

Every Student Succeeds Act Primer:

High School Dropout Prevention and Reengagement of Out-of-School Youth



April 2016

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 includes several provisions that support state and district efforts to (1) prevent students from dropping out of high school and (2) reengage out-of-school youth.

Dropout Prevention and Recovery

Under ESSA, state plans must describe how the state will work with school districts to transition students from middle school to high school and from high school to postsecondary education effectively. Strategies for ensuring these effective transitions may include integrating rigorous academics, career and technical education (CTE), and work-based learning; mentorship or family-engagement programs; dual-enrollment and early college high school programs; career counseling; and coordination with institutions of higher education and employers. District plans may use Title I funds to support experiential and work-based learning opportunities that provide students with in-depth interactions with industry professionals and academic credit.

Federal funds also are available to schools to coordinate efforts to address aspects of school climate that contribute to students leaving school, such as school-based violence and [excessive](#)

[use of exclusionary discipline](#) (e.g., suspensions and expulsions).¹ States can partner with community-based organizations to introduce violence-prevention programs and train staff in disciplinary strategies that reduce the use of exclusionary discipline.²

Although ESSA no longer includes an individual program dedicated exclusively to high school dropout prevention and recovery, it creates the new Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants³ program, which provides federal funding states and districts may use for dropout prevention. The law also specifically targets dropout-recovery efforts for migrant, American Indian, and Alaska Native children and youth.⁴ State plans must describe how states will meet the needs of migratory children who have dropped out of school and employ dropout prevention strategies for American Indian and Alaska Native children and youth.

Intervention and Support for Low-Graduation-Rate High Schools

Under ESSA, states must identify high schools in which one-third or more of students do not graduate for comprehensive intervention and support (e.g., [early college](#) high schools and [career academies](#) and approaches such as [Linked Learning](#)). States can use funding under the federal Safe and Healthy Schools Grant to establish or improve high school dropout prevention, recovery, and reentry programs. For example, approaches could include [reengagement centers](#) and strategies



focused on [reducing racial gaps](#) in high school graduation rates. Districts also can partner with their local workforce development boards to implement education and employment interventions focused on dropout recovery for out-of-school youth through the 2014 [Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act \(WIOA\)](#).

Charter School Support

Under ESSA's Grants to Support High-Quality Charter Schools program, states receive federal funding for charter schools. In awarding these grants to schools, states must prioritize charter schools that serve "at-risk" students through activities such as dropout prevention, dropout recovery, or comprehensive career counseling services. States also must prioritize proposals for high-quality charter schools that focus on dropout recovery and academic reentry.

Students with Disabilities

For young people with disabilities, [who are more than twice as likely to drop out of high school as peers without disabilities](#), school districts may leverage their efforts under ESSA with related efforts under [WIOA](#) to support students' successful transitions to postsecondary education and the workforce. For instance, school districts may partner with authorized recipients of funds under the [Rehabilitation Act within WIOA](#), and these authorized recipients must devote 15 percent of their federal vocational rehabilitation resources to pre-employment transition services for in-school youth with disabilities.



Prevention and Intervention Programs for Neglected, Delinquent, or At-Risk Children and Youth (Title I, Part D)

ESSA maintains Title I, Part D, of the No Child Left Behind Act, the previous authorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. This section of ESSA includes the following provisions to address the needs of "neglected, delinquent, or at-risk children and youth":

- **Reenrollment of court-involved youth:** State plans must provide assurances that the state educational agency (SEA) has established procedures to ensure students placed in the juvenile justice system reenroll in secondary school or in a reentry program that best meets the needs of the individual student. This may include the transfer of credits that such students earn during placement in the juvenile justice system and opportunities for such students to participate in credit-bearing course work while in secondary school, postsecondary education, or CTE programming.
- **Delivery of evidence-based interventions:** States receiving funds under Title I, Part D, must describe how the SEA will, to the extent feasible, note when a youth comes into contact with both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Funds may be used to provide services and evidence-based interventions designed to keep such youth in school. Such evidence-based interventions could include coordination with probation officers to eliminate unnecessary absences from school or family therapy models such as [Family Integrated Transitions](#).
- **Support for Native students:** States may use federal funding to support projects that facilitate the transition of children and youth between state-operated juvenile justice institutions, or institutions in the state operated by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior, and schools served by local educational agencies (LEAs) or schools operated or funded by the Bureau of Indian Education.

Youth in Foster Care

States must provide assurances that each LEA will collaborate with the local child welfare agency to designate a point of contact and develop and implement clear written procedures governing the arrangement and funding of transportation to allow youth in foster care to remain enrolled in their "school of origin." Guidance from the U.S. Department of Education defines "school of origin" as "the school that the child or youth attended when permanently housed or the school in which the child or youth was last enrolled."

Homeless Students

ESSA requires school districts to allow homeless students to remain enrolled in their "school of origin" when it is in a student's best interests and to provide transportation for such students. In addition, school districts must have a "liaison" to identify homeless students, support their educational needs, and connect them to comprehensive services.⁵ Each school district must set aside Title I funds to support homeless students and may receive additional federal funding for these purposes.⁶

For additional fact sheets and videos about ESSA, visit www.all4ed.org/essa/.



Endnotes

- ¹ See ESSA, Title I, Improving Basic Education Programs Operated by State and Local Education Agencies, Schoolwide Program Plans.
- ² See ESSA, Title II, Preparing, Training, and Recruiting High-Quality Teachers, Principals, or Other School Leaders, and Title IV, 21st Century Schools.
- ³ The Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants program has three purposes: (1) provide all students with access to a well-rounded education; (2) improve school conditions for student learning; and (3) improve the use of technology to raise academic achievement and digital literacy for all students. If a district receives less than \$30,000 through this program, the district may choose to support only one of these purposes.
- ⁴ See ESSA, Title VI, Indian, Native Hawaiian, and Alaska Native Education.
- ⁵ See ESSA, Title X, Education for the Homeless.
- ⁶ See ESSA, Sec. 1113(c)(3).

The **Alliance for Excellent Education** is a Washington, DC–based national policy and advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring that all students, particularly those traditionally underserved, graduate from high school ready for success in college, work, and citizenship. www.all4ed.org

The **Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)** advocates for public policies and programs at the federal, state, and local levels that reduce poverty, improve the lives of poor people, and create ladders to economic security for all. www.clasp.org

The **National Youth Employment Coalition (NYEC)** is a national membership network that improves the effectiveness of organizations that seek to help youth become productive citizens. Toward this end, NYEC sets and promotes quality standards; tracks, crafts, and influences policy; provides and supports professional development; and builds the capacity of organizations and programs. www.nyec.org

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