

## A Critical Opportunity for Teachers to Inform the *Every Student Succeeds Act*: Policy Recommendations for State and Local Leaders November 2016

### Background

The Rodel Teacher Council, an initiative of the Rodel Foundation of Delaware, was founded in 2013 to elevate the voices of teachers, represent the diversity of the teaching force in Delaware public schools, provide a venue for teachers to weigh in on important issues affecting their work, and help set the course for education improvement in Delaware. The Council is dedicated to finding solutions, improving their craft, and leveraging their voices for the benefit of their students.

*Critical Opportunities for Teachers to Inform the Every Student Succeeds Act: Policy Recommendations for State and Local Leaders* was authored by six members of the Rodel Teacher Council. These principles are grounded in the policy recommendations of the [Blueprint for Personalized Learning](#).

### What is personalized learning?

Great educators and parents know that students have different learning styles—what works for one student does not necessarily work for the rest of the class. Personalized learning offers a new vision for education—one in which students become the center of the learning environment, and where students and teachers work together toward students' individual learning goals. This allows students to learn at their own pace, while empowering teachers to utilize technology and other innovative tools to support student learning. Personalized learning combines technology with advanced instruction techniques to increase student engagement and achievement.

### RECOMMENDED GUIDING PRINCIPLES

*The recommendations that follow are guiding principles for five elements of ESSA and policy recommendations for state (Department of Education, State Board of Education) and local (district and charter) leaders as they write official plans.*

**Professional Learning:** Great professional learning transforms schools, promotes innovation, and encourages creativity.

- **Opportunity:** Within ESSA, state and local leaders can allocate Title II funds for professional development to support teachers in preparing for student centered





approaches to practice, such as blended learning, competency-based learning, and personalized learning models.

- *Implications for Delaware's **state** ESSA plan:* Delaware should incentivize the use of Title II, Part A funds to support local entities in providing personalized, ongoing, and job embedded support for all educators.
- *Implications for Delaware's **state** ESSA plan:* Take advantage of the Title II, Part A set aside available to create innovative school leadership pipelines to prepare educators and school leaders for the transition to personalized learning.
- *Implications for Delaware's **local** ESSA plans:* Local leaders should work with educators to design and implement personalized, ongoing, and job embedded professional development aligned with the state vision.

**Assessment and Accountability:** Parents, students, educators, and the public need timely, relevant and useful information about student performance—on assessments and other data—to make student-centered decisions.

- Opportunity: Under ESSA, Delaware has the opportunity to adjust its accountability indicators to incorporate metrics aligned to personalized learning models, such as increasing the weight of existing “growth to proficiency” metrics to further incentivize success for all students.
- Opportunity: In addition to student performance on assessments, Delaware can incorporate additional indicators of school success into its accountability system, such as indicators of school climate and safety, student and educator engagement, and community engagement.
- Opportunity: ESSA established a pilot program, the Innovative Assessment and Accountability Demonstration Authority, which will allow up to seven states to design, build, and implement innovative, competency-based assessment systems to drive continuous improvement of learning. Delaware should apply to be a member of this pilot program, and support the development of school models that promote students based upon mastery.

**School Improvement:** School improvement efforts should identify the needs and strengths of individual schools and support schools to seek innovative solutions with transparency and local input.

- Opportunity: Delaware can take advantage of flexibility within ESSA to develop processes to help underperforming schools implement personalized learning



strategies, including identifying research-based approaches and partnering with approved technical assistance providers.

- *Implications for Delaware's **state** ESSA plan:* Under ESSA, states can redesign school/district support/intervention systems. Delaware should take advantage of this flexibility to design a framework/process for school improvement that districts/schools must address in its implementation plan to access federal and state resources, including community engagement/ownership, learning experiences shaped by student voice/choice, emphasis on content knowledge and social emotional competencies, and transparency of standards. School improvement plans must be aligned with specific needs identified, addressing specific goals/objectives.
- *Implications for Delaware's **local** ESSA plans:* As appropriate, local leaders and community partners design and implement school improvement strategies aligned to the needs of individual schools and based on the state framework, to access state and federal school improvement resources. The needs assessment and plan development process for individual schools should address schools' specific strengths and needs.

### Meeting the Individual Needs of All Students

- Innovative Approaches: Student-centered environments encourage students, families, and educators to work together to support student learning.
  - Opportunity: ESSA allows states to use resources in Title I and Title IV to encourage LEAs in advancing personalized learning approaches, especially those focused on mastery-based learning, student agency, and building community partnerships.
    - *Implications for Delaware's **state** ESSA plan:*
      - Title I: Delaware should use the 3% Direct Student Services Reservation to increase access to high quality learning opportunities for at-risk students by establishing a digital registry of credit-bearing personalized learning opportunities aligned to state standards.
      - Title IV: Delaware should leverage a portion of the Title IV state block grant to create an innovation fund to incentivize schools/districts to scale personalized learning strategies, and an additional portion of this fund to provide subgrants



to districts for technology improvements and maintenance aligned to personalized learning tenets.

- *Implications for Delaware's local ESSA plans:* Schools and districts should work with community members and stakeholders to design and implement personalized learning programs in order to access the Title I and Title IV subgrants referenced above.
- High Need Students: All students deserve access to a high-quality educational program that meets their specific needs. This includes special education students, English learners, gifted and talented students, and low-income students.
  - Opportunity: Through ESSA, Delaware has the opportunity to build upon the work of many groups who have advocated on behalf of these students, and can ensure that all student needs are met through the use of student-centered approaches and a meaningful accountability system.
    - *Implications for Delaware's state ESSA plan:* ESSA requires state to measure the progress of English learners (ELs) toward English proficiency. When measuring this progress, Delaware should examine multiple measures, including the number of long-term ELs (five years or more), and overall classification rates.

**Teacher Involvement:** Educators' voices and expertise must inform the development and implementation of ESSA plans.

- Opportunity: Delaware's educators have front-line expertise when it comes to the needs of the students and families they serve. The development of local and state ESSA plans is an opportunity to engage with educators and have their ideas, feedback, and professional knowledge inform the path forward. Here are some ways state and local leaders can engage teachers in these and other issues:
  - How Local Leaders Can Include Teachers
    - Establish planning committees for teachers to participate in school improvement intervention planning and encourage authentic participation
    - Allow teachers to weigh in on Title I through the establishment of a Title I committee
    - Seek teacher input using multiple tools such as feedback through a website, email, or Schoology discussion board etc., as well as traditional forms (surveys and meetings)



- How State Leaders Can Include Teachers
  - Actively seek teacher and local leader input when drafting ESSA, including holding open forums, conducting surveys, and holding feedback sessions
  - Visit schools to gather teacher feedback on ESSA drafts

### Additional Resources

Delaware Department of Education, [ESSA Resources](#)

KnowledgeWorks, [Recommendations for Advancing Personalized Learning Under the Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\)](#)

Rodel Teacher Council, [Blueprint for Personalized Learning in Delaware](#)

Rodel Teacher Council, [Personalized Learning Policy Briefs](#)

Rodel Foundation of Delaware, [ESSA Resources](#)

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