ESSA IMPLEMENTATION COMMITTEE

# ESSA Subcommittee Meeting – Standards and Assessments

**Date, Time:** Monday, June 27, 2016, 1:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.

**Location:** 135 South Union Street

**ALSDE Facilitator:** Sandy Lewell

**Members present:** Matt Akin, Krissie Allen, Pamela Fossett, Walter Gonsoulin

**Members absent:** Frank Chestnut

**Summary:** Members were led through discussion of a few specific topics:

- Overview of ALDSE's progress to date
- Assessments or Advanced Mathematic Students
- Nationally Recognized High School Tests

Lewell led group discussion and brainstorming session on the specifics of the Standards and Assessments portion of the ESSA, and how individual school districts can work with the state to achieve certain goals. Future meetings will go into further detail, and answer questions that were raised at this meeting.

**Next meeting:** Friday, July 22, 1:00 p.m. 135 South Union Street, Suite 215

## Detailed Notes

**Topic One**: Professional Development Meetings

- Committee reviews the incentive for attending the professional development meetings held quarterly.
- The results of these meetings are seen in the school districts.
- Questions are raised to be discussed at the next meeting concerning the newness of the assessments, the trajectory of students, and if they are up to state standards.
- Concern also raised for schools that cannot necessarily send a large group of teachers to the professional development meetings.
- Attendance of quarterly development meetings is not required, but urged. If teachers cannot attend, the materials covered are available online.

**Topic Two**: Assessments for Advanced Math Students in Middle School

- Bullet points for discussion are passed around to committee members, and are as follows:
    - Assessments for Advanced Math Students in Middle School
        - States are required to test students in grades 3 through 8 and once in high school, in math and reading, plus science in certain grade spans. If they want to test in other subjects, that is fine, as long as those tests are aligned to state-level academic standards.
        - States are required to report results separately for boys, girls, English-language learners, students in special education status, different racial groups, socio-economic status, homeless students, foster students, and military-connected students.
        - Three new categories required in ESSA: homeless students, foster students, military-connected students.
            - The regulations define what it means to be a child in foster care, including any in a foster home, group home, residential facility, pre-adoptive home, or emergency shelter.
        - All students in the state have to take the same test in each grade, with a couple of exceptions.
            - Exceptions include: districts participating in a local assessment pilot (up to seven states can apply for that); districts that choose to use a nationally recognized high school test instead of the state exam.
            - 8th graders who are taking advanced math classes – like Algebra 1 or Geometry – can take a test at their level, instead of the regular state math test for 8th graders.

**Topic Two Continued**: …Assessments for Advanced Math Students in Middle School

- Test are required to be accessible to English-language learners and students in special education. If students need accommodations, like extra time, they should get it. Tests should also be aligned to standards that get students ready for postsecondary education or the workplace.
    - Under ESSA, students who are taking advanced math courses in 8th grade, like say, Geometry, can take a math test on their own level, instead of the typical state test for 8th graders. In order to get this flexibility, though, state needs to provide appropriate accommodations for students in special education and ELLs.
- In plans submitted to the USDOE, states have to describe their strategy to provide all students in the state with the opportunity to take and be ready for advanced middle school math. Essentially, states must have a game plan for giving every student the opportunity to take the tougher math classes early.

- Committee discussion on if the state will allow 8th grade students to take ASPIRE or a different test in line with the course they are taking.
    - One committee member is unsure of the materials covered for ASPIRE, and would like giving localities the option of an alternative test. Specifically, a test more in line with what students have actually learned.
- Member discussed the possibility of lowering the passing score for an advanced class to encourage more participation, but other members are worried that test scores are too low with the current standards.
- Possibility of including these measures in a different part of the report card, so as to be more inclusive of students.
- Possible solution to representing all students' scores: ask for a percentage of students being reported on meeting testing requirements.
    - Must report student groups differently (new groups are: homeless, children in foster care, and children of active duty military parents).
- Suggestion of making a strategy that begins before 8th grade by possibly including pre-AP classes.
- Recommendation of phasing in an accountability process to establish a baseline for test scores.
- Recommendation of allowing earlier grades to begin the sequential math classes, if funding is not an issue to create a feeder pattern.
- Some members disagreed whether the strategy needed to be made at a state level or at a more local level.

