



Minnesota Department of Education
1500 Highway 36 West
Roseville, MN 55113

September 18, 2017

Dear education stakeholders,

Thank you to everyone who sent feedback on our draft state Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) plan during the public comment period. We received hundreds of responses to our survey, suggestions at our public meetings across the state, letters and emails. I want to recognize the important work and dedication of the hundreds of volunteer members of our ESSA committees that provided feedback and input on the issues directly impacting students and families across Minnesota as we developed the draft plan. Your contributions are extremely valuable and many of those ideas are reflected in the plan.

We listened to your feedback, and heard loud and clear the importance of an equitable and excellent education for every student in Minnesota. We heard the tremendous desire for our students to receive an education that is well-rounded, including the arts, physical education, and civics. We heard that pre-K through grade 12 teachers and educators need strong support systems and that administrators need proper tools and backing to ensure our rigorous standards are being met. We heard that libraries and early learning opportunities are important to educators, families and communities. And perhaps loudest of all, we heard that equity must be at the foundation of every decision we make and every service we provide to our students.

Based on this feedback, the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) has made some changes to our state ESSA plan. We submitted our state plan to the U.S. Department of Education on September 18, 2017. Below is a summary of changes we made to some sections of the draft plan first posted on August 1. I hope that this allows everyone to easily keep track of changes and provides some information as to why the change was made.

It's also important to emphasize that the arts are a crucial component to a well-rounded education. We combed through our plan to ensure that the arts and other components of a well-rounded education are not unintentionally dismissed. The arts are not extracurricular or enrichment activities; they are critical to student success and learning, and as so many stakeholders emphasized, are important in ensuring all students are well-prepared for career and college. We need to make sure every Minnesota student has meaningful opportunities to succeed after graduating high school. Stakeholders specifically discussed equitable student participation in a range of career and college readiness options, such as advanced coursework, career and technical education, or post-secondary enrollment options. MDE is committed to reporting some of these data as well as moving toward the longer-term plan to include a measure of career and college readiness in the accountability system.

I also want to highlight some of the topics not clearly required to be addressed in our state plan, but are essential elements of our work to support students and schools. Throughout the public comment period, we

heard from many people the importance of clear data reporting and school recognition as well as incorporating early learning, foster care, and family engagement. I completely agree, and that is why we will be communicating with stakeholders throughout the coming months about how our teams will be working on reporting data in a transparent way and our future process to recognize schools. We will also be releasing a supplemental document on our website that outlines our efforts related to supporting youth in foster care, family engagement, early learning and other areas as part of our ESSA work.

As we traveled the state to talk about ESSA with Minnesotans, we received a lot of questions about how our new accountability system will differ from past systems. Under North Star, our new accountability system laid out in our ESSA plan, we estimate that between 300-400 schools will be identified for support, and approximately 200 of those schools will be high schools. One of the new criteria for identifying schools for support is the graduation rate of every student group, adding support systems to schools with a graduation rate of 67 percent or less for any student group. This shines a bright light on the areas students need more support in order to make sure they graduate from high school well-prepared for their next step, whether it be college, a training program or the workforce.

Schools will be identified for support for the 2018-19 school year. One concern we heard as we shared our draft plan over the past few months focused on the state's capacity to support the increased number of schools identified for improvement. Although we can't address this concern in the state plan, we will continue to pursue additional resources to support and expand this work.

We also received questions about how ESSA will coordinate with our state World's Best Workforce (WBWF) legislation. Aligning aspects of the ESSA plan with WBWF was a priority throughout our plan development process. As we move into implementation, we will continue working to make sure that the federal ESSA system aligns with and connects to our state efforts and requirements clearly and efficiently, so we can build one robust system of support and guidance for our schools and students.

Equity continues to be incredibly important to Minnesotans. Our communities are working harder than ever to make sure every student has the opportunity to access an excellent education. Minnesota's ESSA plan is a new tool to help us move toward that goal, and I am excited to see how we can continue working together to expand and implement policies to reach all students.

The U.S. Department of Education has 120 days to respond to our state plan, at which time we will begin bringing our ESSA plan to life. Although stakeholders have worked hard over the past 21 months to help us craft Minnesota's ESSA plan, we'll need your continued involvement and guidance in the next phases of this important work. I'm confident that by working together, we'll continue to build better opportunities and outcomes for our students. Thank you for all you've done so far, and for your continued efforts on behalf of our students, our schools, our families and our communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brenda Cassellius".

Dr. Brenda Cassellius
Commissioner

List of Changes Made to Draft State ESSA Plan

Title I, Part A: Access to Educators, School Conditions and School Transitions

Change made: The guidance for how local districts identify effective teachers for the purpose of ensuring equitable access to effective, qualified, and experienced teachers has been clarified. To be identified as effective, a teacher must be evaluated using the local teacher development and evaluation system. It has been clarified that Pre-K teachers must be evaluated to be identified as effective.

