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EVIDENCE AND FUNDING

Connecting the Dots



CHIEFS FOR CHANGE IS A COALITION OF STATE EDUCATION CHIEFS AND DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENTS DEDICATED TO EXCELLENCE AND EQUITY FOR ALL STUDENTS.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) provides states new freedoms to leverage federal programs toward a wide range of possibilities. But what does it look like to use that freedom in the most strategic and effective ways? State Chiefs are developing bold strategies to take advantage of the additional flexibility to use federal funding in more innovative and evidence-based ways. Leveraging this flexibility can be a powerful tool for leaders to meaningfully influence the work of schools and outcomes for students. Nationally, over \$16 billion is currently spent each year on the two largest federal Title programs in ESSA – Title I and Title II – and ESSA provides new opportunities for states to invest these funds in smarter, forward-thinking ways.

This paper summarizes four previously published briefs by Chiefs for Change: [ESSA and Evidence: Why It Matters](#), [Implementing Change: Rethinking School Improvement Strategies and Funding Under the Every Student Succeeds Act](#), [Expanding Equity: Leveraging ESSA to Provide Direct Student Services](#), and [ESSA Title IIA: Preparing, Training, and Recruiting High-Quality Teachers, Principals, and Other School Leaders](#). It also makes connections across the previously published papers by recommending that state leaders:

1. Access new and expanded flexible funding opportunities **strategically**, by aligning resources toward states' overall vision and priorities, and
2. Leverage the provisions in ESSA requiring funds to be spent on “evidence-based” activities to utilize funds most **effectively** – to help guide state and local agencies toward allocating resources for research-driven initiatives.

By aligning these resources to key state and district goals, investing in strategies with proven outcomes, and tapping ESSA's opportunities for creative uses of funds, states can significantly magnify the impact of these federal dollars in schools in ways that have not been achieved previously. The states profiled in this paper illustrate some of the ways Chiefs are already using the new flexibilities and evidence provisions within the law to accelerate the pace of change in their contexts and improve outcomes for students across the country.

The paper also ties the previous briefs together by providing a framework for Chiefs to consider the opportunities across elements of ESSA and develop a strategic approach that ensures federal funds are used in ways that match key priorities for schools and students and maximize the use of evidence-based approaches. State Chiefs that are still considering how to use the funding flexibilities and evidence requirements summarized in this paper should reflect on the following questions:

1. What is my **state vision** for student achievement and success over the next 5-10 years?
2. What are the **priorities (or key levers)** for achieving that vision?
3. What are the **evidence requirements** within ESSA that address those priorities; how can I

build upon or strengthen those requirements?

4. What **funding flexibilities** within ESSA can I use to advance these priorities (new state set-asides, transferability); how can I **coherently align** resources to advance these priorities (aligning, blending/braiding funds)?
5. What are my **technical, fiscal, political, and organizational realities** that impact these decisions?

By answering these questions, state leaders can begin to unpack the funding opportunities within ESSA and identify strategies for advancing their own priorities and vision under the new law in their contexts.

INTRODUCTION

The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) made substantial changes to the nation's most significant federal K-12 education law, including by providing states and school districts greater flexibility in using federal funding and through its emphasis on evidence-based strategies.

States and school districts spent over \$16 billion¹ nationwide in fiscal year 2015 across Title I and Title II, just two federal funding streams within ESSA profiled in this paper. ESSA includes provisions on how states and districts must allocate their federal funds, but ESSA also provides more flexibility for state educational agencies (SEAs) and local educational agencies (LEAs) than some of the previous law's mandates on spending. Effectively leveraging ESSA's spending provisions, especially aligning resources across programs toward a clear vision for student improvement, could lead to meaningful change for students in local communities. Alternatively, overlooking or minimizing ESSA opportunities, or implementing them poorly, could equate to millions of dollars passed through to states, districts, and schools via disconnected, compliance-driven processes. ESSA provides an opportunity to chart a new course for state- and locally-driven action to improve schools. States and districts should acknowledge this important moment in time and embrace the responsibility they have to increase their impact – especially for the students that need *proven* strategies and resources the most. The stakes are high, and states should seize the opportunities within ESSA, acknowledging that doing so may take a more thoughtful approach to building capacity within and outside SEAs and LEAs, specifically the capacity to conduct, understand, and make use of research, and the capacity to administer and align federal funding streams.

This paper summarizes four previously published papers by Chiefs for Change: [ESSA and Evidence: Why It Matters](#), [Implementing Change: Rethinking School Improvement Strategies and Funding Under the Every Student Succeeds Act](#), [Expanding Equity: Leveraging ESSA to Provide Direct Student Services](#), and [ESSA Title IIA: Preparing, Training, and Recruiting High-Quality Teachers, Principals, and Other School Leaders](#). It also makes connections across the previously published papers by recommending that state leaders:

1. Access new and expanded flexible funding opportunities **strategically**, by aligning resources toward states' overall vision and priorities, and
2. Leverage the provisions in ESSA requiring funds to be spent on “evidence-based” activities to utilize funds most **effectively** – to help guide state and local agencies toward allocating resources for research-driven initiatives.

The structure of this document begins with a summary of each paper followed by concrete examples of states that are “connecting the dots” and implementing these recommendations within their own contexts.

¹ http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_401.70.asp?current=yes

State Chiefs that are still considering how to use the funding flexibilities and evidence requirements summarized in this paper should reflect on the following questions:

1. What is my **state vision** for student achievement and success over the next 5-10 years?
2. What are the **priorities (or key levers)** for achieving that vision?
3. What are the **evidence requirements** within ESSA that address those priorities; how can I build upon or strengthen those requirements?
4. What **funding flexibilities** within ESSA can I use to advance these priorities (new state set-asides, transferability); how can I **coherently align** resources to advance these priorities (aligning, blending/braiding funds)?
5. What are my **technical, fiscal, political, and organizational realities** that impact these decisions?

