



July 7, 2017

President Michael Kirst and Board Members  
California State Board of Education  
1430 N Street, Room #5111  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Agenda Item #3: ESSA State Plan

Dear President Kirst and Board Members:

I write regarding agenda item #3, the draft of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) California state plan. As staff noted in item #1, this is the 17<sup>th</sup> State Board of Education meeting at which the development and implementation of California's new accountability system has been discussed. And for each of those, EdVoice, and many other concerned organizations, have expressed the importance of ensuring that it advance the goal of equity embodied in the vision Governor Brown set for the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF). But the draft ESSA state plan, which should reflect the progress of those two and a half years of work, fails to show that California actually intends to do anything itself to ensure extra federal resources are programmed to reduce historic inequities in access to basic public education and effective teachers.

With the impending deadlines on the state plan and the critical signals and infrastructure set by the ESSA state plan, it is vital that the Board give clear guidance to the Board and Department staff about how California's new accountability system will address and reduce historic inequities. Please refer to formal comments submitted by EdVoice and the LCFF Equity Coalition in response to the draft plan for detailed feedback on the plan. Here are a few key areas of the draft plan and staff's proposed revisions on which we urge the State Board to give clear direction.

#### **Title I Part A: Accountability**

The State Board must ensure that interim (or annual) improvement targets in the Dashboard are designed in such a way to communicate and incentivize the expectation that performance gaps will close between student groups.

California must develop a system of meaningful differentiation and identifying LEAs and schools for support and assistance that identifies those with the greatest need of improvement and assistance, and are most likely to benefit from that assistance. If LCFF is truly intended to address shameful inequities in opportunity and outcomes for low-income students, English learners, foster youth, and racial and ethnic subgroups, then the methodology for identifying LEAs and schools for support should enable the state to do that. With the data provided by CDE staff at this 17<sup>th</sup> discussion of the accountability system, we can finally see that the recommended approach for implementing LCFF's statutory framework for identifying districts in need of assistance results in under-identifying districts with persistent achievement gaps among LCFF-targeted and racial/ethnic and linguistic student groups: two-thirds of 181 LEAs identified for assistance under

LCFF are identified solely based on low performance by one subgroup, students with disabilities. So, according to this analysis, most LEAs are doing just fine with their English learners, socioeconomically disadvantaged students, and students of color. This new data finally illustrates clearly how the current methodology for determining what constitutes a red classification on the dashboard just obfuscates the chronic failure of large groups of students that LCFF was supposedly intended to address.

As for the criteria for identifying the lowest performing 5 percent of Title I schools, we recommend that the Board adopt criteria that complements LCFF and helps address the under-identification of districts with persistent achievement gaps among LCFF-targeted and racial/ethnic and linguistic student groups. Of those options proposed by staff, Option 3 is the only one that actually identifies the lowest 5 percent of schools. It also addresses the very real concern raised by Board Member Rucker of inequity within a district that would go unnoticed and unaddressed with the recommended methodology.

Our integrated accountability system needs to truthfully identify where support is needed, if we are to address years of injustice and change the trajectory of underserved students' lives. We urge the Board to direct further serious review of the methodology to make these determinations, and we offer our support and assistance in rethinking a new approach.

#### **Title I, Part A: Access to Educators**

California must ensure that every student, including low-income students, English learners, and minority students—are served by effective teachers and there is a system to monitor and support LEAs in improving access. The proposed revision to the ESSA state plan still does not define ineffective (or effective) teaching, as required by the ESSA statute. Instead, staff proposes reporting various credential information that do not capture an educator's performance in the classroom and are in most cases, already reflected in the data for inexperienced and out-of-field teachers.

To ensure all California students receive a quality and equitable education, it is imperative California build and maintain a strong and diverse teaching force. To achieve such a teaching force it is important to maintain multiple and diverse pathways to the classroom; by including intern credentials as part of the ineffective teaching definition runs counter to achieving this goal. Including intern credentialed teachers is neither required, nor is there evidence that intern credentialed teachers are less effective than other new teachers. Instead, the State Board should look at actual performance of teachers, whether reflected in their statutorily required performance reviews or other proxies, like teacher absenteeism.

Overall, the Board approval of the ESSA state plan as proposed would be a dereliction of the State Board's constitutional and statutory responsibility under ESSA and the California Education Code as the State Educational Agency to act as the policy making body over K-12 education to ensure every child, including every English learner, every student in poverty and every foster youth—which represent 3.9 million students in California—have an equitable opportunity to access a basic public education. EdVoice urges the Board to stand firm on its constitutional responsibility for state oversight of the entire system of K-12 public education and take actions to

explicitly move beyond talking about equity and provide leadership insisting the Department not overlook persistent failure and fill in the serious gaps in the system architecture of the state plan with specific direction for action so the state can actually make progress in addressing persistent academic achievement gaps.

If you any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me directly.

Respectfully,



Sarah Lillis  
COO & Institute Director, EdVoice

cc: Karen Stapf Walters, Executive Director, California State Board of Education  
Judy Cias, Chief Counsel, California State Board of Education  
David Sapp, Deputy Policy Director and Assistant Legal Counsel