

Aligning District Practice to ESSA: Every Student Succeeds Act

Assessing our Academic Success and Planning for Future Growth

Halifax Area School District: September 2017

OVERVIEW:

The nation's *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA), signed into law by President Barack Obama on December 10, 2015, demonstrates the federal government's important and continuous role in supporting public education. Its roots can be found in the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA) championed by Lyndon B. Johnson, the 36th President of the United States. Developed and passed with strong, bipartisan support, ESSA replaced the Bush era *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) established in 2002. In summary, ESSA realigns the federal government's role in education and elevates the use of technology in education in unprecedented ways. The welcomed changes require new thinking from leaders at the local, state, and national levels.

ESSA's long term goals requires states to set long term goals for three specific indicators of school success: *Academic Proficiency as Measured by Test Scores, Graduation Rate, and English Learners Growth in Achieving Proficiency in the English Language*. Pennsylvania's ESSA Consolidated State Plan includes flexibility for identifying fairer, more valid ways to measure school performance; determining how to best support schools identified as needing improvement; accelerating important reforms already underway; and moving state education policy away from a strict focus on compliance, and toward the establishment of rigorous expectations for all students.

Pennsylvania's Consolidated ESSA Plan is aligned to the state's education vision. It underscores the importance in investments in education funding, comprehensive measures of school success, high-quality early childhood education, investment in great teachers and leaders, growth in STEM innovation and capacity, expansion of pathways to postsecondary success, and support for Community Schools. Through the use of stakeholder work groups that addressed four key issues: assessment, accountability and school improvement, educator preparation, and educator evaluation, the Pennsylvania Department of Education views the long-term goals in its ESSA Plan as a means to ensure all school districts meet the guidelines that were established by the federal government:

ACADEMIC PROFICIENCY: *Cut in half the percentage of non-proficient students on PSSAs and Keystone Exams by 2030. This goal also applies to all students and each subgroup.*

GRADUATION RATE: *Cut in half the percentage of students who fail to graduate. This goal also applies to students and subgroups. It also seeks to use greater of four-year and five-year cohort rate.*

ENGLISH LEARNER PROFICIENCY GOAL: *Growth in scale score toward attainment of English proficiency as measured by ACCESS for ELLs assessment.*

Most notably, ESSA is the first bill to narrow the United States federal government's role in elementary and secondary education since the 1980s. It is possible that some stakeholders in the Halifax community will (1) appreciate the reduction in federal government oversight of education and a transfer of federal control of school accountability Pennsylvania; and (2) will embrace the objective of the law which is to ensure that every child achieves. However, to the possible chagrin of many stakeholders, including the district's teachers and administrators, the law retains the hallmark annual standardized testing requirements of the 2001 *No Child Left Behind Act*, shifting the law's federal accountability provisions to states. Under the law, students will continue to take the PSSA (English Language Arts, Math, and Science) between third and eighth grade and the Keystone Exams for Algebra I, Literature, and Biology in high school.

In recent years, Halifax has struggled to meet the cut off scores for proficiency at the elementary, middle school, and high school levels under the School Performance Profile (SPP) evaluation system, a system which relies heavily on standardized test scores to determine the success or failure of an education organization. As noted by the Pennsylvania Department of Education, "a school accountability system must be fair and transparent to make appropriate determinations of school success." Halifax welcomes the broadening of measures of school performance provided by ESSA. Through the implementation of the *Future Ready PA Index*, a new public-facing school report card that expands the number and breadth of indicators used to measure school performance, district personnel are confident that stakeholders will finally receive an accurate and transparent view of the progress the Halifax Area School District is making toward ensuring every student is a prepared, engaged, and responsible citizen.

ESSA ESSENTIALS:

- ESSA ensures that every student has an opportunity to a high-quality education and the support and tools he/she needs to embark on a path toward a successful future.
- ESSA ushers in a new era in public education for students, parents, and educators that shifts the focus back to closing the opportunity and achievement gaps for all students.
- ESSA shifts the focus to close the opportunity gaps for all students by including an 'opportunity dashboard' with indicators of student support or school success.
- ESSA empowers educators to make educational and instructional decisions to ensure that ZIP Code does not determine the quality of education.

- ESSA means more time for students to learn and teachers to teach because it reduces the amount of standardized testing in schools and decouples high-stakes decision-making and statewide standardized tests.
- ESSA gives states the right to define educational standards for their schools and flexibility to determine how students meet them.
- ESSA gives state and district leaders the responsibility to think beyond mandates and create a broader vision for how the law can enhance our work in schools.
- ESSA repeals adequate yearly progress and replaces it with a statewide accountability system.