By answering these questions, state leaders can begin to unpack the funding opportunities within ESSA and identify strategies for advancing their own priorities and vision under the new law in their contexts.

SUMMARY – ESSA AND EVIDENCE: WHY IT MATTERS

ESSA incorporates the concept of “evidence-based” activities into its grant programs in a variety of ways. In some cases, grant funds may only be spent on evidence-based activities. In other cases, states, districts, and schools are encouraged, or required, to implement evidence-based activities, but grant spending is not limited to those activities. In either case, ESSA’s focus on evidence can help states, districts, and schools prioritize their spending on activities that are likely to improve student outcomes.

The law specifies 4 tiers of evidence. Tiers 1 through 3 are the most rigorous and require evidence to be based on different kinds of well-designed and well-implemented studies that show an intervention has a *statistically significant effect* on improving student outcomes. Tier 4 does not require actual evidence of effectiveness, but instead requires a rationale (strong theory) based on high-quality research findings or positive evaluations that an intervention is likely to improve student outcomes. Within the context of state formula grant programs, ESSA’s evidence requirements primarily impact Section 1003 of Title I which requires states to set aside 7% of Title I funds to help turn around the lowest-performing schools, as well as the use of funds allocated to districts under Title I, Part A, as all schools identified for improvement must implement at least one evidence-based intervention, which (for schools receiving Title I funds) can be supported by those

dollars. ESSA’s evidence provisions can also impact portions of Title II, Part A, Title IV, Part A, and competitive grants like the Teacher and School Leader Incentive Fund (TSLIF) and the Education Innovation and Research (EIR) program.

For more information on the required, allowed, and incentivized evidence-based provisions in ESSA, see Results For America’s [resource on the topic](#).

Minimizing these evidence requirements could be easy for many states, given the likely decreased federal oversight role in ESSA, the unlikely scenario that the Department of Education (USED) will micromanage states’ use of the evidence provisions, and the relatively low bar for meeting the less rigorous tiers of evidence. However, there are obvious educational, fiscal, moral, and political imperatives *not* to dismiss this opportunity. Funding initiatives that are proven to work is good for everyone – kids *and* adults. While this will require strong leadership, and may even require building capacity within or outside the SEA, there are also some simple and immediate actions that states can take to leverage the evidence provisions. For example, states can use external resources like the [What Works Clearinghouse](#) and the [Best Evidence Encyclopedia](#), two high-quality online resources that provide information on school supports and interventions, including what is known about what works, for whom, and under what conditions.

States and schools can also utilize [Evidence for ESSA](#), a new resource for identifying the most up-to-date information on programs that meet ESSA evidence requirements, developed by Johns Hopkins University in partnership with Chiefs for Change and several other organizations. States can use these resources to build in-house capacity and knowledge of evidence-based interventions, to review district- and school-level plans, and/or to provide a vetted list of evidence-based interventions to schools and districts to utilize when developing their needs assessments and building their plans for school improvement. However, it is also important to note that these online resources should not be considered “plug and play.” States should still consider their own context, the context in which the research was done, and the needs of local districts before choosing or incentivizing certain actions or interventions. For example, when selecting interventions to vet for schools and districts, in addition to considering the interventions’ tiers of evidence, states need to consider the grade level in which the intervention was studied, and consider if the same evidence or conclusions could be drawn for an intervention in another grade level.

• • • **Connecting the Dots: Nevada** • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • •

• • • Nevada is leveraging the evidence requirements within ESSA to advance its priorities around school improvement. ESSA requires that Section 1003 funds (which are the 7% set-aside out of a state’s Title I, Part A allocation for school improvement) be spent on the most rigorous evidence-based activities (activities that satisfy evidence tiers 1, 2, or 3). To support districts in meeting this requirement, the state aims to provide guidance on evidence-based interventions and

supports to help schools and districts identify strategies for school improvement. In addition, it plans to include a menu of evidence-based, prioritized interventions in the district-to-state application for school improvement funds. If a district selects from this menu, it will expedite the review of that district's application for Section 1003 funds on behalf of schools it serves that have been identified for support and improvement. If/when a district includes an intervention or support in its application that is *not* from the menu of services, it will receive a deeper level of analysis. In doing this, Nevada helps districts select prioritized, evidence-based activities, while at the same time creating a streamlined, more efficient process for application review at the state level. Finally, Nevada hosted a ½-day training and partner meeting for schools likely to be eligible for 1003 funds. During the meeting, schools had the opportunity to participate in training on how to identify evidence-based interventions for their particular challenges, technical assistance on the new application for the funds, and a meet-and-greet session with external partners that provide interventions and supports that meet the ESSA bar for evidence-based practices. Nevada's multiple strategies clearly focus on and support evidence requirements under ESSA.

There are other ways to leverage ESSA's evidence provisions as well. A state could, for example, identify evidence-based strategies that address challenges shared by multiple districts in the state and connect those districts to resources and supports to work together on specific strategies or interventions. States could help build evidence by supporting LEAs/schools in ongoing efforts to evaluate interventions, if using lower level tiers of evidence for interventions not supported by 1003 funds. A state could also design LEA applications for ESSA funds under Section 1003 in ways that promote evidence-based interventions that align to a district's specific needs or challenges. Or, where consistent with federal law, the state could award points or 'credit' for competitive grants that districts could receive if they use prioritized interventions or supports in their applications.

