

ESSA School Improvement Work Group
MacKay Building Pierre, SD
April 13, 2016

The meeting of the School Improvement Work Group began at 10:00 a.m. on April 13, 2016, in the MacKay Building, Pierre, South Dakota. The School Improvement Work Group was formed to make recommendations to the South Dakota Department of Education pertaining to changes in school improvement in the new reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act known as the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA).

Welcome

SD DOE Secretary Melody Schopp welcomed the members of the group. She gave a brief overview of discussions at the federal level pertaining to interpretation of the new federal law and the writing of the accompanying federal regulations.

Workgroup Membership

Members of the work group present were: Lori Bouza, Wagner Community School District; Scott Fossum, Mitchell Technical Institute; Lori Laughlin, Black Hills Special Services; Cari Leidholt, Pierre School Board; Tammy Meyer, Sisseton School District; Jeannine Metzger, Oglala Lakota County School District; Kate Mogard, Brookings School District; Joan Pribyl, Rapid City Area School District; Adam Shaw, Madison Central School District; Karyl Knudson, Smeeth School District; Ann Smith, Sioux Falls School District; Jill Stephenson, Aberdeen School District; Peri Strain, White River School District; and Melissa Weber, Canistota School District.

Outline of the Process

Terri Bissonette, consultant for McRel International North Central Comprehensive Center, will act as the facilitator of the group through the summer. She informed the group that three other work groups will be working on various areas of the ESSA Act – School Accountability, Educator Effectiveness, English Language Learners. The three work groups working on school improvement, educator effectiveness and English learners, will be making recommendations to the Accountability Work Group. The Accountability Work Group will review all of the information and make final recommendations to the SD Department of Education for use in writing a new State Plan as required by ESSA. As the new State Plan must be implemented for the 2017-2018 school year, the work group recommendations will need to be processed in the late summer/early fall to meet all of the timelines including public comments and a review process by the South Dakota Governor's Office. The plan will be submitted to the US Department of Education in January 2017.

Bissonette explained that the first objective of the day was to understand the background of school improvement per the state's Flexibility Waiver from the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The second objective was to understand the areas where state changes are permitted in the statutes, and the third objective for the day was to formulate recommendations focused on specific aspects of the law and school improvement. Bissonette helped the committee set norms for the meetings.

Overview of ESEA Requirements and Changes under ESSA

Shannon Malone, Title I Administrator SD DOE, provided a slide presentation and explanation of the ESEA Flexibility Waiver from the No Child Left Behind process that the state has been implementing for the last several years. She outlined the items that have been eliminated, changed and added to the ESSA law.

Work Process

Bissonette led the group through a series of small and large group discussions to consider a number of questions pertaining to the accountability system and designation as a school in improvement. The results of the group discussions are attached.

Wrap-up

The work group determined that their next meeting will be June 6 in Pierre. More information will be sent to the work group pertaining to any of their requests. The workgroup will also receive information about the discussion of the other work groups prior to the next meeting.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 3:55 pm

Discussion on the current system and areas where there may be opportunities for revision

Attendance Calculation

- Some participants indicated that the new attendance calculation is challenging for schools and districts.
- Will attendance have to be used as an indicator? The answer is “no”. States must have one additional indicator, but it is not required to use attendance. Attendance needs to be tracked per subgroup.
- Attendance is a Catch 22 issue as it involves many social issues. We can’t change the social issues, but we can change how we calculate attendance.
- Many schools follow a list of actions to contact individual families (best practice and legal) and how they encourage attendance. After all of these actions, there are still students not attending. However, none of these actions count because the calculation rate does not change. The school hasn’t forgotten the children. The schools get no credit for all of their actions.
- Should the schools who reach the 95% get bonus points in the accountability calculation? Bonus points for meeting the 95% and no penalty points for not meeting the 95%?
- Can attendance be “made up.” Could a Friday or a Saturday be considered as an attendance day to help families who had to be gone during the week?

Title I Schools/Non-Title I Schools

- Under ESSA no non-Title I school will ever be a Comprehensive Support School/chronically underperforming school.
- Title I and Non-Title I high schools with less than 67% graduation rate may be identified as a targeted school. Non-Title I schools will not be identified by any other indicator.
- If non-Title I schools cannot be held accountable as Title I schools are held accountable, then can we remove the non-Title schools from our reward system?

Career Readiness

- Smarter Balanced is more college oriented. Would a different assessment be a better fit for career and life ready students? Any assessment would have to be aligned to the state standards and National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) does not.
- Assessments may channel students in areas where their interests do not lie. Do some assessments limit student’s potential? School counselors are in short supply to assist students.

School Climate/Safety

- Should safety or school climate be an indicator? Is this a better indicator than attendance?
- How do we judge school climate? Doing a survey of the parents is difficult with lack of participation and skewing of the outcome when parents with an issue tend to return the surveys at a higher rate.