Reason: Early education teachers and Tier 1 and 2 teachers under the new licensing system are not always part of a local bargaining unit, so they may not be part of the locally negotiated teacher development and evaluation system and would therefore not be evaluated for their effectiveness.

Change made: Included language around how the state will support districts and charter schools to provide effective transitions for students and families to successfully transition between early childhood and K-12 schools.

Reason: Evidence suggests that early education experiences can have a powerful effect on students' school and life outcomes. State and local policymakers have strong incentives for making the transition to kindergarten as smooth and stress-free as possible for children and families.

Title I, Part A: Accountability

Change made: Provided more detail on MDE's desire to align ESSA and WBWF. One of the areas in which we have more work to do is around the school readiness goal in WBWF. The update articulates benefits of the kindergarten entrance and our desire to expand the use of the kindergarten entry profile statewide.

Reason: Use of the kindergarten entry profile could support transitions between early childhood and K-12. Data could inform stakeholders and policy makers about the outcomes of early childhood programs, identify students who need early intervention and provide school districts and charter schools data they need to meet the WBWF goal of having all students ready for school.

Change: Minnesota set a goal of 85 percent of English learners making progress in achieving English language proficiency by the year 2025. A student is considered to be making progress toward proficiency if they reach their individual target, demonstrating they are on a trajectory to become proficient in English.

Reason: Ensuring the success of English learners is critical for Minnesota's future workforce. This rigorous statewide goal is important to set an expectation that every English learner must be provided equitable access to high quality language instruction education programs that ensure they are achieving at high levels.

Change: MDE will continue to examine options and opportunities to use in-school suspension data in a meaningful way within the consistent attendance indicator. MDE is committed to supporting districts with positive behavior interventions.

Reason: Considering in-school suspensions as a part of accountability may be one lever to incentivize sound discipline practices in an effort to ensure students of color and American Indian students are not

disproportionately suspended when compared to their white peers. Stakeholders expressed a desire to pay closer attention to the instructional time students are receiving with the goal of ensuring every student has the opportunity to be engaged and ready to learn in class.

Change: Two additional types of schools that are eligible for support.

- Any Title I school that demonstrates low performance on Stage 1 and Stage 2 indicators but with consistent attendance higher than the threshold used to identify the bottom 5 percent will be identified for targeted support and improvement.
- If a Title I school is in the lowest 25 percent of Title I schools for any Stage 1 indicator and is not otherwise identified for support under ESSA, its district is eligible for support under the WBWF.

Reason: In an effort to focus on increased achievement and closing gaps, any school that is demonstrating a need based on academics and English language proficiency should be given support to improve.

Title I, Part A: School Support and Improvement

Change: Examples of additional interventions for schools that are reidentified for comprehensive support and improvement have been added to the plan.

Reason: Examples were added to increase clarity regarding the scope and level of rigor needed for improving consistently underperforming schools.

Change: Criteria used for schools to exit comprehensive or targeted support and improvement have been updated.

Targeted Support and Improvement

- A non-Title I school that remains identified will continue in the targeted support and improvement status.
- A Title I school that remains identified will move to the comprehensive support and improvement status.
- A school that is not reidentified in the next identification year will still remain in the targeted support and improvement status if either of the following is true:
 - The student group for which the school was identified performs below the performance of the lowest 25 percent of Title I schools in any Stage 1 indicator.
 - The student group for which the school was identified fails to show improvement on all indicators which led to the initial identification.

Comprehensive Support and Improvement

- A school that remains identified will continue in the comprehensive support and improvement status with more rigorous interventions.
- A school that does not remain identified in the next identification year will be moved to targeted support and improvement if either of the following is true:
 - The school remains below the 25th percentile of Title I schools in any Stage 1 indicator.
 - The school fails to show improvement on all indicators which led to its initial identification.

Reason: This change was added to ensure schools are demonstrating continuous and sustained improvement to exit their status. It also ensures that schools not demonstrating sufficient improvement continue to receive deeper levels of support.

Change: It was clarified that all schools identified for targeted support and improvement will assess and address resource inequities as part of the required needs assessment and improvement process.

Reason: ESSA does not require that all schools identified for targeted support and improvement assess and address resource inequities. Requiring this of all identified schools better supports our focus on equity and addressing inequities.

Change: The roles of school readiness data and data on disproportionate rates of suspension and expulsion were clearly articulated as part of comprehensive needs assessment for school improvement planning. The importance of addressing preK-12 programming as part of school improvement was more clearly included.

Reason: Ensuring an excellent and equitable education to every student means guaranteeing equitable access to education and school related opportunities, including early learning. Schools and educators will need to look for potential disparities resulting from discipline policies and create plans to address any disparities.

Title II, Part A: Supporting Effective Instruction

Change made: Updated section addressing how MDE will help to improve the skills of educators, specifically around the work we are doing to provide trainings to early care and early education teachers working with English learners.

Reason: Minnesota's English learner population is the fastest growing student population in Minnesota. Professional development for those teaching English learners is essential to their success.