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South Dakota releases education plan

PIERRE, S.D. – South Dakota today released its [state plan for education](#) required under the Every Student Succeeds Act. The release kicks off a 30-day comment period in which members of the public are invited to weigh in on the proposed plan.

Development of the plan follows a year of conversations with stakeholders across the state, including students, parents, teachers, school administrators, school board members, legislators, tribal representatives and representatives from higher education.

“South Dakota was in a solid position when ESSA passed,” said Secretary of Education Melody Schopp. “For nearly five years, we have been focused on preparing students to leave the K-12 system college, career and life ready. Passage of ESSA provided us the opportunity to assess our system and look for flexibilities within the new federal law that would support our *state* priorities for educating students.”

While the plan must address major federal requirements, it also affords states the opportunity to showcase its own state priorities. Under the proposal, South Dakota plans to pursue several innovative ideas for supporting student growth, which will be reflected in the way its school accountability system is structured. For example:

- At the high school level, South Dakota will expand its accountability indicator related to college and career readiness. This means schools would receive recognition for providing opportunities for students (e.g., dual credit courses, Advanced Placement courses and exams, and career and technical education courses), in addition to measuring performance on the ACT or Smarter Balanced test.
- South Dakota will look to emphasize the importance of a positive school climate by developing an accountability indicator around the idea of safe and healthy schools. This indicator would apply to elementary and middle schools.
- South Dakota will look to explore options for allowing schools to assess students not based on the strict structure of grade levels, but rather at their level of learning.
- South Dakota will pursue the use of pilot schools to immerse students in engaging academic and work-based experiences that are directly connected to a student’s end goals.

“We took our time in developing this plan – with the driving idea of doing what is right for South Dakota students,” Schopp said. “We look forward to receiving additional input on the proposal.”

Since passage of ESSA in December 2015, the department has engaged with more than 50 groups to discuss and gather feedback on ESSA-related education topics. These conversations, as well as the recommendations of four work groups, helped to form the basis of the proposed plan. Governor Dennis Daugaard will review and provide input into the plan as well, prior to its submission to the U.S. Department of Education in September.

To access the plan and to provide public comment, visit doe.sd.gov and click on the “Every Student Succeeds Act” box.