



Comments from the Coalition for Community Schools at the Institute for Educational Leadership for ESSA Title I Regional Meeting

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Submitted by: Mary Kingston Roche, Director of Public Policy, Coalition for Community Schools

The new Every Student Succeeds Act contains key provisions that advance the principle that partnerships among school, family and community are essential for student success. The bill's passage is a pivotal moment for the community schools movement which is built on that principle. It empowers State and district leaders to rethink strategies to support all students and to see their communities as vital resources in that effort. As a Coalition of over 200 national, state and local partners, the Coalition for Community Schools represents many voices. These include education like the School Superintendents Association, National Education Association, and American Federation of Teachers; health like Trust for America's Health and the School-Based Health Alliance; youth development like YMCA and Boys and Girls Clubs; and others like United Way Worldwide. And we represent more than 150 communities pursuing the community school strategy.

For Title I we offer a few specific comments today, and we will be submitting more thorough comments by January 21.

1) We are very pleased that the law requires states to incorporate at least one non-academic indicator into their accountability system. This provision represents a significant recognition of the multiple factors that influence young people's success. We feel that while states should carefully consider which non-academic indicators will be most meaningful to include, the Department should encourage states to develop a comprehensive framework for results that ties the academic and non-academic indicators together. This will ensure that the non-academic indicators are not just an additional data point that states will collect, but that it is a powerful tool to drive how states will support students to succeed. We urge the Department to encourage states to undertake an inclusive outreach strategy to determine the indicators that includes educators, families and community partners. Such a process is most likely to lead to indicators that meet three key criteria: 1) Communications Power: is explanatory for a broad and diverse audience; 2) Proxy Power: is of central importance and will drive actors to work together; 3) Data Power: based on data that is reliable and consistent.

2) We urge the Department to include community partners as stakeholders to be consulted for LEA plans, alongside educators and parents. Under ESSA, states and districts must report a broader set of results beyond academics, including chronic absence, school discipline and



school climate data. Experience tells us that schools must partner with their community to tackle these goals together; United Ways, community-based organizations, higher education institutions, local government and others are already involved in various ways and the Department can affirm the importance of their involvement in its regulations. Community partners should be included in the development of LEA plans and consultation with the group should be continuous, so that relationships can be deepened and impact increased overtime. We would also point out that community is included as a stakeholder for school-wide program plans, Title I Part E for Flexibility for Equitable Per-Pupil Funding, and for Title II state and LEA applications for formula grants, so the inclusion of community partners should be consistent throughout the entire law. The Coalition is prepared to share tools for community engagement strategies that will lead to robust community stakeholder engagement for these purposes.

3) We commend Congress for requiring SEAs and LEAs in their Title I plans to describe how they will improve school conditions for learning. We believe it is essential to meet students' conditions for learning in order to prepare students to become college- and career-ready. Moreover, when people think about conditions for learning they are thinking more comprehensively about what young people need to thrive. The Department should encourage states and districts to articulate what they see as conditions for learning before selecting strategies, as the set of conditions will inform the implementation. The Coalition recommends that states and districts consider six conditions for learning we have articulated for years and in reports like *Making the Difference: Research and Practice in Community Schools*. These conditions for learning are:

- Condition #1: Early childhood development is fostered through high-quality, comprehensive programs that nurture learning and development
- Condition #2: The school has a core instructional program with qualified teachers, a challenging curriculum, and high standards and expectations for students
- Condition #3: Students are motivated and engaged in learning — both in school and in community settings, during and after school.
- Condition #4: The basic physical, mental and emotional health needs of young people and their families are recognized and addressed.
- Condition #5: There is mutual respect and effective collaboration among parents, families and school staff.
- Condition #6: Community engagement, together with school efforts, promote a school climate that is safe, supportive and respectful and that connects students to a broader learning community.

4) The requirements for school-wide program plans align extremely well with the major components of the community school strategy, and we recommend the community school



strategy be referenced as a vehicle to effectively implement schoolwide programs. From the requirement to coordinate and integrate federal, state and local programs; to conduct a comprehensive needs assessment of the entire school; to address the needs of all the children in the school, through counseling, mentoring, etc.-these are all activities that community schools do effectively and strategically, and we urge the Department to encourage districts to tap the assets of their partners and consider the community school strategy as a means to implement school-wide programs at a high level.

5) The Title I requirement for a comprehensive needs assessment for Targeted Support schools and Schoolwide Programs is a great development. There are numerous community partners ready and willing to step up to support the needs assessment and planning process embedded in various elements of ESSA. By asking districts to involve community partners in the needs assessment the Department will set the stage for these partners to be deeply engaged in addressing particular needs. The Coalition will be pleased to offer in our longer comments specific components of a comprehensive needs assessment that we see are effective in community school initiatives across the country, and we urge the Department to share these and other recommended components with LEAs to inform their use.

Conclusion: Like almost any law, ESSA is not a perfect piece of legislation. The Department as well as advocates for young people will have to be diligent in ensuring that the needs of our most vulnerable children, children of color and poor children are met. We will have to work hard to be sure that states fulfill their responsibility to our children now that much greater authority has devolved to that level, and do the same at the community level. The Coalition for Community Schools looks forward to working with the Department and our over 200 partners to ensure that schools and communities together give every child every chance to succeed.