

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) strengthens federal support for early learning and provides new opportunities for birth-through-third grade alignment, accountability and funding. States are required to develop their own ESSA plan to comply with the federal law, which replaces No Child Left Behind.

**By incorporating the following policies into North Carolina's state plan, the state can:**

- Advance the North Carolina General Assembly's mandate to develop a comprehensive approach to early childhood education birth through third grade.
- Invest in policies that have widespread, bipartisan public support.
- Promote evidence-based approaches that support children to read at grade-level by the end of third grade.

**Develop a birth-to-eight professional development system that ensures teachers and administrators have the skills and knowledge to support young children's learning.** The State Plan should support and specify that Title II ESSA funds are to be used to:

- Improve professionals' knowledge and application of appropriate developmental expectations of young children and the components of high quality birth-through-eight early learning environments;
- Include community-based birth-to-eight early educators in professional development opportunities.
- Develop principals and school leaders' knowledge of child development, high quality early learning and best practices in prekindergarten through third grade classrooms.
- Identify evidence-based strategies and resources for birth-to-eight professionals to support the social and emotional development of children;
- Operationalize developmental and early learning standards that cross the range of domains for children from birth through third grade.

**Ensure that children learn in environments and through practices that are developmentally appropriate and support their success.** The State Plan should:

- Require districts to adopt age-appropriate, evidence-based practices for use in prekindergarten through third grade classrooms and demonstrate in the district plan how such practices will be implemented.
- Specify that the state will provide guidance and technical assistance to districts to support the implementation of age appropriate environments, standards-based instructional practices and the use of data to inform instruction.

**Implement accountability measures that reflect the importance of children's early years.** When assessment results in third grade and up are the only metric on which a school is judged, it creates a strong incentive for district and school leaders to focus on the "tested years." The State Plan should:

- Include chronic absenteeism as a non-standard measure in the accountability system and district report cards. The indicator should be weighted for prekindergarten through second grade.
- Include a defined measure of suspension and expulsion as a non-standard measure in the accountability system, disaggregated by age, grade, race, ethnicity and income.
- Link the state longitudinal data system to early childhood data sources for birth-to-five chronic absenteeism, suspensions and expulsions, and include this information disaggregated for age in the report cards.

**Support smooth transitions for children as they begin school and through the early grades.** The State Plan should:

- Require districts to create transition plans in collaboration with community stakeholders that create shared understanding between early childhood programs, schools, administrators and families of what children should experience between early childhood programs and schools and between kindergarten, first grade and second grade.