HALIFAX BEST PRACTICES THAT SUPPORT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ESSA:

The Halifax Area School District currently uses a number of best practices at every level to inform and guide instruction. These best practices align to the tenets of ESSA and the following indicators that will become part of the district's Future Ready PA Index: academic achievement, academic growth, high school graduation rate, efforts to reduce chronic absenteeism, college and career readiness, English learner proficiency.

The Halifax Area School District uses the Teacher Effectiveness Model (Charlotte Danielson's Framework) for observation and evaluation. The components in this research-based model are aligned to the INTASC standards and are grounded in a constructivist view of teaching and learning. The complex activity of teaching is divided into 22 components clustered into four domains of teaching. The model effectively allows HASD's administrators to conduct rich, professional discussions on the four domains that contribute to increased student achievement: (1) Planning and Preparation, (2) Classroom Management, (3) Instruction, and (4) Professional Responsibilities. Through continuous feedback during these conversations, the Framework is used as the foundation of our district's mentoring about best instructional practices, coaching, professional development, and teacher evaluation processes, thereby linking all these activities together and helping teachers become more thoughtful practitioners.

Professional development in the Halifax Area School District is aligned to the organization's *Comprehensive Plan*, as approved by the Pennsylvania Department of Education through June 2019. Significant time has been devoted to developing teachers' data analysis skills, technology use, and content knowledge needed to ensure all students will achieve at their highest levels. An emphasis on eliminating poverty as a barrier to student achievement ensures equity and excellence for all learners.

The District's induction plan was retooled at the start of the 2017-2018 to provide new and experienced teachers opportunities to focus on their professional entry into the organization, versus their compliance in completing a required number of experiences to achieve tenure.

Now known as a Professional Staff Entry Plan (PSEP), the three-year program focuses on important topics and tasks that help to shape the educator's instructional philosophy and align it to the vision and mission of the Halifax Area School District. Many of these activities are completed online using Canvas, the district's learning management system. Other activities involve workshops on relevant topics related to the teaching profession and meetings, led by the mentoring team, to reflect on practice, challenges, and successes. Each year of the program culminates in an authentic assessment, designed by the teacher, to enhance content knowledge and support their growth as a professional. All evidence and artifacts from PSEP Program are documented in an electronic portfolio and reviewed by administration before tenure and professional status is granted at the end of three years.

Providing Pre-K to Every Child

The Halifax Area School District is a recipient of the state supported Pre-K Counts Program. Pre-K Counts is a unique, public-private collaboration between philanthropies, state government, innovative school district-community partnerships providing what national research has shown: early learning in quality preschool settings is the key to helping all children succeed, now and in the future. The evidence is clear. Fifty years of research demonstrates the lasting academic, developmental, and social benefits of high-quality early childhood education programs. Children who attend effective preschool programs are:

- most likely to become good readers in elementary school.
- less likely to be placed in special education.
- more likely to graduate from high school and participate in post-secondary education.
- less likely to need public assistance as adults.
- less likely to be arrested or incarcerated.

Funds from the district's Pre-K Counts grant are used exclusively to support the needs of two classrooms at Enders-Fisherville Elementary School for children age four. A certified teacher and highly-qualified aide nurtures a class of no more than 15 students in each room. The curriculum is aligned to the state's early childhood education standards and the district's kindergarten readiness standards. Enrollment in the program is restricted to children who reside in a family whose income is at or below 300% poverty level as per the Federal Poverty Level guidelines.

The Halifax Area School District also partners with the community's early care providers through a Pre-K Advisory Committee. This group meets monthly and shares curriculum, professional development opportunities, and instructional strategies. Networking provides opportunities for early childhood education teachers to visit classrooms and share best practices. Collaboration ensures the Pre-K Counts program identifies and serves the neediest students and families in a confidential and caring manner. Members are also afforded opportunities to rent the Halifax Elementary School at a nominal fee to conduct before and after school programs for district students.

Mastering the Standards is Elementary

At the elementary level (K-5), weekly grade level team meetings are used to review instructional strategies, analyze the results from benchmark (Dibels and 4-Sight) and standardized testing (PSSA), and refine the RTII processes used daily with students. Teachers have access to PVASS data and are supported in tracking student growth toward meeting expected outcomes. Additionally, the alignment of practice between the district's two elementary schools, (Enders- Fisherville and Halifax Elementary) for managing student behavior has ensured the successful implementation of Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) strategies. These strategies are cross-walked to the district's Discovery Character Education Program, which builds school community by creating a culture of character and conscience. A district wide emphasis on eliminating poverty as a barrier to student achievement has also ensured equal access to resources for all learners.