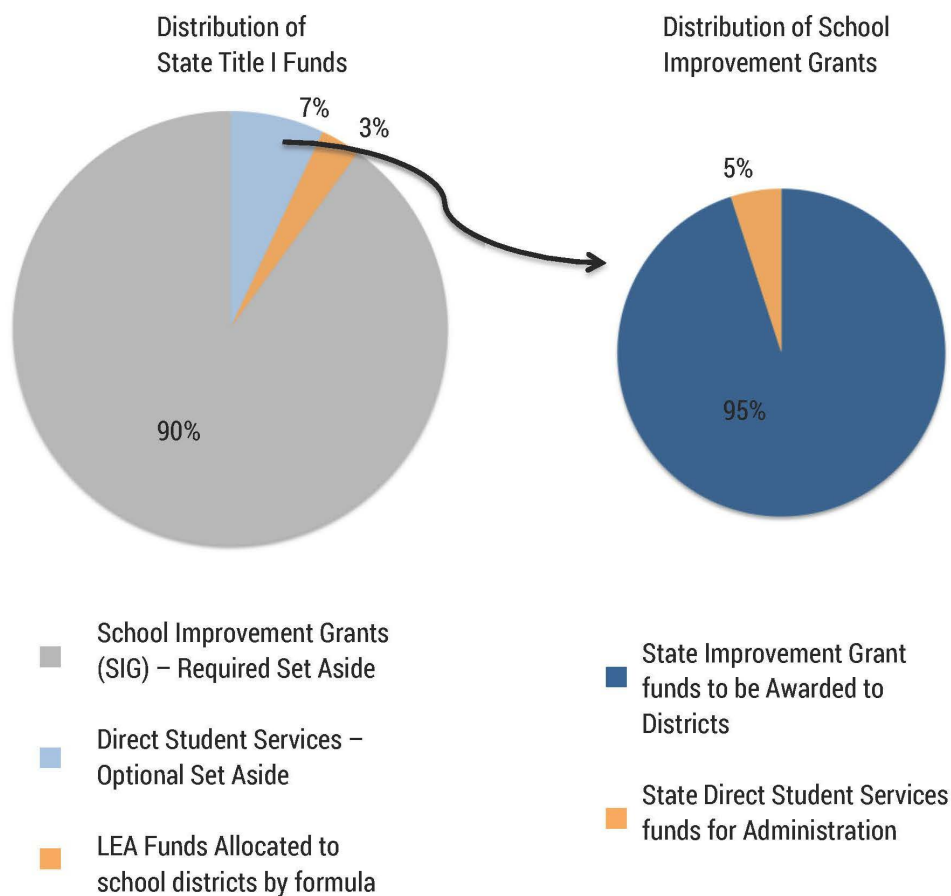
At the same time, states should be thoughtful about the way they incentivize and encourage specific evidence-based interventions at the LEA level. There is a delicate balance between incentivizing programs that have been proven to be successful and that are consistent with state-level priorities, and obtaining the local buy-in necessary for interventions, supports, and programs to be implemented successfully.

Louisiana provides an example of attempting to manage this balance. Recently, the state solicited a Request for Information (RFI) from local and national providers to work with and help support schools identified for improvement. Through the RFI, the state created an inventory of high-quality, proven school and district improvement partners. The state also planned a day-long "[design summit](#)" during which these providers met with local leaders, shared their work, and allowed district leaders to ask questions. Louisiana's RFI did two important things: First, it addressed a state priority to connect external providers with the state's smaller cities and rural areas; second, it provided districts choice in identifying partners that are best suited to their needs. All the materials from Louisiana's school redesign summit can be [found on its website](#) for further information.

Depending on the state, the approaches above may involve different types of knowledge for state and district leaders, specifically those involved in the administration of ESSA programs. They may demand that leaders have deeper knowledge of the evidence and research base behind specific activities or interventions. Or, they could require external capacity, such as through regional centers, to disseminate and support research-based interventions, track outcomes, and create a feedback loop to districts and states. They could necessitate partnerships across business, universities, and/or philanthropy to match funds for interventions or activities with the highest levels of evidence. While any shift in approach will necessitate resources and time at the front end, there are clear benefits to investing limited resources in approaches and services with evidence of their ability to transform outcomes for students.

SUMMARY - IMPLEMENTING CHANGE: RETHINKING SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES AND FUNDING UNDER ESSA

Under Section 1003 of ESSA, states must set aside 7% of their Title I funds for LEAs to support school improvement efforts in the state’s lowest-performing schools. States can use up to 5% of the set-aside (5% of the 7%) for grant administration, monitoring, implementation support, and guidance. The rest (95% of the 7%) must be awarded to districts with designated low-performing schools.²



While 7% seems like a small percentage, it equates to roughly \$1B nationwide assuming the fiscal year 2016 Title I appropriation. The framework of the school improvement set-aside is similar to

² If an LEA agrees, the state can provide services to eligible schools directly or through other entities such as school support teams, educational service agencies, or nonprofit or for-profit external providers with expertise in using evidence-based strategies to improve student achievement, instruction, and schools.

NCLB's School Improvement Grant program (SIG) but with greater flexibility for states and local agencies to determine how to utilize those funds, because of statutory language prohibiting the U.S. Department of Education from prescribing specific interventions through regulation.

Chiefs for Change provides three overarching recommendations for the use of the 7% set-aside:

1. **States should use the set-aside as an innovation fund** (awarding funds competitively with priorities for certain activities, designing the application to incentivize these activities, etc.) **to encourage districts to use the strongest evidence-based interventions**, including by doing the following:
 - a. Focusing on instructional practice informed by data,
 - b. Providing opportunities for educators to collaborate and share effective data-based instructional practices,
 - c. Prioritizing human capital through strategic hiring and professional learning,
 - d. Providing additional time through extended-day or -year models, and/or
 - e. Creating conditions for empowerment of school improvement, including school autonomy, need-based funding and resources, and systems to support, monitor, and sustain school improvement efforts.

