

A Vision for New Hampshire Education

Input from Communities on the *Every Student Succeeds Act*

On December 10, 2015 President Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), a long-awaited overhaul of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and No Child Left Behind. ESSA is designed to encourage states and schools to innovate, while also maintaining an emphasis on state and local systems of improvement and strengthening a more balanced assessment and accountability system.

ESSA offers a unique opportunity for New Hampshire to collaborate on a shared vision for the future of education in our public schools. The Department of Education sought to engage with local communities in October and November of 2016 for help in developing the key ideas that will ultimately become the core of our state's consolidated ESSA plan. These ideas will help us to determine how we as a state will identify educational success, support schools and teachers, report on academic progress and challenges, and hold one another accountable for our shared commitment to students.

ESSA requires states to conduct extensive outreach and engagement efforts, but that is not why we embarked on such an ambitious outreach campaign. The New Hampshire Department of Education (NH DOE) is committed to engaging with our stakeholders during the development of our plan, through its implementation and beyond to ensure that the state's public schools address the needs of every child. To begin this outreach and engagement, we drafted an online survey and organized regional meetings. In the survey and at the public meetings we posed the same four questions:

- What do you expect from NH's education system?
- What school characteristics are most important to you to improve student learning?
- What measures of school quality or student success should be included in a school accountability system?
- In your experience, what are the best ways for the NH DOE to support schools to serve the needs of all students?

Feedback Summary

The following synthesis represents an analysis of the high level feedback and suggestions gathered through the online survey and the regional meetings. Not every suggestion or public comment is represented below; instead, this is an analysis of the several hundred comments received throughout the fall of 2016. To read the full transcript of the summary responses and meeting notes, please follow this link at <https://www.education.nh.gov/essa/index.htm>.

Question 1: What do you expect from New Hampshire's school system?

"I expect students leaving a K12 system to be equipped with general life skills [and to be] respectful, inquisitive, critical thinkers who can think independently, solve problems creatively and trust the skills they have acquired to find the answers/solutions to questions they have."

"Students [should be] able to fully be involved in their learning and get a chance to explore their interests as well as to be exposed to new ideas and subjects. Learning, and therefore teaching, should be taught at each student's current level, with the goal of bringing them up."

"[Our schools should] help produce kind, aware, educated citizens who are creative, curious, courageous and confident, critical thinkers who are passionate about making their world better."

- **Students should graduate equipped with "life skills":** Respondents stressed the need for the New Hampshire schools to prepare students to be **successful in college and careers, and to be independent thinkers** able to live, work and function in the world today. Many called for a focus on **21st century skills** such as creativity, critical thinking, leadership and self-discipline; others stressed that the state's students should be encouraged to become courageous and confident. Many highlighted the need for students to be prepared for **citizenship**, and to learn *how* to think, not just *what* to think.
- **Schools should address the social and emotional needs of their students:** Many called for a focus on the "whole child," stressing the need for all students to get a **social and emotional education** in addition to an academic one. Respondents called for schools that are safe for students, and staffed with school counselors, psychologists and assistants who can teach **kindness and tolerance**. School environments should be welcoming and embrace differences among students.
- **Schools should hold all students to high expectations:** Respondents called for **strong academics for all students**, noting that the best schools provide pathways that prepare students for either college or career. Many called for **universal high expectations** for all students and "best in class" education in a range of topics including literacy, math, science, geography, history, STEM, arts education and music. Others noted the importance of **addressing the needs of students with special needs**, including students who are hearing impaired or have mental health issues; and providing their parents with support to advocate for and support their children.
- **All educators should receive the supports and tools they need to be successful:** Respondents called for the state to focus on staffing classrooms with **caring, dedicated, highly qualified teachers** who have access to the professional development they need to continually improve. Many called for teachers who can **nurture student strengths** and **teach to different learning styles**. Many also stressed the importance of ensuring that teachers are "paid what they're worth."
- **Schools need to be provided with the resources and supports necessary to improve.** Respondents called for the state to develop a **fair and accurate way to rate the schools** that will be paired with support for districts to improve. Many stressed that key to this will be **adequate funding, support for educators, and resources**.

Question 2: What school characteristics are most important to you to improve student learning?

"[I want] quality over quantity. A nurturing environment that fosters learning of skills as well as experimenting, trying new ideas, being allowed to fail, and think independently."

"[Schools should] respond to the needs of the learning, rather than trying to fit the learner into the mold of the administration."

"Everyone should feel safe, valuable and have a voice."

"[I want] a supportive, safe and nurturing environment where bullying is not tolerated and student learning differences are celebrated and allowed to flourish."

"Having excellent and enthusiastic teachers outweighs almost every other factor. It's difficult to achieve that when the expectations put upon educators are so high, while salaries are so low."

- **Community partnerships can build capacity:** Respondents stressed the value in developing partnerships with other schools and districts to **broaden student access to innovative programs**; partnerships with community businesses and organizations can also help by sharing resources, support and serving as mentors.
- **School culture and climate matters:** Respondents overwhelmingly called for schools that are **safe, clean, respectful, nurturing, friendly, and free from bias, with zero tolerance for any type of bullying**. Many called for schools that create an atmosphere of creativity, fun and exploration that offer experiential learning opportunities.
- **All schools should maintain a culture of high expectations:** Many called for schools that maintain **high expectations for every child, regardless of achievement level or disability**. Respondents called for schools to look for and to **embrace creative alternatives** to traditional teaching methods to reach students with different styles of learning, including performance-based, inquiry-based and tiered instruction, as well as hands-on, student-centered, project-based learning. Schools should be designed to teach students to love learning and to develop their passions. Many stressed the value in reinforcing the arts, and urged the state to weave environmental education throughout the curriculum.
- **Teaching quality is key to student achievement:** Respondents noted that **excellent teachers** are a critical factor in improving student achievement. They called for teachers who are **highly proficient, well compensated, and ethnically diverse**. Many noted that teachers need to have access to ongoing training and support, be **regularly engaged and respected** by their administrators, and **empowered to innovate**.