Important to note, through a strategic multi-year implementation of a standards-based report card, teachers have become more adept at using the Pennsylvania Core Standards in their teaching. As this more rigorous and defined approach to reporting assessment continues, staff will continue to gain confidence in reflecting a student's academic progress in mastering grade specific performance standards. The standards-based report cards, versus the calculation of a percentage grade from a variety of assignments, will provide parents with a more accurate picture of what their child knows and can do.

Finally, technology integration, ensuring every elementary student has access to a device during the school day, has allowed teachers to differentiate instruction through the use of enrichment and remediation applications. The implementation of blended learning strategies affords students additional opportunities to practice collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking. Students are gaining a deeper understanding of complex content and tasks by using technology to guide a self-directed and individualized pace.

Refining and Extending Knowledge Defines the Middle School Experience

At the middle school level, daily team meetings are used for the common planning of lessons, review of state standards, analysis of benchmark (4-Sight) and standardized tests (PSSA and Algebra Keystone) results, and sharing of instructional strategies. A math, science, English, and Social Studies core are delivered via a grade level teaming concept. Reading instruction remains an essential component of the 6th grade curriculum.

A strong science program introduces students to science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) concepts through such activities as greenhouse maintenance, creating and maintaining an environmental classroom in the middle/high school courtyard, and Chesapeake Bay conservation activities. Electives provide opportunities for students to begin studying their career interests in preparation for the 8th grade tour at Dauphin County Technical School. For example, technology education courses introduce students to manufacturing through the study of engineering and design via drafting and 3D printing technologies. Even Art and Music are skills are assessed using authentic and performance based assessments. A level one Spanish

class is made available to 8th graders who have demonstrated proficiency in the English/Language Arts PSSA.

The foundation of the elementary school's PBIS Program is expanded upon in the Discovery Character Education program. Students interact daily with their Discovery Group to engage in character lessons, receive academic help, and complete school wide jobs such as the school wide recycling program which fosters a sense of stewardship in the middle school program.

Finally, a technology integration and a one-to-one initiative, which ensures every middle school student has access to a device, has allowed teachers to differentiate instruction through the use of enrichment and remediation applications. The implementation of blended learning strategies has afforded students more opportunities to practice collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking. Students are gaining a deeper understanding of complex content and tasks by using technology to guide a self-directed and individualized pace. A digital applications course reinforces the connectivity, critical thinking, creativity, and communication skills students will use in their academic and social endeavors.

Preparing for College and Career in High School

Halifax High School students prepare for college and career through the completion of 24 credits of academic and elective courses. A partnership with the Dauphin County Technical School (DCTS) affords interested students the opportunity to major in a technical program of study, earning industry certifications and college credits while still in high school. Those students who do not choose to attend DCTS are afforded access to elective programs in Technology Education, Art, Music, and Family and Consumer Science. The Business Academy program, aligned to a career and technical education program of study, provides instruction in Accounting, Entrepreneurship, and Marketing. Students use their knowledge and skills to operate a student run enterprise called *The Den*.

Advanced Placement courses are available in the core content areas: Math, English, Science, and Social Studies. A partnership with Harrisburg Area Community College offers students the opportunity to earn college credit in two levels of English and one level of Health. Students may also elect to attend the local community college full-time during their senior year of high school. Students are encouraged to explore the career interests through participation in the Cooperative Education, Job Shadowing, and Internship programs.

The Graduation Project, a graduation requirement, requires students to finalize and present a career plan, describing the personal, academic, financial considerations they have given to preparing for life after high school. Character education continues in high school with time devoted every day for students to participate in their multi-grade level Discovery groups. Service learning, academics, graduation project preparation, and intramural competition are an integral part of the high school program.

Teachers meet in interdisciplinary groups and by departments to plan lessons, review instructional strategies, and analyze data from AP testing, Keystone Exams, and the College in the High School placement exam. Technology integration and a one-to-one initiative, which

ensures every high school student has access to a device, allows teachers to differentiate instruction via the Canvas learning management system. The implementation of blended learning strategies affords students more opportunities to practice collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

“Moving Forward: Initiatives and Interventions in Light of the High Stakes Assessment Results.” Overview of HASD’s performance on the 2017 PSSA and Keystone Exams. Includes recommendations for growth and revisions to teacher created Student Learning Objectives.

“Halifax Area School District ESSA Communication Plan Timeline.”

“Truancy Elimination Flowchart.” Created in cooperation with the local district justice to reduce habitual absenteeism.

“Halifax Area School District Comprehensive Plan: 2016-2019”
<http://www.hasd.us/Page/2256>

“Educator Effectiveness Model of Supervision and Evaluation.”
<http://www.education.pa.gov/teachers%20-%20administrators/educator%20effectiveness/pages/default.aspx#tab-1>