2. **State leaders should use lessons from previous school improvement efforts.** For example, the results of the federal SIG program provide important lessons for future school improvement efforts. While schools and LEAs had to select prescribed interventions from a federal list, they often chose the least disruptive intervention which had modest impact, and/or did not fully implement the intervention with fidelity. To avoid this result, states need to keep a healthy balance, or tension even, between allowing schools to choose their own interventions that meet their needs and capacity constraints, with the evidence provisions to require more proven strategies. In addition, there is research and evidence from other previous improvement efforts that support high-level principles for effective school turnaround strategies, such as authority and autonomy for important school-level decisions like staffing, multi-year resources and funding, and a high-quality pipeline of educators, among others.³

3. **States should encourage districts to align school improvement strategies funded under Section 1003 to other programs.** For example, if teacher leadership is a major strategy for a state's school improvement efforts, the state could encourage, or at least make it easier for, districts to use multiple funding sources – including Title I, Part A and Title II, Part A funds – to support this type of intervention. Federal grant spending should reflect the goals and priorities of the state and district. ESSA encourages states and districts to coordinate

³ <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education/report/2016/09/13/143922/7-tenets-for-sustainable-school-turnaround/>

activities across programs, and includes flexibilities to help align services such as increased flexibility to transfer funds out of certain programs and into another. For example, states and districts can transfer funds from Title II, Part A and Title IV, Part A into Title I to support low-performing schools. This increased flexibility can help states and districts to align resources toward their goals, specifically their goals and priorities for the lowest-performing schools.

There are several key decisions for states to make when considering their strategy to distribute school improvement funds. Making these decisions strategically will help state leaders incentivize LEAs to act and develop plans that align with their statewide vision and the evidence provisions.

1. **Competition or Formula** – States can decide to distribute funds based on formula or by competition, or a hybrid of both approaches. Each method has specific pros and cons but all can support quality if implemented well. For example, if states decide to allocate via formula, they should create program parameters to ensure funds are spent effectively.
2. **Requirements for Awarding Grants** – States need to develop rules and procedures for awarding grants that are within the boundaries of the law *and* that encourage interventions and activities that align with the state vision and are supported by evidence under Tiers 1-3. These rules and procedures should address, among other things:
 - a. the timing of grant implementation – balancing thoughtful implementation with the urgency of turning around schools,
 - b. ensuring that grant recipients reflect the diversity of geography within a state – including geographic areas that may have limited resources or capacity to implement turnaround strategies,
 - c. size of grants – such that LEAs have enough funding to implement their strategies with fidelity, and
 - d. prioritization of grants – determining the relative priority to attach to schools undergoing comprehensive improvement and those implementing targeted improvements, and determining what districts have the “greatest need” or demonstrate the “strongest commitment” to implementing the grants. This includes considering the different supports and needs that schools identified for comprehensive support and improvement might have, as opposed to the needs for schools identified for targeted assistance. The nature of each of these identifications is very different; therefore, their needs may be as well.
3. **Local Application Requirements** – State leaders have the opportunity to build upon the requirements within ESSA for district applications for school improvement funds. This is another opportunity to shape how funds are used, ensure alignment with the overall state vision for achievement, and ensure that interventions have a rigorous evidence base behind them. ESSA requires several elements within local applications, such as descriptions of how

the LEA will support and monitor its schools receiving program funds; use a rigorous review process to recruit, screen, select, and evaluate external partners; align other funding streams to support the school improvement process; and remove policy barriers to implementing any of the LEA’s strategies. But the state can provide *more* guidance and incentives for local districts to develop strong applications, and/or can put more emphasis or focus on different elements of the application that they want to prioritize given their state vision, such as prioritizing interventions that serve certain populations, English Language interventions, or rural school supports – depending on the priorities and vision of the state.

4. **Additional Local Application Requirements** – Finally, the law establishes minimum requirements for local applications (listed above). However, it allows for states to request additional information from local applicants that can help differentiate applications as part of a competitive-based school improvement innovation fund. For example, states might consider additional key criteria, such as the extent to which proposed strategies and interventions meet the **highest** tiers of evidence, or the extent to which districts will take on challenges in areas such as governance, operations, fiscal management, and programming that reflect a meaningful departure from past or current practice.

• • • **Connecting the Dots: Massachusetts** • • • • • • • • • • • • • •

- • • The recently released [draft ESSA plan](#) from Massachusetts provides an example of some of the opportunities above.

In its plan, Massachusetts proposes that comprehensive support and improvement schools will be eligible to apply for school improvement funds through a **competitive process**. Citing [evidence from research](#) commissioned by its Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), Massachusetts prioritizes practices that it has found to be successful in its state context, including four effective turnaround practices:

1. Establishing a school-wide community of practice through leadership, shared responsibility, and professional collaboration;
2. Employing intentional practices for improving instruction;
3. Providing student-specific supports and instruction to all students; and
4. Providing appropriate social, emotional, and behavioral supports in order to create a safe, orderly, and respectful learning environment for students and teachers.

Using these lessons from previous school improvement efforts, MA will structure the competitive school improvement grant process around four critical elements:

1. A rigorous set of expectations aligned to the four evidence-based turnaround practices (listed above) required of applicant schools;

2. Applications and interviews scored on a rubric with a high bar that ensures funding is only allocated to schools that demonstrate strong capacity to implement a strategic and actionable approach based on a robust data analysis and with community involvement to implement the turnaround plan;
3. Alignment to state statute and regulations for low-performing schools; and
4. Supplementing with district assistance by a statewide system of support aligned to the turnaround practices.

In addition, Massachusetts states that for low-performing schools and districts that embrace certain practices, the department will provide priority consideration in the allocation of other state-level discretionary grants.

In structuring its school improvement funding in these ways, Massachusetts is leveraging several recommendations cited in this paper, including:

- Utilizing lessons from previous school improvement efforts to inform future efforts;
- Proposing a competitive process for school improvement funding and prioritizing certain schools within that process; and
- Aligning other state-available funds toward evidence-based practices for school improvement.

