

Every Student Succeeds Act Stakeholder Engagement

Regional Meetings Report



In our commitment to obtain feedback from diverse communities and stakeholders for the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) hosted a series of regional meetings in Duluth, Bemidji, Marshall, Rochester, St. Cloud and Burnsville. The purpose of these meetings was to give the opportunity for stakeholders to learn about ESSA, share feedback and ask questions. Below are themes that came up throughout these meetings.

Equity

- Defining the cause of gaps in access to high-quality teachers is important. What are we doing to address the gaps?
- Higher education institutes need to be in on the conversation, so that teachers are well prepared and when they leave the institution, they know what tools are available to help them give all students the best education possible.
- Equity is lost when programs aren't accessible to everyone. In early childhood, early learning scholarships and the state's new small voluntary pre-K program only give access to high-quality early childhood programming to some students, and some who need them the most fall through the cracks. All 4-year-olds deserve this.
- Transportation creates an equity barrier, especially in Greater Minnesota, when students can't access programming. A good example is limited access to summer targeted services.

School Improvement

- Family engagement is a critical element of a high-quality school.
- Communities have to decide what they value and what they want to focus on. In terms of an accountability system, ask "what measures do we want to focus on as a community?"
- Professional development is important.
- We need to find a balance between successfully measuring schools and remaining transparent about results, while not shaming schools that are low-performing.
- Sustaining school improvement gains after the school improvement funding is gone is an important part of the whole process.
- Desire to have networks for communication between districts to share what is working well.

*"There seems to be more flexibility in ESSA and flexibility is a new term to our system, and it's a term that can't be bought. What is going to get us results is adults all working together around a shared vision. Putting limited resources towards what is going to get the most bang for the buck. **This is a paradigm shift.**" –Marshall participant*

Student Success

- English Learners need additional support and especially with growing populations in Greater Minnesota, we have to think differently about how we do this. Being bilingual is a huge asset!
- We must build on the strengths of students with disabilities.
- When students need additional help in math and reading, it shouldn't come at the expense of other subjects and activities.
- Culturally relevant curriculum benefits all students.
- Pre-K needs to be included in how we think about providing a high-quality education.

*“There are so many other aspects to a child’s life before they even get to the door. We have to think about all of that. We are trying to get test scores up when **some of these kids are just trying to make it through the day.**” –Bemidji participant*

Testing

- Kids are taking too many tests. How can we make sure tests are being used for the right purposes?
- The Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCAs) are not an effective means for measuring student growth.
- Concerns about meeting the requirement for 95% of students to participate in testing, when parents are allowed to opt their students out of testing.

“Testing has been around forever. But now, tests are causing anxiety for teachers like never before, and the teachers are passing that stress on to students.” –Burnsville participant

Well Rounded Education

- Excited about the opportunity to focus on a variety of subjects, but there is no new funding, which is a major concern. Districts will have to get creative with funding.
- How can we find teachers to support a well-rounded education when we already struggle to find elementary teachers?
- Librarians are a critical piece to a well-rounded education. Literacy and digital literacy are so important to college and career success.
- Physical education and health are components of a well-rounded education that can be weaved into the whole school day.
- The push for testing in English, math and science has pushed other subjects, like social studies, to “the back of the line.” How do we balance a well-rounded education with testing?
- Qualitative and quantitative measures should be considered. For quantitative, there is interest in expanding the Common Course catalog to track what programming students are accessing.
- It needs to be easier for high school teachers to offer college level courses. It is getting harder.