

From NCLB to ESEA and now ESSA: The new Federal Education Law

by Carol Vandenberg, Executive Director



As you are aware, President Obama [signed into law](#) the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

Congress overwhelmingly passed the legislation, the House (359-64) and Senate (85-12), and was bipartisan. This is the legislation to replace the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), the previous version of the ESEA, which was passed in 2001, and has been up for reauthorization since 2007. Overall, we support legislation that reduces the federal role in public education and restores local control. The new "Every Student Succeeds Act" is a move in that direction. It is an imperfect piece of legislation, and will not please everyone.

The ESSA includes many of the key reforms and offered relief from many onerous provisions of NCLB. It helps ensure educational opportunity for all students by:

- holding all students to high academic standards that prepare them for success in college and careers;
- ensuring accountability by stipulating that when students fall behind, states redirect resources into what works to help them and their schools improve, with a particular focus on the very lowest-performing schools, high schools with high dropout rates, and schools with achievement gaps;
- empowering state and local decision-makers to develop their own strong systems for school improvement based upon evidence;
- reducing the burden of testing on students and teachers, making sure that tests do not crowd out teaching and learning, without sacrificing clear, annual information parents and educators need to know their children are learning;
- providing more children access to high-quality preschool; and
- establishing new resources for proven

strategies that will spur reform and drive opportunity and better outcomes for America's students.

There is much to be figured out as the nation moves to implement the new law, but the White House and the Federal Department of Education have released a number of materials to help educate the public about the ESSA, including:

- a [White House fact sheet](#) on ESSA;
- a [White House report](#) on progress made in elementary and secondary education and how ESSA will cement that progress;
- Secretary Duncan's blog post, "[Finally a Fix to No Child Left Behind](#);"
- Director of the White House Domestic Policy Council, Cecilia Munoz's blog post, "What You Need to Know About the Fix to No Child Left Behind" (with a side-by-side comparison of NCLB, ESEA flexibility, and ESSA);
- [excerpts](#) from the Secretary's prepared remarks at the Learning Forward conference; and
- a Dear Colleague letter from both Secretary Duncan and incoming Acting Secretary King on ESSA.

All of these materials are posted on the PENC website at www.pencweb.org and on the ESEA website at www.ed.gov/ESEA. Additional materials will be posted as they become available. In the meantime, questions may be directed to ESSA.questions@ed.gov. We expect the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction to conduct an analysis at some point and share what the impact may be on our state. You can read the entire bill for yourself on the PENC website.

I hope your 2016 is off to a good start, and I look forward to serving you! Always contact me if we need to discuss anything education related.