SUMMARY - EXPANDING EQUITY: LEVERAGING ESSA TO PROVIDE DIRECT STUDENT SERVICES (DSS)

In addition to the 7% required set-aside of Title I funds, states have an opportunity to reserve 3% of Title I funding for Direct Student Services (DSS). If states decide to take advantage of this discretionary funding opportunity, the funds must be targeted to districts with large numbers of schools identified for improvement, and services should be implemented through meaningful engagement with diverse state and district stakeholders. Implementation of the DSS option can allow families of students who attend struggling schools to obtain additional academic opportunities from among a wide menu of providers, including (but not limited to):

- Access to online courses and/or advanced courses like AP/IB not otherwise available,
- Credit recovery programs for at-risk students,
- School choice, and
- Personalized learning.

Key action steps for state leaders who wish to take advantage of DSS include:

- Consulting with school districts,
- Developing an application for local districts to apply for funds,

- Awarding grants to districts and, at the state’s discretion, setting grant-making priorities (in addition to those in the statute), and
- Providing oversight for districts and external providers of services.

Once again, state leaders should reflect on their state vision and priorities when considering whether and how to take advantage of the 3% reservation. In doing so, Chiefs should consider whether the allowable uses for DSS are aligned with their priorities for advancing their vision and how this funding might work in tandem with other federal funding streams to achieve states’ goals for increasing student achievement. For example, Chiefs considering the DSS reservation for use in expanding course access for students should think about how those funds can supplement or work in collaboration with other funding streams. Expanding rigorous coursework to low-performing schools could be an allowable intervention under Title I; training and/or recruiting more teachers to teach AP, IB, and dual-enrollment courses could be an allowable use of Title II funds; and Title IV funds could also be used to expand these offerings online as a means of providing students with a “well-rounded education.”

Chiefs for Change has published a [variety of resources and tools](#) for states considering the use of DSS in the implementation of their ESSA plans, including a [model request for applications](#) that states can modify for LEAs to apply to carry out services under DSS, a [timeline](#) for planning and launching DSS by the fall of 2017, an [FAQ for stakeholders](#) regarding DSS, and a [list of provider application criteria](#) to ensure states oversee only high-quality providers through DSS.

Finally, it is important to bring local districts into the rationale for alignment and use of these targeted funds, and provide an opportunity for local districts to provide input – they need to not only be engaged in this discussion as required stakeholders under ESSA, but will need to see this reservation as part of a broader vision for improving education throughout the state and for strategically targeting resources to those services that are research-based and have a proven track record of successful outcomes for students.

• • • **Connecting the Dots: Louisiana** • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • •

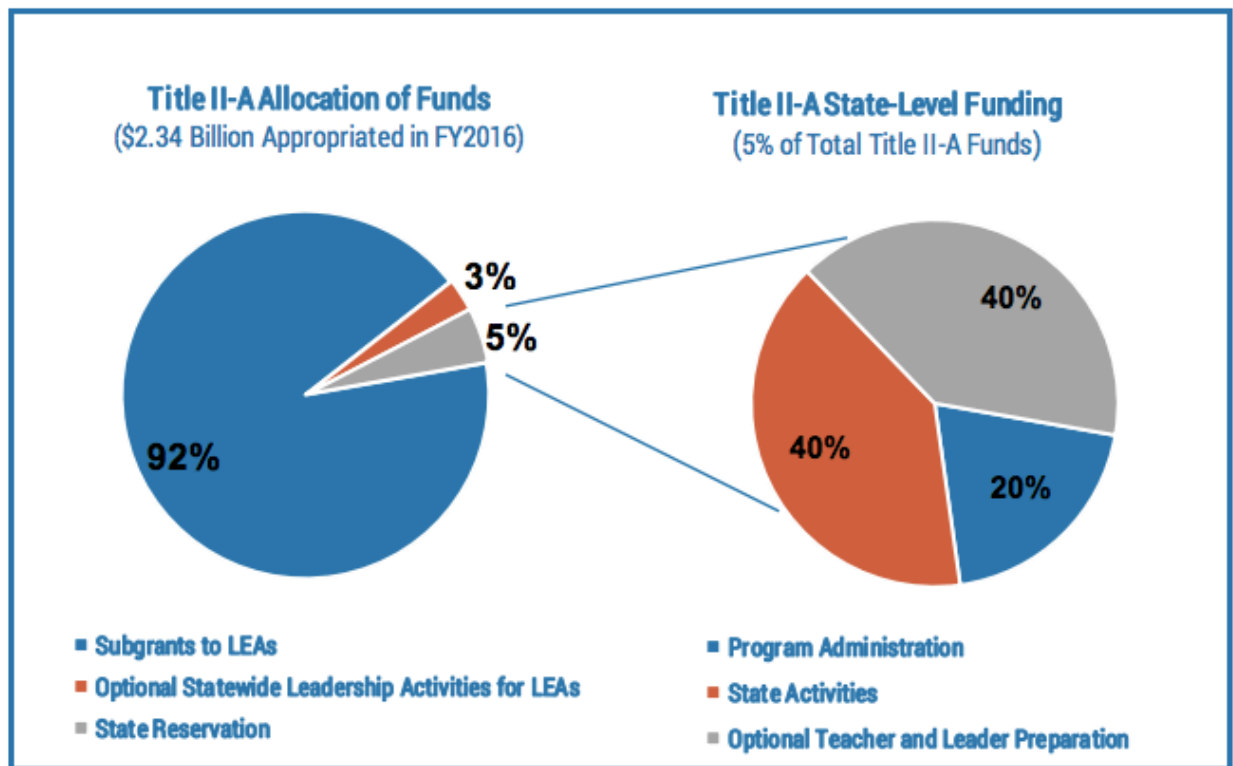
• • • Louisiana’s [draft ESSA framework](#) provides an introduction for how a state might include DSS as part of a broader strategic effort to address specific challenges within a state. Louisiana’s framework is centered around five key challenges that the state hopes to address throughout all aspects of its plan and that were identified based on the specific needs of Louisiana students and stakeholders. Each challenge is explained in-depth in the framework.

