



Issue #2: Stakeholder Engagement and Consultation With School Leaders

ESSA Background

On December 10, 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed into law with strong bipartisan support as the latest reauthorization of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act. ESSA is notable for devolving authority to states, emphasizing the use of evidence-based school interventions and providing states greater flexibility to design broader school accountability systems while maintaining student performance goals.

Importantly, ESSA offers a renewed focus on school leadership and recognizes the impact of leaders on school improvement and effective instruction. The law provides states and districts new opportunities to fund school leadership and explicitly acknowledges leadership as a legitimate target of educational-improvement activities.

Under the law, states were required to submit a plan to the U.S. Department of Education detailing the goals, strategies and funding priorities for their education system. To gain greater insight into the treatment of school leadership in state education systems, the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA), with the support of state-based review teams, conducted a comprehensive review of the 52 ESSA plans (50 states, Washington, DC, and Puerto Rico).

The Importance of Stakeholder Engagement

“Meaningful and ongoing stakeholder engagement helps ensure that stakeholders are able to provide feedback and inform continuous enhancement of State and local strategies to improve student outcomes and meet State-established performance goals.”

– U.S. Department of Education

To promote robust and informed state plans, ESSA encourages, and in some cases, requires consultation with stakeholders. Stakeholders recommended for consultation include, but are not limited to, members of the state legislature, local school board members, school principals, teachers, parents, students in secondary schools, and the general public.

To ensure a diverse population of stakeholders were reached, the U.S. Department of Education advised states to hold several meetings at different times of the day in as many regions of the state as possible. However, many states recognized that some stakeholders still might not be able to have their voices heard through public meetings. Thus, as a supplement to public meetings, some states solicited feedback from stakeholders through online

Stakeholder Engagement: At a Glance

- All states, Washington, DC, and Puerto Rico engaged with educational leaders.
- 44% of plans established an ESSA working group specifically dedicated to discussing topics of school leadership.
- 69% of plans engaged with institutions of higher education.
- 40% of plans listed school leadership as a topic about which they wished to receive focused feedback.

surveys, webinars, and email accounts uniquely established for stakeholders to submit feedback. These alternative solicitation methods allowed stakeholders to provide the state education agency with feedback at a convenient time.

The purpose of these consultation events was not simply to allow state education agencies to relay information. Rather, the events sought to expand dialogue with affected stakeholders and produce valuable information supporting the collaborative vision for education in their state.

In promoting opportunities for stakeholders to engage in policy formation, state plans were more likely to represent the state’s best thinking. Additionally, consultation gave stakeholders a sense of ownership in the plan’s goals and vision. As a result, states with meaningful consultation are better positioned to successfully execute the strategies laid out in their plans.

“The Nebraska Department of Education is committed to collaborating with stakeholders from a diverse set of backgrounds including educators, policymakers, business leaders, and community members... As is evident, feedback was incorporated into every phase of drafting.”

– Nebraska’s ESSA Plan

Change of Administration’s Effect on Stakeholder Engagement

On March 13, 2017, the U.S. Department of Education issued new guidelines for the submission of ESSA plans. As a result, states were no longer required to document their stakeholder engagement within their ESSA plan. Consequently, although all states had at least begun consulting interested stakeholders, some states chose not to include their solicitation efforts in their plan. In most cases where states did not describe their stakeholder engagement efforts within the ESSA plan, they uploaded the details as an external document on their website. UCEA considers stakeholder engagement to be an integral aspect to understanding how states are approaching school

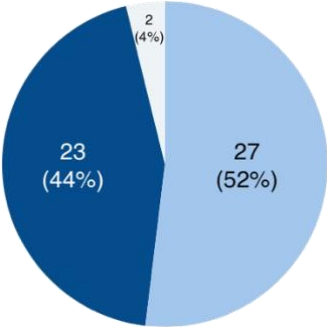
leadership under ESSA. Thus, UCEA ESSA researchers examined these supplemental documents as part of the analysis in order to gather a more holistic picture of stakeholder engagement efforts.

What Did UCEA’s Analysis Find?

UCEA researchers were particularly interested in how states engaged with educational leaders. Our 52-plan analysis determined that all states, Washington, DC, and Puerto Rico engaged with educational leaders. Additionally, 35 out of 52 plans (67%) engaged with institutions of higher education. The analysis also determined that 23 out of 52 plans (44%) established an ESSA working group specifically dedicated to discussing topics concerning leadership, and 21 out of 52 plans (40%) specifically mentioned leadership as a topic about which they wished to receive focused feedback.

School Leadership Advisory Groups

Number of states that established a working/focus/advisory group uniquely tasked with discussing issues of school leadership:



Legend

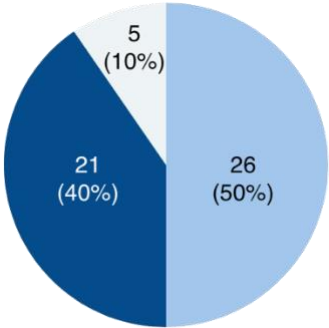
23 plans established a working/focus/advisory group on school leadership.
27 plans did not establish a working/focus/ advisory group on school leadership.
2 plans did not establish a working/focus/ advisory group.

