and your colleagues to engage in a dialogue about how schools can enhance equity of opportunity, the webpages for the *National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports* provide relevant information and resources <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html>

Want Some Help?

Email us and we can help develop a plan for moving forward. Contact: Ltaylor@ucla.edu or adelman@psych.ucla.edu .

The success of the *Every Student Succeeds Act* depends on enhancing equity of opportunity. A critical facet of advancing equity of opportunity for students at school is transforming student and learning supports in ways that effectively address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students.

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Please forward this to a few colleagues you think might be interested.

For those who have been forwarded this and want to receive such resources directly, send an email to Ltaylor@ucla.edu . Looking forward to hearing from you.

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