The third challenge outlined in Louisiana’s plan is “fair access to experiences essential for life after high school.” Within this challenge, Louisiana identifies **several strategies** to address the challenge,

including the use of federal funds by districts to support and expand access to critical courses and experiences, and changes to the state’s accountability system to better reward schools that promote students’ transition to college and the workplace. The framework describes Direct Student Services as an opportunity for the state to reserve funds to support access to courses not offered at the school students attend, support for students taking exams for post-secondary credit and industry certifications, credit recovery programs for at-risk students, school choice, and personalized learning. The framework identifies how DSS can be used by schools to meet the needs of parents in their communities to gain access to opportunities or courses that they seek for their children, given their context and needs. In articulating *all* of the strategies and opportunities under ESSA to address the “fair access” challenge, it positions DSS not as a discrete set-aside opportunity within the law, but rather, part of a comprehensive and aligned state strategy to address specific challenges within its unique context.

SUMMARY - ESSA TITLE II, PART A: PREPARING, TRAINING, AND RECRUITING HIGH-QUALITY TEACHERS, PRINCIPALS, AND OTHER SCHOOL LEADERS

ESSA provides opportunities for state and local Chiefs to use federal Title II funding in even more effective and innovative ways to help improve teacher and leader quality and, ultimately, increase student success.



States can utilize their funds for activities like:

1. **Educator academies** – States may spend some of their state-level funds (up to an amount equal to 2% of the state’s total Title II, Part A allocation) to establish or expand teacher, principal, or other school leader preparation academies to prepare educators to serve in high-need schools. These academies must operate under an agreement with a state authorizer designated by the Governor, and must focus on clinical preparation and issue credentials only when teachers show an impact on student learning. These innovative academies provide states an opportunity to build preparation programs from the ground up, using a different incentive structure than those of traditional educator preparation programs – rewarding progress with student outcomes as opposed to compliance within regulatory frameworks.
2. **Recruitment, retention, and ensuring equitable access to excellent educators** – While Title II, Part A funds are formula funds accessible to all states, states that want to push further can support effective human capital management systems under the updated competitive grant

opportunity, the Teacher and Leader Incentive Fund (TIF) program (under Title II, Part B) to better recruit, retain, and ensure equitable access to excellent teachers and principals.

3. **Supporting effective professional development, including better incorporating career and technical education (CTE) content into training and instructional practices** – States may use their state-level funds to support the professional development of teachers, principals, or other school leaders on a variety of issues, including integrating CTE content into instructional practices. This can include providing training on best practices in understanding state and regional workforce needs and transitions to postsecondary education and the workforce. States should consider their school improvement strategies, especially those states that are considering high-quality CTE programs as an intervention or support, and use these funds to ensure teachers are receiving the development and training they need to deliver that intervention.
4. **Strengthening school leadership activities** – States can use their share (5%) of Title II, Part A funds to support school leadership activities, as well as other permissible activities to support teachers and principals. In addition, states now have the option of reserving up to an additional 3% of funds (from the 95% allocated to LEAs) for “principals and other school leaders” consistent with authorized state activities. This money can be used for systemic improvements for principals and other school leaders, such as peer-to-peer learning sessions, collaborative initiative planning, collective program evaluation, and other investments. This can also be used for principal “academies” as described above.
5. **Developing a comprehensive approach to human capital** – As under previous law, states can submit a single, consolidated state plan covering the various formula programs, instead of submitting a separate application for each program. The plan should include a variety of strategies for human capital, including, among other things, the state’s plan to address systems of educator development, retention, and advancement, support for educators, and educator equity. Through the consolidated state plan, states can provide a cohesive approach to their human capital systems, as opposed to focusing individually on discrete, disconnected talent initiatives or programs. States can encourage school districts to spend their Title II, Part A funds effectively through guidance, the design of the LEA application, or enforcement of spending rules such as the evidence-based requirements for certain Title II, Part A activities. For example, if a state is prioritizing educator preparation as a strategy for improvement, it could provide guidance to districts on how to use Title II, Part A funds on teacher resident salaries.

Research shows that there is no one silver bullet for improving the quality of teachers and school leaders; rather, Chiefs need to pull multiple levers. States should take a comprehensive approach to Title II, considering the entire continuum of an educator’s career – from preparation through retention and advancement – as opposed to discrete programs that can be funded by Title II and that lack evidence of improving student outcomes. In addition, they should consider how/if the new and expanded uses of Title II coherently support their vision and priorities for student achievement overall – including the needs for school improvement and educator preparation – and ensure that

schools receiving school improvement grants are addressing the needs of their teachers and leaders and allocating Title II funds accordingly.

• • • **Connecting the Dots: New Mexico** • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • •

- • • New Mexico presents another example of some first steps toward this approach. For years, the state has been messaging to LEAs that Title II funds are about “educator effectiveness,” as opposed to discrete allowable uses of funds. This alone signals to LEAs that they should be thinking expansively about the use of Title II funds across the entire human capital continuum. In addition, New Mexico’s [recently released draft ESSA plan](#) indicates an intent to leverage some of the recommendations specifically mentioned within this paper. For example, the plan indicates intent to use Title II funds to fully implement the state’s educator equity plan, which includes a number of strategies to address inequities in access to effective educators. In doing this, New Mexico leverages federal funding opportunities under Title II of ESSA to implement strategies and priorities that are important to the state’s overall vision of equity and that address the entire human capital continuum for educators.

