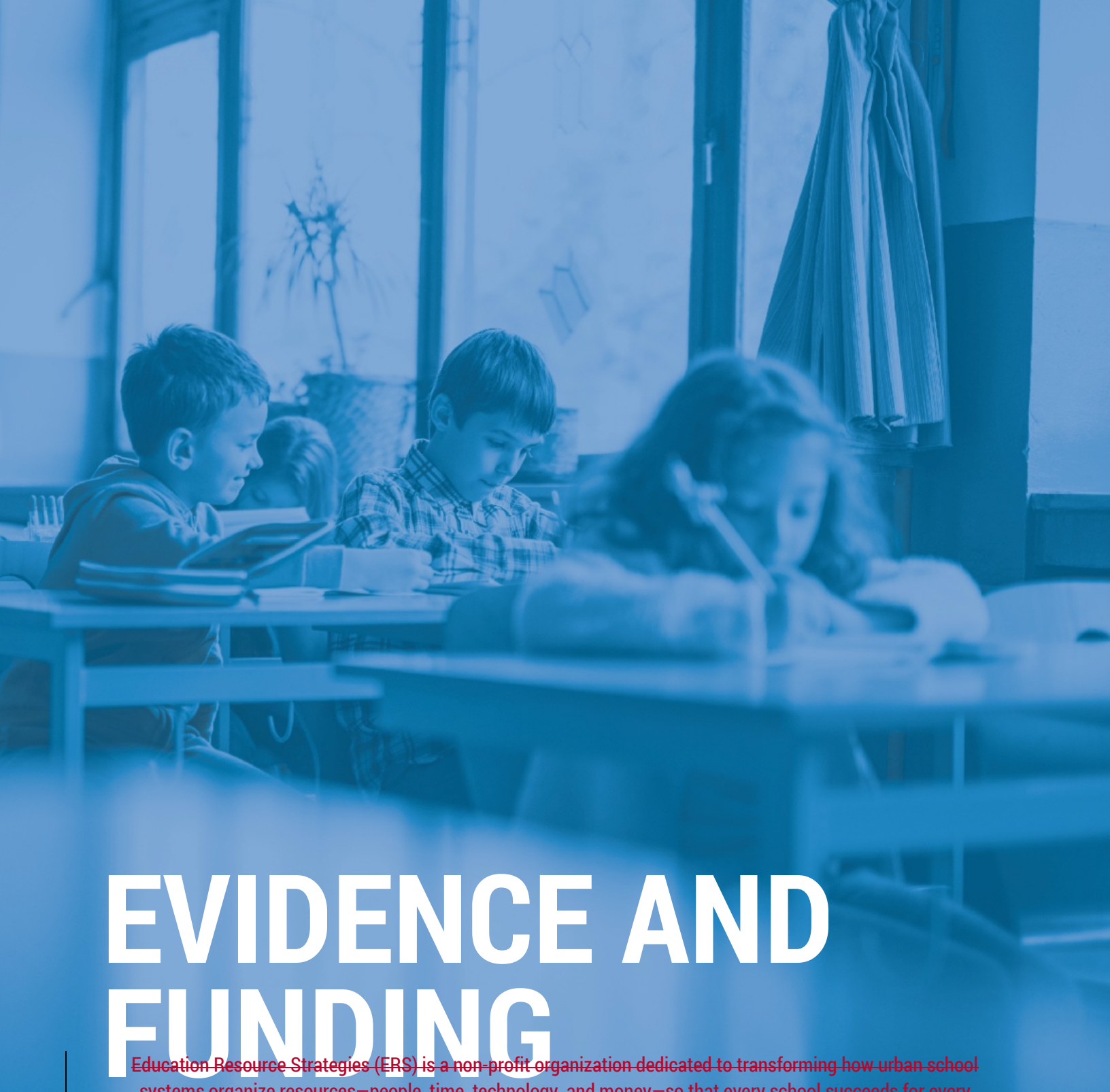


2017 April 4



EVIDENCE AND FUNDING

Connecting the Dots



EVIDENCE AND FUNDING

Education Resource Strategies (ERS) is a non-profit organization dedicated to transforming how urban school systems organize resources—people, time, technology, and money—so that every school succeeds for every student. We partner with the largest urban school systems in the country on strategic resource allocation to help every school succeed for every student. Learn more about our work at erstrategies.org.

Connecting the Dots

April 2017





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

We advocate for the policies and practices working for students, facilitate a robust system of peer-to-peer advising among our members, and sustain a pipeline of the next generation of Chiefs.

To learn more about Chiefs for Change, visit our website at chiefsforchange.org.



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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

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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

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.