Keep or Change or Eliminate

Eliminate

- New attendance calculation, go back to whole group attendance
- Eliminate one test fits all, add more elementary and middle school assessments in the calculation
- Revise the 15-day count for graduation rate
- Four-year cohort - need to add time, needs more flexibility such as 125%
- Get rid of labeling of Title I only, not counted at the top if not counted at the bottom
- AMO target is too high
- Get rid of LEAP (Indistar)
- Consider the dynamic of a school SST member in a large district. With layers of administration, the SST is an odd dynamic
- All assessments not aligned to the state standards should be eliminate
- Eliminate the cumbersome reporting process for the focus and priority schools

Keep

- Smarter Balanced is aligned to college readiness – needs to be realigned as career and life readiness or use another test to measure career readiness and align courses and graduation requirements.
- Keep attendance as an “other” indicator but modify the 94%. The districts cannot reach 94%
- Keep the new calculation for attendance. The previous calculation process was easier for the districts to do and reflected well on the district. The new calculation is better for students as it helps the districts understand the chronically absent students and the subgroups in which they are identified.
- Keep attendance calculations with the addition of interventions
- Keep Title I support and the use of the School Support Team members. In some larger districts the recommendations of the SST members are lost through the structures and bureaucracy of the district.
- Keep the completion rate and extended time
- Keep a focus on academic growth

Add

- School Board members need to have specific training on school improvement.
- Investigate ways that the judicial system can help enforce attendance. Make a recommendation to the Governor that the judiciary must support school attendance. The schools are dealing with attendance issues (social issues), but do not have all the tools and supports needed.
- Look at the school from a holistic point. What are districts doing to support the whole child, not just math and reading/LA? Many parents have their own problems for example substance abuse. School is more than a test and passing a test. What are we doing to make the student life ready?

Specific Workgroup Recommendations for the New System

- Setting Aside Title I Funds – Currently identified schools must set aside a percentage of Title I funds to implement the improvement activities. When schools exit the improvement status, the funds are no longer required to be set aside. The interventions go away with the funds resulting in the loss of the very interventions that lead to exiting improvement. The exit criteria should include setting aside funds for interventions for a period after the school is no longer identified.
- Removal of Staff and Principal – Eliminate the requirement to get rid of the principal and teachers as a level of school improvement. The schools cannot maintain rapport with the children during these drastic changes.
- One Size Fits All – Schools should be looked at individually as the same model cannot work in all schools; circumstances, parents and children are all different and all changing. The schools should have fewer indicators to consider and should have more time to work on the indicators. This will help the schools to focus better on one area.
- Growth Model – We need to measure progress and growth within South Dakota. Comparisons of assessment achievement and accountability from state to state do not give us a true picture of our own growth over time.
- Remove the SPED Subgroup from Accountability – Can the SPED score be removed from the SPI? The students would still be tested and SPED would continue to do their review periodically of all students through their monitoring process. This would need to be researched as it could be an Office of Civil Rights (OCR) issue.

Target Support and Improvement

- Set the designation every two years
- Extend the support after the school exits school improvement as a maintenance process.
- Ensure the SST is a good match. The definition of a good match may be different for the school and for the SD DOE.
- Provide more information and training for school board members. The workgroup discussed having a school board member sit on the school improvement team and came to the conclusion that it was not feasible; time, freedom for staff to speak, controlling attendance, and possible micro-management are factors.

Comprehensive Support and Improvement

- Change takes about three years with the first year a planning year. What if after three years a school is showing growth, but cannot exit from the bottom 5% simply by how all the schools land on the rank order? The exit criteria is based on other schools and not necessarily based on your own school's achievement. Would this be a tiered approach for example moving to the next tier if growth can be shown? The exit criteria could consist of a percentage of growth, development of a plan, and implementation of the plan. What would happen next should all the schools complete these requirements?

Workgroup Requested Information

- Notice to parents of district testing under ESSA – As the State of South Dakota does not allow an opt-out of Smarter Balanced Assessment, what will be contained in the notice to the

parents/public about the assessment and dates. What language will be contained in the notice? Will districts be required to provide notice of all testing including DIBELS, etc.? How will home schooled children be affected by changes? (Currently home schoolers are tested in 4th, 8th and 11th grade and must use the state assessment or other nationally normed assessment; most use the SAT 10.)

- Definition of terms – What are the definitions of terms used in ESSA including those pertaining to school improvement? The committee needs a jargon map to better understand the key terms. What is meant by college ready? Is college readiness different from technical school readiness?
- Flow chart – The committee needs a chart of ESEA requirements that continue with ESSA. What changes? What disappears? They asked for a list of what can be done and what can't be done.
- Best practices – The workgroup asked for more information on best practices pertaining to a variety of topics such as attendance, school climate, and growth models. IndiStar is based on best practices and helping with the turnaround principles. School climate may be an issue for attendance. How do we make school a good experience/good place where students want to attend every day? Transportation is a key to school attendance. Many districts will not provide transportation within the city limits and this becomes a school barrier. Shouldn't the districts be required to provide transportation?
- What is happening in other states – The committee wants some examples of school improvement processes in other states. Are there examples of criterion based systems from other states? What are other states doing to address the cultural components of their school populations?