In addition, the plan prioritizes the use the Title II, Part A 3% set-aside for statewide school leadership opportunities to support innovative teacher and school leader preparation programs that utilize evidence-based practices to ensure novice teachers are ready on day one in the classroom. This too reinforces a key priority for the state more broadly regarding educator preparation and leverages ESSA flexibilities to advance that priority. Overall, the state places a heavy emphasis on using district data to assess teacher quality needs, and, in turn, creates a link between those needs and the district's planned Title II, Part A activities. The state then provides assistance and feedback on those plans and their alignment to the needs identified by the data. The state supports districts in comprehensively assessing their needs for teacher and leader quality, and then helps districts target resources strategically toward those needs. States can take initial steps like this to first address the strategic uses of funding *within* federal funding streams, in addition to using and encouraging LEAs to use funds strategically *across* streams to support broader priorities and goals of the state.

CONCLUSION

The flexibilities within ESSA for states to determine and implement a cohesive vision for student achievement and success provide both an exciting opportunity and a clear responsibility. State and local leaders should embrace the evidence requirements and new or expanded uses of federal funding to promote strategies that have proven to work in rigorous research studies, as opposed to just a strong theory or political popularity. They should align federal resources around a clear and compelling vision with evidence-based strategies for improving student achievement. Taking advantage of these opportunities will require strong leadership and expanded capacity at the state and local levels, but will reap long-term benefits for students and communities across the country for years to come.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES / HELPFUL LINKS

[Results for America: ESSA and Evidence Resources](#)

[USED: Guidance on Using Evidence to Strengthen Education Investments](#)

[CCSSO: Developing Effective Guidance: A Handbook for State Educational Agencies Delivering Guidance on Federal Education Programs to Drive Success](#)

[USED: Guidance on Title II Part A Funds](#)

[Jobs For the Future Braided Funding Toolkit](#)

[Center for American Progress: 7 Tenets for Sustainable School Improvement](#)

[Louisiana Draft ESSA Framework 2.0](#)

[Louisiana School Redesign Resources](#)

[Massachusetts Draft ESSA Plan](#)

[New Mexico Draft ESSA Plan](#)

Appendix – 10 Key Decision Points for State Chiefs

Category	Decision Point	ESSA Requirements	Opportunities for Boldness
School Improvement	What school improvement interventions will we encourage/leverage with Section 1003 funds?	Section 1003 funds are the 7% of Title I funds set aside by the state to support school improvement efforts in the nation’s lowest-performing schools in comprehensive and targeted support and improvement. The 7% set-aside is similar to NCLB’s School Improvement Grants (SIG) program but with greater flexibility for states and local agencies to determine how to utilize those funds	Use the set-aside as an innovation fund to leverage the strongest evidence-based interventions, aligned to each state’s unique context and needs, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focusing on instructional practice informed by data, • Providing opportunities for teacher leaders to collaborate and share effective instructional practices based on data, • Prioritizing human capital through strategic hiring and professional learning, • Providing additional time through extended day or year models, and • Creating conditions for empowerment of school improvement – including autonomy for school leaders over staffing, budget, school culture, and schedules.
	How will we allocate Section 1003 school improvement funds – via competition, formula, or a hybrid of the two?	Under ESSA, SEAs must distribute 95 percent of Section 1003 school improvement funds to LEAs through a formula or on a competitive basis.	<u>Consider the pros/cons of formula vs. competitive funding.</u> Given the number of schools identified, model the allocations using different approaches (formula grants, competitive, and hybrid models) to determine the average size grant for districts and schools and determine what the size of grants might be across different geographies. Consider whether grant sizes under different models are adequate to support schools with the greatest needs and strongest commitment to improvement (see below).
	For what time period will we award Section 1003 school improvement grants?	Under ESSA, the grants may be for up to 4 years, which can include a planning year.	Provide 4-year grants, but with years 3 and 4 of funding contingent upon output or outcome measures.

Appendix – 10 Key Decision Points for State Chiefs

School Improvement (cont'd)	<p>How will we prioritize Section 1003 grants?</p>	<p>States must give priority to LEAs with the highest numbers/percentages of schools identified, as well as those that illustrate the greatest need and strongest commitment. Chiefs must define and clarify how this will operationalize in their states. There is no requirement that every LEA receive an allocation, or that every school in comprehensive or targeted support receive funding.</p>	<p>Develop state priorities for school improvement funding. If distributing via competition, LEAs that receive more points relative to these priorities in the competition receive higher allocations. Alternatively, if allocating via formula, create absolute priorities for the funding which determine whether an applicant is eligible to receive a grant.</p>
	<p>Should we go beyond what is required under ESSA for LEA applications for Section 1003 funds?</p>	<p>ESSA sets a <u>minimum “floor”</u> for what must be included in LEA applications for Section 1003 funds but does not prohibit states from going further and adding to these requirements. States can ask LEAs to address additional factors relevant to Section 1003 requirements.</p>	<p>Create specific requirements for LEA monitoring of Section 1003 funds, or create conditions that would terminate the grant if the requirements are not met.</p> <p>Require LEAs to articulate how they will use federal funding streams in support of their Section 1003 application, such as funding for professional development under Title II, and in tandem with one another.</p> <p>Support, or award points to, LEAs that change their policies and practices to more effectively implement school improvement strategies discussed in their applications– such as ensuring principals have the flexibilities they need to successfully implement their plans – as an indication of the strength of the district’s ‘commitment to implement its interventions in the application..’</p> <p>Require Section 1003 applications to indicate the extent to which the strategies and supports outlined are based on the highest tiers of evidence available and appropriate to meet the school’s needs and context.</p> <p>Encourage and award points to plans that take on difficult issues like governance, operations, and fiscal management.</p>