**Topic Two Continued**: …Assessments for Advanced Math Students in Middle School

- Pros of the new assessments:
  - Tests would be aligned with what children are actually taught.
  - Allowing tests more fitting to students' needs would give flexibility to localities, specifically LEAs.
  - Encourage the challenge of advanced classes, and offer flexibility.
- Cons of the new assessments:
  - Mandated tests creates an all-or-nothing approach to testing because some material may not be age appropriate.
  - By possibly including these scores in a different section of the report card, it might keep the school from counting top students' scores.
  - Punitive measures like one test for everyone. Flexibility with the LEAs is key to local control.
  - Possible disadvantage to certain school districts if the burden of funding is left to the local school districts and not a state-wide plan.
  - If the phasing in process takes too long, failing is a possibility.
- Unanswered questions:
  - How flexible is the actual language, and what are states really allowed to change?
  - If flexibility is given, who would make the decision of what test is given to the students?
  - What if a majority of kids take the advanced class, but then take the lower level test.: If this happens will the goal still be met?
  - What would the cost be and who would be responsible for another assessment?
  - Should students in advanced classes be tested differently?
  - What would the actual test look like? How would it be made?
  - Another interesting thing to mention with Algebra 1 and Geometry specifically, sequentially why couldn't 7$^{th}$ graders maybe take Algebra 1 and 8$^{th}$ graders take Geometry?
- Moving forward:
  - Not enough information was known to make a full recommendation.
  - Further review of language and allowed flexibility is needed.
  - More research is needed into the consequences of certain cons.

**Topic Three**: Nationally Recognized High School Tests

- Bullet points for discussion are passed around to committee members, and are as follows:
  - Nationally Recognized High School Tests
    - ESSA includes a new option for high school tests. Districts can use a locally-selected, nationally recognized high school test instead of the state exam, if they want to, as long as the state permits it.
    - So what exactly is a nationally recognized test? According to the new regulations, it's any test for high school students that is administered in multiple states and is accepted by institutions of higher education in those or other states for college entrance or placement. That means SAT, ACT, PARCC, and Smarter Balanced count. And it would seem that Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate are also acceptable. NAEP, on the other hand, is almost certainly out because it's not a college or placement test. Importantly, these tests will have to meet the standards of the federal peer review process.
    - How do these test get phased in? The new regulations make it clear that if a district chooses to offer an alternative test, the district has to use the same test with all its high schools. And it can't phase the new test in slowly. It's all at once or nothing.
    - Also: ELLs and students in special education must get the accommodations they need to take these tests, and the school district is responsible for making sure that happens.
    - And, importantly, ELLs and students in special education have to get the same benefits from taking the tests that other students do. So if the test the district chooses is a college entrance test, like the SAT, all groups of students need to be able to use it for college entrance, even if they use accommodations to take it. This has been a struggle for the ACT and SAT. In some cases, some accommodations prevent the student from having a valid score for college entrance.
    - Districts can't just suddenly switch tests. Before they request the switch, the district must give parents a chance to provide input and explain to them how instruction might change. If charter schools are going to be effected by the switch, the district needs to get their input. Additionally, once a new test is adopted, the district has to let parents know.

**Topic Three Continued**: …Nationally Recognized High School Tests

- Charters that count as school districts can take advantage of this option, too. But they still have to abide by state charter laws. If the state law says charters have to give the same test as the neighboring high schools, they have to stick with that test.

- Uncertainty is expressed over the apparent drastic change to what tests are allowed.
- Members are excited about the possibility of flexibility and the inclusiveness of the test for ELLs and students in special education.
- In reference to choosing a nationally recognized high school test, the point is made that placement tests determining college placement may be more valid than the current tests.
- These bullets clearly call for an all or nothing approach without a period of phasing in, as previously questioned.
- Suggestion for community college tests to be considered.
- Pros for Nationally Recognized High School Tests
    - Parents being able to have a role in the decision process.
    - This plan allows for flexibility and local control.
    - Allows for accommodations to be made for ELLs and students in special education.
    - Feels like it allows for flexibility in the timeline and in the selection of the test.
- Cons for Nationally Recognized High School Tests
    - If the test has to be one used for college placement or acceptance because not every student goes to college.
      If only the ACT and AP tests are offered as alternative.
- Unanswered questions:
    - Is it fiscally prudent to give every student the ACT?
    - If we have 138 school districts, with a mix of needs among them, how do we know as a state if we're headed in the right direction without a system in place to overview?
    - What flexibility is there for non-college bound students? What about using multiple indicators like under plan 2020?
- Moving forward:
    - More information needed to make a recommendation.
    - Specific information needed about how to better test non – college bound students.
    - Questions brought forward in this meeting will be researched and answered at the next meeting.

**Next Steps:**

- Possible Q&A portion to be added to the next meeting.
- Lewell said the next meeting will answer the questions raised and allow for further clarification of the committee's recommendations.
- The committee members were recommended to look over their copies of the regulations, plan 2020, and all other documents-given in preparation for the next meeting.