Question 3: What measures of school quality or student success should be included in a school accountability system?

"I think that making sure each student is learning and growing at his/her best possible pace should be the goal for all."

"We should focus on higher level learning. Too many students today have to focus on too many tests and so never get some of the basic skills needed to be successful at college-level courses. There are exceptionally few standardized tests in the workforce - but the ability to think critically and understand how subjects and people relate to each other is of paramount importance."

"[We should measure] creative, applied learning, not regurgitation of facts."

- **Standardized test data alone is not sufficient:** Respondents stressed the need to have a variation of **real-time data** available to influence decision making and instruction; some also called for faster turnaround of Smarter Balanced results. Other suggestions included using **student and teacher survey** results, and to more deeply rely on **longitudinal data** to understand how teaching has influenced student success.
- **Student social and emotional growth should be measured:** Many urged the state to find ways to **measure culture and climate** issues including: student interest in learning, school **safety**, impact of **student voice**, quality of **support services** and access to and **participation in the arts**. Still others called for the state to find a way to assess ingenuity, innovation, creativity, perfectionism and other "skills that will ultimately come in handy as they grow up."
- **Efforts to innovate should also be measured:** Respondents called for the state to measure the degree to which schools offer **collaborative projects** that require students to demonstrate **creativity, leadership and other 21st century skills**. Others called for the state to measure how schools use the **arts** as a way for students to learn in all subjects; others urged the state to measure student access to an **effective library program** staffed by a certified school librarian. Many focused their response on the opportunity for the state to allow districts to differentiate their accountability standards based on their unique district conditions, resources and priorities.
- **Track student success after high school:** Respondents suggested a range of ways for the state to measure student performance as a means to measure school or district quality, including evidence of student growth, closing of achievement gaps, chronic absenteeism, graduation rate and dropout rate. Others suggested **tracking graduates to measure their employment and college success rates** one to two years after high school, as well as five or 10 years later.
- **Teacher retention and performance should also be measured:** Many suggested measuring quality in part by measuring the number of educators **teaching outside of their license** or specialty; others suggested looking at **teacher retention**, teacher surveys and **performance reviews and goals**.

Question 4: In your experience, what are the best ways for the NH DOE to support schools to serve the needs of all students?

“Continue to help schools with competency-based education and assessments and follow students even after they leave public education.”

“I know this is larger than the DOE, but I feel the biggest thing that could be done is to have a sustainable, consistent education funding formula that more closely reflects the actual cost of education.”

“The state should help focus on equity of opportunity. Educational quality differs too much by zip code.”

- **Current funding levels are insufficient:** Respondents noted that there is a need for **equitable funding** across the state to local districts, especially when it came to the funding and implementation of unfunded mandates. Many noted a need for **funding to support initiatives and new forms of education, including arts education, CTE & vocational education, and science and STEM**. Finally, a few respondents noted a need for the state to better use federal funding to support teachers and professional development.
- **Create a balance between state priorities and local control:** We received a variety of responses that debated the role of the NH DOE in determining decision-making as it relates to NH schools. Many respondents saw **control at the local level a top priority, especially as it relates to curriculum and assessment decisions**. Conversely, many saw the need for the state to provide adequate funding and **guidance on standards and assessments, and to allow for local control of implementation**.
- **Support teachers and administrators and cultivate collaborative learning opportunities:** overwhelmingly, respondents agreed that **the NH DOE has a role in supporting teachers**, through the offering of **high quality professional development**, engaging teachers in **collaborative learning**, and **supporting local initiatives** by connecting locals across the state. Others noted a need for the NH DOE to play a role in **attracting and retaining new high quality teachers for the state**.
- **Ensure equity to public education for all students across the state:** Respondents noted a need for the state to play a role in **ensuring access to high quality education for all students**, particularly **special education students and students in low-income schools**. Additionally, there were a few concerns about the proportion of funding going to special education versus the entire school. Others believe that the NH DOE has a role in **equipping districts with the resources needed for 21st century learning, including technology and curriculum materials, school counselors, and school librarians**.

Our Engagement Process

The NH DOE hosted six (6) regional meetings with local communities across the state to engage in face-to-face discussions with educators, parents, students, and business and community members. In addition to the regional meetings, the NH DOE shared an online survey with every SAU, several statewide organizations that represent teachers, principals, superintendents and parents, and a variety of other online forums. This summary document includes the high level takeaways from the input we received, and will be used to craft several long-term academic goals that will form the backbone of the state's ESSA plan. We intend to engage further with our parents, students, and business and community members as we move forward with the development of our Consolidated Plan, so please stay in touch.

Engagement Efforts

Regional meetings

Approx. 150 citizens attended in:

- Moultonborough
- Keene
- Gorham
- Exeter
- Concord
- Manchester

Online survey

Posted for 85 days, 977 people responded

Breakdown of 977 Survey Respondents

