

EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT (ESSA): Educator Certification Work Group Meeting #1 – June 14, 2016

I. Anticipated Timeline of ESSA Stakeholder Engagement in Pennsylvania¹



2. Scope of Educator Certification Work Group

ESSA eliminates the highly qualified teacher (HQT) requirements of No Child Left Behind, requiring that states instead establish a definition of “effective” educators, and ensure that teachers and paraprofessionals serving in schools receiving federal funds meet state certification and licensure requirements. The new federal law also provides opportunities for states to identify strategies for recruitment and retention of talented educators. (For a more detailed breakdown of ESSA’s impact on educator certification and preparation, please see the [ESSA vs. No Child Left Behind crosswalk document](#).)

Work group members were also encouraged to be mindful of (but not necessarily bound by) relevant state policy to ensure as coherent an approach as possible. (A [crosswalk](#) of ESSA requirements and Pennsylvania laws and regulations was provided to work group members ahead of the June 14 meeting and is available on the Department’s ESSA webpage.)

With this context in mind, members of the Educator Certification are charged with exploring the following questions and considerations to develop framework recommendations for state educator evaluation policy with respect to ESSA:

- What attributes should we expect of educators exiting preparation programs? What skills should future educators have coming out of in-field/practical experiences?
- What are the qualities of an “effective” educator?
- How can Pennsylvania ensure every student has access to an effective educator?
- What barriers exist in placing effective teachers in the classroom?
- Does the change in federal law under ESSA foster any opportunities to address teacher shortages? How can Pennsylvania ensure we are preparing sufficient numbers of effective educators?

The Educator Certification work group discussion was facilitated by David Hendrie of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). Staff from the PA Department of Education (PDE) were also available to the work group to provide support and assistance, as needed. During the second half of the day, the Educator Evaluation and Educator Certification work groups came together to discuss

¹ Discussion notes from the April 28 breakout sessions on educator evaluation are available on PDE’s [website](#).

overlapping themes – in particular, how Pennsylvania might define “effective” educators in a post-HQT world, and how the commonwealth can ensure equitable access to effective educators for all students.

3. Emerging Themes – Educator Certification

Members of the Educator Certification work group identified several key themes during their discussions on June 14:

1. Developing greater understanding and awareness around existing pathways to teaching and school leadership in Pennsylvania, including traditional and alternative preparation programs.
2. Identifying pros and cons for alternative and innovative programs permitted under ESSA.
3. Emphasizing the importance of in-field, practical experiences as part of preparation.
4. Exploring strategies to address diversity, recruitment, support, and retention in the context of ESSA implementation.
5. Crafting a new recommended definition of “effective” educators for consideration in Pennsylvania’s ESSA State Plan, including strategies to monitor and promote equitable access to effective educators for all students.

There was, predictably, significant diversity of opinion on other fronts. For example, one smaller breakout group discussed the mechanics of moving to an observation-based evaluation framework and how various domain results would inform the final evaluation decision; however, the full work group did not come to consensus on this question. This discussion also included contemplations of how teachers would have opportunities to improve, including appropriate supports. A more detailed breakdown of the day’s discussion areas is below.

4. Discussion Points – Educator Certification

Emerging Theme #1: Developing greater understanding and awareness around existing pathways to teaching and school leadership in Pennsylvania, including traditional and alternative preparation programs.

- Should maintain quality of educator preparation programs while increasing accessibility and flexibility.
- Traditional programs are still out of reach for many students; funding sources are needed to improve accessibility.
- Length of preparation programs is also cost prohibitive; need incentive programs.
- Change in the entrance requirements/scores for educator prep program exams to improve access.
- Grade bands make it difficult to staff buildings.
- Need for solid core as part of teacher preparation programs, including a core knowledge of child development, trauma-informed approaches, etc.

Emerging Theme #2: Identifying pros and cons for alternative and innovative programs permitted under ESSA.

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- Ensuring a balance between rigor and standards of traditional educator preparation programs with the flexibility and accessibility of alternative pathways; alternative programs do not always maintain quality and often have low retention.
- Alternative and innovative preparation programs can improve educator diversity, which would have a significant positive impact on students.
- Gear Up or other college access/pathway programs as a potential way to expand pipeline for teacher preparation programs.

Emerging Theme #3: Emphasizing the importance of in-field, practical experiences as part of preparation.

- Clinical experiences are too short and not rigorous enough to adequately prepare new teachers; should increase time and rigor of clinical experiences to ensure educators have more practical experience and are exposed to real-life situations.
- Work group discussed possibility of beginning observing/student teaching during the first year of college; students could teach one class a week for a semester.
- State recognition of mentoring and teacher coaching by establishing endorsement to make it clear that teaching is not a “day one ready” profession (need ongoing support).
- Paradoxical policies of teacher preparation vs. testing into a certification (problem with teachers being certified in a grade range, but can then take a test to teach a different level, allowing them to teach that grade)
 - Example: Current teachers can complete a PreK-4 certificate and test grades 5-6, thus qualifying them to teach 5-6 despite not having completed a program.

Emerging Theme #4: Exploring strategies to address diversity, recruitment, support, and retention within the context of ESSA implementation.

- Reduce/remove barriers to teaching, particularly for students of color, to ensure diverse, talented, and supported educator workforce in Pennsylvania.
- Consider enhanced recruiting efforts and incentives (loan forgiveness program, for example).
- Strengthen communication and partnerships between institutions of higher education (IHEs) and local education agencies (LEAs).

Emerging Theme #5: Crafting a new recommended definition of “effective” educators for consideration in Pennsylvania’s ESSA State Plan, including strategies to monitor and promote equitable access to excellent educators for all students.

- In the afternoon, Educator Evaluation work group members collaborated with individuals in the Educator Certification work group to explore how Pennsylvania might define “Effective/Ineffective” (ESSA) versus “Qualified” (No Child Left Behind).
- Members from both work groups explored the following questions:
 - If we aren’t using the easy-to-measure criteria (i.e., certification), what will our measures be?
 - What is the threshold for experience that would circumvent/bypass traditional certification?
 - Effectiveness is a measure of output, but measures are often about input (preparation). What are evidence-based predictors of educator effectiveness?
- Overall, work group members identified the following characteristics that might define effective vs. ineffective teachers:
 - **Effective teachers** are properly credentialed and demonstrate subject matter and instructional competence for the core content area(s) they teach. These teachers engage students in learning, and demonstrate effective practice, including continuous

growth and improvement. They also have annual satisfactory evaluations (which consider student growth data).

- **Ineffective teachers** are not properly credentialed (have not completed an approved teacher certification program), and are incompetent in subject matter and instructional practice for the core content area(s) they teach. These teachers fail to demonstrate proficiency in one or more of the four Danielson Framework domains (or an approved alternate measure). An ineffective teacher is one who has failed to improve after they are given an improvement plan and appropriate supports.
- When exploring definitions of “ineffective/effective” versus “qualified” teachers, work group members discussed maintaining some basic requirements associated with HQT status remain (such as bachelor’s degree requirement), but that the system shift from input-based to output-based.
- Work group members also discussed the following as possibilities for a system of educator preparation and evaluation under ESSA:
 - Grace period for new teachers (two years?);
 - Effective teacher status should be tied to the educator evaluation system after they have entered the teaching role (whether certified in that discipline or not);
 - LEAs should determine skill sets required to be considered effective that are demonstrated through evaluation;
- Establish similar system to career and technical education teaching staff.