

Family Engagement in the New Law

PTA and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)



PTAs and parents across the country have worked diligently to ensure that provisions fostering family engagement were included in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015; the new law signed by President Barack Obama on Dec. 10, 2015 to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Over the last 15 years, the PTA has worked to improve and build capacity for evidenced-based family engagement policies in education, which are outlined below.

Parent and Family Engagement in ESSA

ESSA specifically calls for parents to be meaningfully involved and consulted in the development of state and school district education plans. These education plans provide the framework for how a state and school district will deliver education services to public elementary and secondary school students. Additionally, the law requires that parents must be involved in the creation of “state report cards” that provide information on how all schools in the state are performing—such as graduation rates, attendance and student achievement levels. The report cards must be written in a parent-friendly manner so that families can understand the information provided and take action to support their child’s education.



Schools would need to increase spending by more than \$1,000 per pupil to gain the same results as effective family engagement.

The law also requires that Title I school districts—school districts with a high percentage of students and families that are below the poverty line—include a written parent and family engagement policy in their education plan that welcomes all families and seeks to strengthen the partnership between families, the school and the community to improve student outcomes. As part of the written policy, each school must have an annual meeting with families to explain what students will learn, the assessments used to measure student progress, the state’s academic standards and the proficiency levels students are expected to meet for their grade level.

ESSA also supports family engagement by requiring school districts to use at least 1% of their Title I funds for parent and family engagement activities. The funds can be used to support professional development for educators on family engagement, home visiting programs and other activities to support family engagement that are consistent with a school district’s parent and family engagement policy.

Statewide Family Engagement Centers Program

The Statewide Family Engagement Centers (SFECs) grant program is included in ESSA to help states and school districts better support schools and educators to engage with families—and to help families to better engage with their child’s school and teachers. SFECs will provide states and school districts with the capacity to support effective implementation and enhancement of family engagement policies and initiatives in schools and among parents and families. SFECs will seek to work with state and local entities, including school districts, to ensure family engagement strategies are systemically embedded in policy and practice that affect education, children and families. Furthermore, SFECs can provide programming directly to families so they can better support learning at home.

Statewide Family Engagement Centers have three core functions:

- Work with state and local level agencies to support family engagement in education.
- Provide professional development to school districts and educators on evidence-based and effective family engagement strategies and practices.
- Provide direct services to families on how to effectively work with their child’s school and teachers to improve their child’s academic outcomes and overall well-being.

To support family engagement at the state and district levels, SFECs must be funded by Congress each year. A key priority for PTA is securing federal investment in the SFEC grant program to make sure states and districts have the resources to increase family engagement in education that support student success. National PTA is calling on Congress to adequately fund the SFEC grant program for fiscal year 2017.

If funded, applications for these competitive grants can be submitted to the U.S. Department of Education by statewide organizations, such as non-profits or groups of statewide organizations that have demonstrated experience in engaging families in their child’s education and working with state-level agencies, communities, organizations and schools on family engagement policies and practices.



Teachers are more likely to remain in schools where families are involved and are able to develop trusting relationships with families.

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What can you do to support family engagement at the local, state and federal levels?

At the Local Level

- Join and volunteer with your local PTA to increase family engagement opportunities at your school.
- Volunteer to serve on your child's school improvement plan team.
- Visit the school district website to see how you can become involved in the district's parental involvement and family engagement initiatives.
- Reach out to school district leaders and engage with local education stakeholder groups to inform implementation of ESSA.
- Nominate yourself to serve on the committee that drafts the school district education plan required under ESSA.

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Students attending schools that embed family engagement as one of five essential components for improvement have seen greater results in math and reading.

At the State Level

- Volunteer with your state PTA.
- Reach out to state education leaders and engage with state-level education groups to inform implementation of ESSA.
- Check your state's Department of Education website to see how you can be involved in the process for drafting the new state plan required under ESSA.
- Nominate yourself to serve on the committee that drafts the state's education plan and seek to include family engagement as an indicator of school success in the plan.
- Encourage your state to adopt the **National PTA Standards for Family-School Partnerships** and to prioritize family engagement in its state policy and guidance on school improvement.

At the Federal Level

- Join the **National PTA Takes Action Network** and advocate on behalf of all children and families. Learn important advocacy skills and have access to resources that will help you become an even stronger advocate.
- **Call on your Members of Congress** to support family engagement by providing the necessary resources to support state and local activities.



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