Appendix – 10 Key Decision Points for State Chiefs

Funding Flexibilities	<p>Will we set aside 3% of Title I funds for Direct Student Services (DSS)?</p>	<p>States have the option to reserve an additional 3% of their Title I, Part A funding for DSS. Funds must be targeted to districts with large numbers of schools identified for comprehensive or targeted improvement. DSS, a new provision, can allow families of students who attend struggling schools to obtain a range of additional academic opportunities from among a wide menu of providers, including, but not limited to: access to online courses not otherwise available, credit recovery programs for at-risk students, school choice, and personalized learning.</p> <p>ESSA requires consultation with LEAs prior to determining whether to reserve these funds. States must then develop an application for district funds; award geographically diverse, competitive, grants to districts – with priority going to LEAs with the highest number of schools identified for improvement; approve and maintain a list of any academic tutoring providers; and monitor the quality of services by DSS providers, among other requirements.</p>	<p>States reserving these funds should communicate their goals and the opportunity clearly and build investment with LEAs for how these funds are aligned with, and part of, a broader statewide effort for improvement.</p> <p>Establish criteria for LEA applications that go beyond the requirements within ESSA and/or prioritize and allocate bonus points for applications that incentivize certain activities. For example, specific evidence-based practices prioritized by the state, or the extent to which districts will take on challenges in areas such as governance, operations, and fiscal management.</p> <p>Take a strong role in vetting and monitoring external providers as recommended here.</p>
	<p>Will we reserve 3% of Title II, Part A funds for statewide school leadership activities?</p>	<p>States have the option of reserving up to an additional 3 percent of funds from the 95 percent allocated to LEAs under Title II, Part A of ESSA for “principals and other school leaders” consistent with authorized state activities. This money can be used for systemic infrastructure improvements for principals and other school leaders, such as peer-to-peer learning sessions, teacher leadership opportunities, and the development of career ladders for educators.</p>	<p>Build a case for how a statewide investment and approach to school leadership can help to better meet the needs of teacher leaders, school leaders, and ultimately students. Consider including a narrative of this explanation in the ESSA plan, discussing it during stakeholder engagement prior to plan submission or following plan submission, and/or publishing an executive summary of the plan that includes this rationale.</p> <p>Take advantage of this opportunity and utilize funds to work with external groups to create statewide conditions conducive to hiring principals, retaining quality</p>

Appendix – 10 Key Decision Points for State Chiefs

<p>Funding Flexibilities (cont'd)</p>			<p>administrators, and increasing future capacity through career ladder and teacher leadership programs. Or, build an in-house program of high-quality mentors and principals to build capacity for leaders in low-performing schools.</p>
	<p>Will we use Title II, Part A state funds for teacher and leader preparation academies?</p>	<p>ESSA permits states to spend state activities funds (an amount up to 2 percent of the total Title II, Part A allocation) for establishing or expanding “teacher, principal, or other school leader preparation academies” if allowed by state law. New academies would be held accountable for the results of their candidates, required to prepare teachers to serve in high-needs schools, and must have a significant clinical experience component. ESSA requires that these academies not face unnecessary restrictions on the methods the academy will use to train teachers, as further described in the law.</p>	<p>Take advantage of the opportunity to fund teacher and principal preparation academies and work with LEAs to develop demand for new, innovative preparation strategies. Embrace the opportunity to build institutions from the ground up that are aligned with the state’s priorities for student outcomes, as opposed to traditional models that are driven by regulatory or accreditation-focused standards.</p> <p>In addition, states should work in partnership with the required state authorizer of these academies. Specifically, to support the creation of principles and standards for effective academy authorization and hold the authorizer accountable to high-quality authorizing processes- including monitoring academies effectively, using outcomes-based approval and renewal processes, and ensuring publicly transparent practices.</p>
	<p>How will we utilize Title II, Part A funds expansively across the entire human capital continuum, and in tandem with other federal funding streams?</p> <p>How will we encourage districts to do the same?</p>	<p>While ESSA maintains the flexible nature of the Title II, Part A program generally, it also provides specific opportunities for SEAs and LEAs to develop and implement programming in a strategic and collaborative manner to better prepare, recruit, develop, and retain our strongest teachers, principals, and other school leaders. See p. 14-15 of this brief for expanded uses of state and local Title II funds to leverage these opportunities.</p>	<p>Use Title II funds to engage multiple levers at once – ensuring higher standards for preparation providers, improving the diversity and the quality of the teaching force through career ladders, promoting strategic compensation and innovative staffing models, and ensuring all teachers and principals have access to high-quality, targeted coaching, mentoring, and professional development.</p> <p>Incentivize districts to use funds effectively and align plans for Title II dollars, including the use of funds in alignment and in support of other federal funding streams. For example, a state could give priority in 1003 grants to LEAs that</p>

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			<p>demonstrate the strongest commitment to using 1003 funds by aligning school improvement resources with their Title II funds.</p>
<p>Evidence</p>	<p>How will we leverage the evidence provisions within ESSA?</p>	<p>ESSA lays out certain funding streams that are only available if used to support activities that are evidence-based. The law specifies 4 tiers of evidence. Tiers 1 through 3 are the most rigorous, and require evidence to be based on at least one study that shows an intervention has a <i>statistically significant effect</i> on improving student outcomes. Tier 4 does not require a study, but instead requires a rationale (strong theory) based on high-quality research findings or positive evaluations that an intervention is likely to improve student outcomes. Section 1003 school improvement funds (the 7% set-aside out of Title I) requires funds be used to support school improvement activities that meet at least the top 3 tiers of evidence.</p>	<p>Curate, annotate, and update a list of evidence-based interventions for LEAs to use as they develop their Section 1003 applications and/or their CSI or TSI required school improvement plans, and consider whether adopting at least one strategy from this list should be required. Or, incentivize the use of specific activities by streamlining the application process when using these activities or awarding extra points to them.</p> <p>Build capacity, or re-train and re-allocate existing staff, to provide information, research, and feedback loops on evidence-based interventions being used in the state, in order to build a statewide culture of using data and evidence to learn and improve. Utilize external resources to support this work such as online repositories for evidence-based interventions or research organizations to support this work.</p> <p>In addition, the state should play a role in continuing to build evidence – for example, providing funding or support to schools using lower tiers of evidence to build a research case for their effectiveness.</p>