



Indiana's ESSA Plan – First Draft

On June 30th the Indiana Department of Education released the Indiana ESSA (Every Student Succeeds Act) Plan – First Draft for public comment. ESSA replaces No Child Left Behind (NCLB) as national education policy.

The Indiana Healthy Weight Initiative (IHWI) and the Indiana Healthy Schools Action Team (HSAT) are very interested in ESSA and the Indiana ESSA Plan because at the **national level** the language in ESSA is supportive of robust physical education, physical activity, health, and overall student wellness. However, it is the Indiana ESSA Plan that lays out the specifics of how Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) will interpret that law. We have advocated for state plans to include key concepts that you can read our [policy paper about ESSA here](#).

The Good

[Section 6 – Supporting All Students](#)

In Section 6 there is strong language that is supportive of health and wellness efforts in schools. The language shows a high-level understanding of the ways things like physical activity, nutrition, social/emotional health, and mental health impact a student's ability to learn and be successful. (Page 85) While this language does not drive policy implementation or school practices, it can serve as rationale for schools wanting to address student health and well-being.

Finally, Social and Emotional Support for students is a priority in this plan. Social and Emotional health is one of the WSCC components which we support. The ESSA plan lays out the “Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)” which is an “overarching framework for academic, behavioral, and social-emotional instruction and intervention.” This framework may well improve the social and emotional health of students. (p. 76)

[Section 4 – Accountability and School Improvement](#)

Section 4 includes the proposed implementation of two non-academic accountability measures. Accountability measures are the ways that schools measure their success and how they are awarded their A-F ranking. Accountability measures have historically driven much of a school's focus including resource allocation. On pp. 33-34 of the draft plan IDOE describes Chronic Absenteeism and a measure of School Climate and Culture as two new non-academic school accountability measures.

The IHWI and HSAT are supportive of the concept of measuring these two indicators. While chronic absenteeism has been shown to have a variety of causes, many times [student health and well-being play a significant role](#). By making schools accountable to chronic absenteeism we believe that many schools will begin to prioritize issues related to student health and well-being that are, at times, drivers of chronic absenteeism.

The measure of School Climate and Culture is still undefined in the draft plan but represents another opportunity for schools to assess aspects of their school experience that may also point them towards changing the health and well-being of their students. It is likely that things like community engagement, parent engagement, and social/emotional issues will feature prominently in these assessments. These are key components in the [Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child \(WSCC\) Model](#) of coordinated school health, which we advocate for. An accountability measure that increases the attention paid to WSCC components is an important step forward in improving school health and wellness.

The Opportunities

While this plan is very positive overall, there are a few key weaknesses that we have found that do not support the concepts we advocate for. The key weaknesses are the guidelines on Title IV Part A funding and the use of chronic absenteeism for grades 3-8 only.



Section 6 - Opportunity: Title IV Part A, Grant Funding Guidelines

Empower local control and decision-making by expanding the definition of fundable projects under Title IV Part A to include all activities that fall under the federal definition of a “well-rounded education.”

The IHWI and HSAT are very concerned with how resources are designed to be allocated in this plan. Of strong importance is how the first draft lays out Title IV, Part A funds on page 105. Under Federal ESSA guidelines Title IV funding was designed to support any evidence-based interventions that addressed a need identified by a school or school corporation in their assessments that fell under the definition of a “well-rounded education.” A “well-rounded education” was broadly defined at to include school health and PE as well as things like STEM, Art, and Music. This meant that fundable activities in Title IV could include things like improved school health services, physical education, and mental health interventions. The Indiana ESSA Implementation Draft Plan only identifies STEM, Reading, Career & Technical Education, International Baccalaureate (IB), Dual Credit, Advanced Placement, and Social/Emotional supports as fundable program interventions in Title IV A.

Student health and well-being would be well served if the definition of fundable projects under Title IV Part A was expanded to include all activities that fall under the definition of a “well-rounded education.” By expanding the definition, schools would have local control to make the decisions about what programs best meet the needs of their individual schools. Secondly, expanding the definition would mean that schools would have the necessary flexibility to fully address the new non-academic measures of accountability. It is very plausible that a school could find that chronic disease management or food insecurity are drivers of chronic absenteeism. The way that the plan is currently written, schools would not be able access funding to address health and well-being issues that might be driving their accountability measures down.

Section 4 - Opportunity: Non-academic Accountability measures in grades 3-8 and 9-12.

Expand the inclusion of chronic absenteeism as an accountability measure in all grades, not just grades 3-8.

A focus on improving chronic absenteeism in all grades will likely help create a culture shift Indiana schools. By focusing on chronic absenteeism schools will be more likely to recognize health and well-being issues in their schools and will be incentivized to improve them. Students who are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy achieve more and are better prepared for the workforce.

We would like you to know that the public is invited to comment on the Indiana ESSA Plan -
First Draft until July 20th!

If you would like to read the plan or give feedback on any section, you can find the links
here: <http://www.doe.in.gov/essa>

The IHWI does not lobby on behalf of or against any bill. Nor do we ask our stakeholders to lobby on behalf of or against any bill. None of the information contained in this report should be construed as a call-to-action. It is intended to be informational and to raise awareness around public policy that is impactful to our work. Each individual and organization must decide on their own what, if any, actions to take regarding public policy.