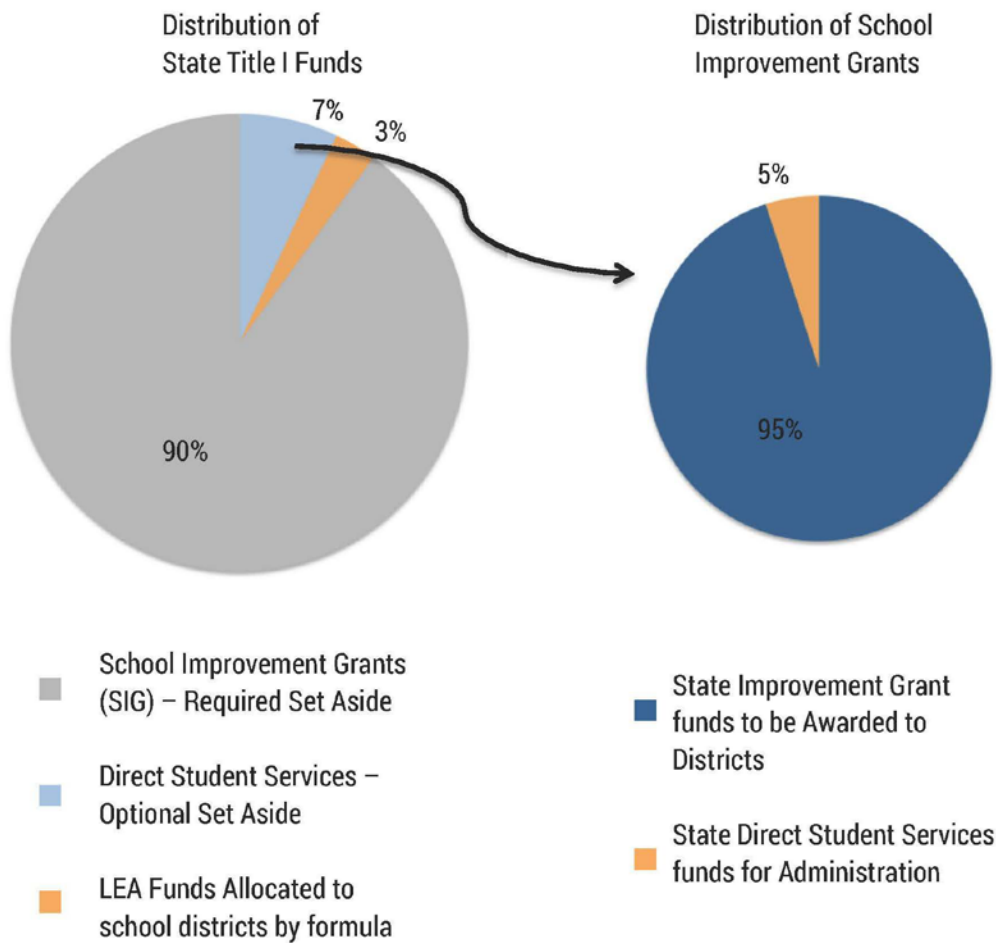
At the same time, states should be thoughtful about the way they incentivize and encourage specific evidence-based interventions at the LEA level. There is a delicate balance between incentivizing programs that have been proven to be successful and that are consistent with state-level priorities, and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

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.

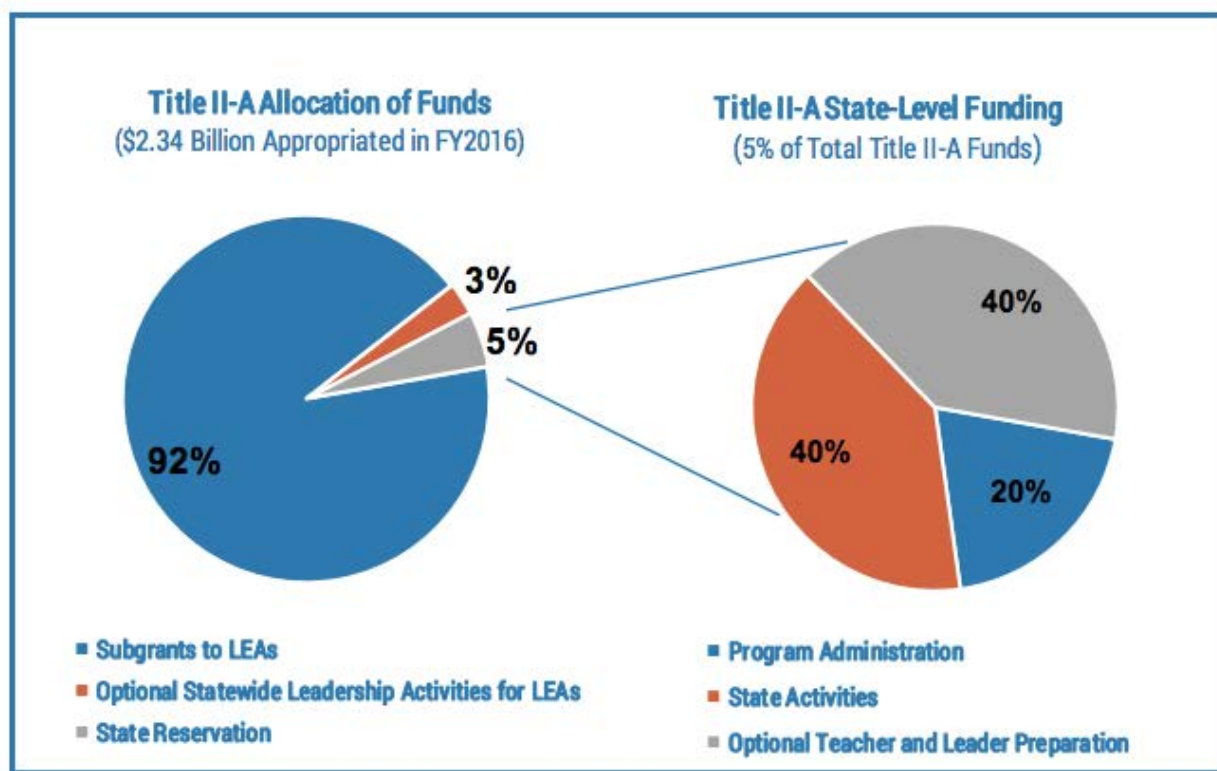
Key action steps for state leaders who wish to take advantage of DSS include:

- 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.

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

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 ESSA Plan](#)

[New Mexico ESSA Plan](#)