Engaging stakeholders is not only required under the law, but is a strong best practice to effectively improve schools. Making decisions on education policy in an inclusive and transparent way leads to better decisions and encourages stakeholders to contribute and become partners in achieving goals in the state and local community. Communities will support improvement strategies that they help to develop.”

– Council of Chief State School Officers

Focused Feedback

Number of states that listed school leadership as a topic about which they wished to receive focused feedback:



Legend

21 plans listed school leadership as a topic about which they wished to receive focused feedback.
26 plans did not list school leadership as a topic about which they wished to receive focused feedback.
5 plans did not provide questions or topics about which they wished to receive focused feedback.

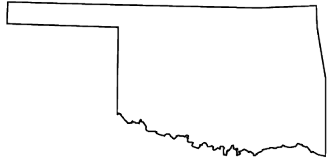
Highlight States

Based on its 52-plan analysis, UCEA researchers highlight three states’ plans demonstrating thoughtful attention to school leadership through their stakeholder engagement efforts. These examples of state investments are merely highlights without claims of exhaustive representation of the variety of thoughtful plans for the use of Title II, Part A funding.

Idaho consulted with teachers, principals, other school leaders, instructional support personnel, charter school leaders, parents, and community partners. Furthermore, Idaho intends to meet with these stakeholders at least annually in order to continue seeking advice on how best to improve educator equity and student achievement.



Oklahoma’s 13 ESSA advisory councils sought verbal feedback from teachers, principals, superintendents, parents, students, business leaders, faith-based community leaders, and underrepresented minorities.



In addition to consulting with interested stakeholders, **Michigan** created seven ESSA action teams including school leaders as members. Teacher and leader quality were two topics addressed by these teams.

Implications

UCEA is strongly encouraged to see school leaders consulted in the formation of all 52 ESSA plans. However, the work of promoting the voice of school leaders is still ongoing. While all states at least engaged in some level of consultation with school leaders, the persistence and intensity of this engagement varied widely among states.

For example, Michigan, which had one of the most extensive consultation regimens in the country, estimated they had reached 350 stakeholders by August 2016. Connecticut developed an in-depth survey with leadership-focused questions. Yet they had only received 21 responses to the survey (none of which came from school leaders) by the end of February 2017—two months before they submitted their plan to the federal government for approval.

UCEA also did not observe any clear evidence presented within ESSA plans conveying an intention to follow up with stakeholders during and after the drafting process. Although it is not surprising to see states taking advantage of increased flexibility under ESSA, we contend it is important that policy makers specifically target school leaders for their unique experiences and perspectives rather than being solely included as part of a large and diffuse group of stakeholders.

References

Burnette, D. (2016, August 2). States working to engage public as they craft ESSA plans. *Education Week*.

Council of Chief State School Officers. (2016). *Let's get this conversation started: Strategies, tools, examples, and resources to help states engage with stakeholders to develop and implement their ESSA plans*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from <https://ccsso.org/resource-library/lets-get-conversation-started>

Council of Chief State School Officers. (2017). *Meaningful local engagement under ESSA*. Washington, DC: Author.

Darling-Hammond, L., Bae, S., Cook-Harvey, C., Lam, L., Mercer, C., Podolsky, A., & Stosich, L. (2016). *Pathways to new accountability through the Every Student Succeeds Act*. Stanford, CA: Learning Policy Institute.

Idaho Department of Education. (2018). *Idaho's consolidated state plan*. Boise: Author.

Learning First Alliance. (2018). *Stakeholder engagement as required in ESSA*. Retrieved from <https://learningfirst.org/stakeholder-engagement-required-essa>

Louisiana Department of Education. (2018). *Louisiana's consolidated state plan*. Baton Rouge: Author.

Michigan Department of Education. (2017). *Michigan's consolidated state plan*. Lansing: Author.

Nebraska Department of Education. (2018). *Nebraska's consolidated state plan (Draft plan as of May 31, 2018)*. Lincoln: Author.

Oklahoma State Department of Education. (2018). *Oklahoma's consolidated state plan (Draft plan as of May 31, 2018)*. Oklahoma City: Author.

Rose, M. (2017). *DeVos strips stakeholder engagement from ESSA requirements*. Washington, DC: American Federation of Teachers.

U.S. Department of Education. (2016, June 23). *Key policy letters signed by the Education Secretary or Deputy Secretary*. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/secletter/160622.html>

Suggested Citation:

Reedy, M. & Doiron, T. A. (2018). *Stakeholder engagement and consultation with school leaders*. Charlottesville, VA: University Council for Educational Administration.



This brief is part of the UCEA ESSA Briefs Series. The intent of the series is to examine the treatment given to school leadership in ESSA state plans. Under the combined leadership of Marcy Reedy and Trevor A. Doiron, the series was made possible through a collaborative research project with contributions made by UCEA policy associates, headquarters staff, and other ESSA Plan reviewers. Based at the University of Virginia, UCEA is an international consortium of research universities with graduate-level leadership programs. UCEA members are marked by a distinguishing commitment and capacity to lead the field of educational leadership and administration.

© 2018 University Council for Educational Administration