



ESSA IMPLEMENTATION COMMITTEE

ESSA Subcommittee Meeting – Early Learning

Date, Time: Friday, July 22, 2016, 11:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m.

Location: 135 South Union Street, Suite 215

ALSDE Facilitator: Karen Porter

Members present: Secretary Jeana Ross, Barbara Cooper, Deborah Love, Hope Zeanah, Sandy Little (DECE), Tracye Strichik (DECE)

Members absent: none

Summary: A review of workgroup meeting #1 was presented. Discussion centered on possible early learning plan components and policy mandates that could impact the work moving forward.

Next meeting: Thursday, August 18, 2016 1 p.m. – 3 p.m., 135 South Union Street, Suite 215

Detailed Notes

All notes below are comments with committee members and the ALSDE facilitator.

New Items:

- Alabama's PLAN 2020 and ESSA
 - Correlations?
 - Questions?
- Review ESSA Guidelines-Early Learning Component
- Determine recommendations for an early learning strategic plan for collaborating, coordinating, and making quality improvements among existing programs and state and local agendas as required by ESSA

What might this plan for early learning look like?

The discussion began with a look at PLAN 2020, Alabama's strategic plan for education. The information in PLAN 2020 is a general and broad look. Discussion was held for thoughts and questions on the possibilities of the plan on the ESSA birth to kindergarten component:

- Will the minimum birth to 4-year-olds (b-4) early learning initiatives be an unfunded mandate? Will there be options? (Examples: Home Visitation, Parents as Teachers)
- Huntsville has LENA Start program for infants and toddlers
- Is the state planning to add additional funding for Pre-K programs?
- Need for identifying what is the "minimum" that schools provide
- Schools need to understand how to use their Title funds– voluntary, supplemental program based on local need
- Need for researching quality models and make funds available without naming specific programs
 - This would be with Title 1 funds set aside based on ESSA or through the competitive grants offered in conjunction with ESSA
- Possibly explore gathering feedback from parents at community engagement meetings to see what parents/community view as the state's role prior to Pre-K programs
- The b-4 early learning initiatives are optional – putting information out about school readiness to parents with infants and toddlers is important knowledge and parents have welcomed the information

Overview of Current Title I Portion and ESSA New Guidelines:

Key State Decisions under the ESSA— Questions and Wonders

- Subcommittee member expressed the need to get representation from the Department of Human Resources (DHR) on the committee as well as research and development from ALSDE and/or DHR



Key State Decisions Continued...

- Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education (DECE) has many things in place, like the Kellogg Foundation Grant, in which we are working to have an alignment with kindergarten through 3rd grade. DECE has not stretched beyond kindergarten, but the 1st grade pilot of assessment tool is underway.
 - In regards to assessments of young children, educators have found that some methods used earlier are not effective, so there have been some shifts in how to assess children early. Comprehensive systems including developmental domains as well as academic content/whole child data assessment systems (like GOLD) truly align with pedagogy and development.
- The state's role is to provide assistance, rather than mandates
- Do we intend to include best practices documents? This should be a part of the technical assistance plan.
- Many people who make decisions about assessment tools do not have experience in the grade levels for which they are selecting. It is important to identify strengths and weaknesses and then allow systems to select tools based on needs.
- For more local control, do not go beyond the requirements of ESSA
- ESSA Committee could propose that early childhood assessments are evidence-based and suggest assessments that are appropriate in collecting data related to the purpose of collection
 - Data collected for purposes other than its intended use would require a reliability and validity test to ensure accurate measures are obtained, ensuring that LEAs are utilizing assessment measures which are intended to collect data for the reporting purpose identified (this is starting at the top and going down looking at infant/toddler pieces first)
- Note: the final regulations from the USDOE have not yet been finalized
- Discussed the need for a template
 - Selma, for example, has various programs. So, what things must be considered to bring areas together and determine the types of funds that can be used and from what sources? There is a need for the coordination of funds, to carefully consider what's allowable, and understand that every system is different.
- Title I funds can be used for early learning
 - What are allowable uses of these funds – this is something the subcommittee can research and lift up key decision points and put them in a format that will be helpful
- Would it be helpful to look at what is working, like the Preschool Development Grant (PDG), for example?
 - Look at the goals, objectives, Head Start standards, and common assessments (like GOLD)
 - For the next meeting, the subcommittee can take the PDG and lift up just the structures and use as a framework for further work
 - Grant was developed as a grass roots effort developed by “boots on the ground” educators in the state



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- ESSA Committee needs clarification on the 15% of federal funds that can be set aside for birth to kindergarten activities
 - The grade level reading piece fits right in with family and engagement strategies
 - DECE has trend aggregate data showing that children who participate in First Class programs are less likely to be in special education, be retained, and have lower absenteeism
 - Trend aggregate data shows that children who participate in First Class programs are less likely to be in special education, be retained, and their attendance is better
 - The greatest body of work with B-4 education for now has gone into the 4-year-old program, and there is a very well-developed technical assistance support structure in place (how DECE has worked to structure the First Class Pre-K). This model allows for the flourishing of high quality Pre-K through coaching and monitoring support for programs.
 - A strategic plan would help districts choose how to use funding
 - Experts could provide expertise and support, but not tell districts what to do
 - The professional learning piece is critical and the current model works
 - If we use existing structures for support, then districts have additional funds to use locally for specific tools/objects for hands-on learning that are needed in the classrooms
 - DECE teaches teachers how to identify the developmental stage of the child and the intentional play that is needed
 - The parent role in this is critical: parents are interested and need to know what to do.
 - In the birth to 5-year-old model, parents are involved and engaged; when we work off a strength-based model, it reinforces the parent's role working with their child (Strengthening Families Model, Home Visiting, other researched-based models)
 - High quality early childhood experiences promote reciprocal relationships between parents and educators

Comments/questions from subcommittee members:

- No data should be collected beyond what is required by ESSA; this is also a suggestion from the data reporting committee
- Wiggio would be our first step; next, solicit comment cards from teachers at the Kindergarten conference
- Can we conduct a survey like we do at the summits? (*This would be a digital survey answered via e-mail with immediate results shown. DECE utilized this method at the ECE Higher Education Summit*)
- “Sounds like we are trying to get as much feedback from stakeholders as possible. I am working on this with my principals. If we can maximize that feedback, it will go a long way to strengthen ESSA.”
- “NCLB felt too top heavy and that impacted implementation. We need to give people opportunity to be heard and have a transparent process.”



Next Steps

Discussion items to report out to the ESSA Implementation Committee:

- Subcommittee should take into consideration the suggestion about using the PDG to provide a framework
 - Subcommittee will have to look at what ESSA requires for early childhood education above and below age 4
 - Subcommittee needs to define early childhood education as a state: this seems like the first question needing an answer in order to come up with supports needed
- There is a crosswalk with the PDG framework and Head Start (First Class model covers Head Start and has high standards)
- Examine opportunities with Title I and special education
- Define supports needed, look at PDG for reference
- Title II establishes a new literacy grant
- Title III includes funds for dual language learners

August 18, the entire ESSA Implementation Committee will meet in the State Capitol Auditorium. Karen Porter will report out to the committee for the Early Learning subcommittee.

