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How ESSA and IDEA Can Support College and Career Readiness for Students With Disabilities

Considerations for States



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Introduction

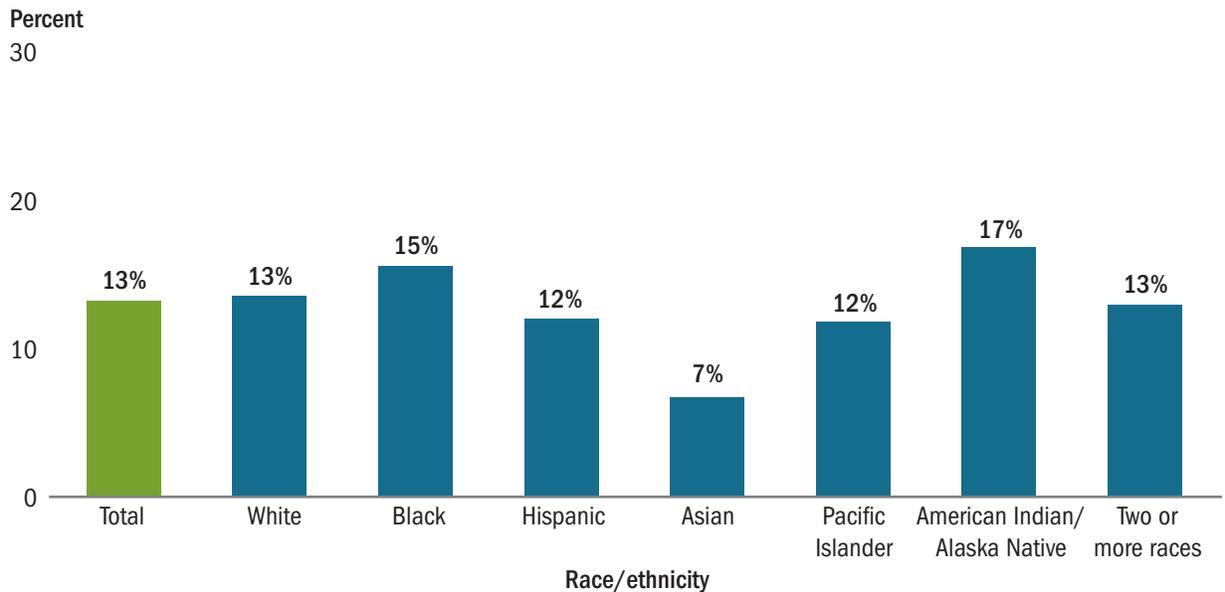
As states consider ways to increase the number of youth who are college and career ready, they must ensure that students with disabilities are able to succeed. States can promote college and career readiness (CCR) by equipping students with the knowledge and competencies needed to enter postsecondary education, join the workforce, and lead full and independent lives. Despite advances in improving CCR for students with disabilities, a great deal of work is needed to help more students achieve their full potential. The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA) provides states with flexibility over the design of their educational systems and offers additional provisions to support CCR for all students, including those with disabilities (English, Rasmussen, Cushing, & Therriault, 2016). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) provides protections for students with disabilities to ensure all students receive a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment.

Who Are Students With Disabilities?

According to the U.S. Department of Education, “students with disabilities” refers to students who receive special education and related services under IDEA or who receive related services under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Students with disabilities served by IDEA include students with intellectual disabilities, hearing impairment, speech or language impairment, visual impairment, orthopedic impairment, serious emotional disturbance, autism, traumatic brain injury, developmental delay, other health impairment, multiple disabilities, or specific learning disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2016). One in five children in the United States have specific learning and attention issues such as dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, dyspraxia, or attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (Horowitz, Rawe, & Whittaker, 2017).

In 2014–15 (most recent data available), the number of children and youth ages 3–21 receiving special education services under IDEA was 6.6 million, or about 13% of all public school students, but there are differences by student subgroup (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Percentage of Children and Youth Ages 3–21 Served Under the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) by Race/Ethnicity: School Year 2014–15



Source: National Center for Education Statistics, 2017, Figure 1.

This brief examines how two federal laws, ESSA and IDEA, can promote the development of meaningful pathways to postsecondary opportunities, including 2- and 4-year college, non-degree certificate programs, apprenticeships, and more, by ensuring all students are college and career ready, and it provides examples of model programs. Specifically, this brief:

- Examines data on secondary and postsecondary education participation and employment outcomes of students with disabilities;
- Considers how CCR strategies can support students with disabilities on a path to postsecondary education and career opportunities;
- Provides analyses of the provisions under ESSA and IDEA that support CCR for students with disabilities;
- Features examples of effective practices; and
- Includes guidance for state leaders.

Overview of Key Federal Legislation

Every Student Succeeds Act

On December 10, 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed into law, reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 and replacing the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001. ESSA requires that all students, including students with disabilities, have access to a well-rounded education and be held to high academic standards that will prepare them to succeed in college and careers. ESSA grants states significant flexibility over the design of their accountability systems, but encourages the use of more college and career readiness measures of student success.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

Enacted in 1975, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates a free and appropriate public school education in the least restrictive environment for eligible students ages 3–21 identified as having a disability that adversely affects their academic performance and therefore requires accommodation of special education and related services as specified by an individualized education program (IEP). IDEA also provides supports for infants and toddlers from birth, but this brief focuses only on children with disabilities who are eligible for educational services. The law includes a focus on strategies to help students transition from high school to postsecondary education and work and requires the development of a transition plan as part of a student's IEP by the time the student reaches age 16.

In 2014, the Results Driven Accountability (RDA) initiative by the U.S. Department of Education Office for Special Education Programs revised IDEA's accountability system to ensure states comply with IDEA. The initiative resulted in improved educational outcomes for students with disabilities. Under RDA, states are required to develop a State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP), in accordance with IDEA, to identify gaps in student performance, analyze state systems, and then implement targeted, evidence-based reforms to address the gaps (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Certain indicators of the SSIP, such as transition strategies and post-school outcomes, directly relate to the goal of CCR and can be aligned with the ESSA state plan.

Other Legislation

While not the focus of this brief, several other federal laws help students with disabilities make the transition to college and careers, including the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA), Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (Perkins Act), Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), and Rehabilitation Act. All of these laws impact students with disabilities in different ways and can be coordinated to support smoother transitions to postsecondary education and training and work.

Data on Education and Employment Outcomes of Students With Disabilities

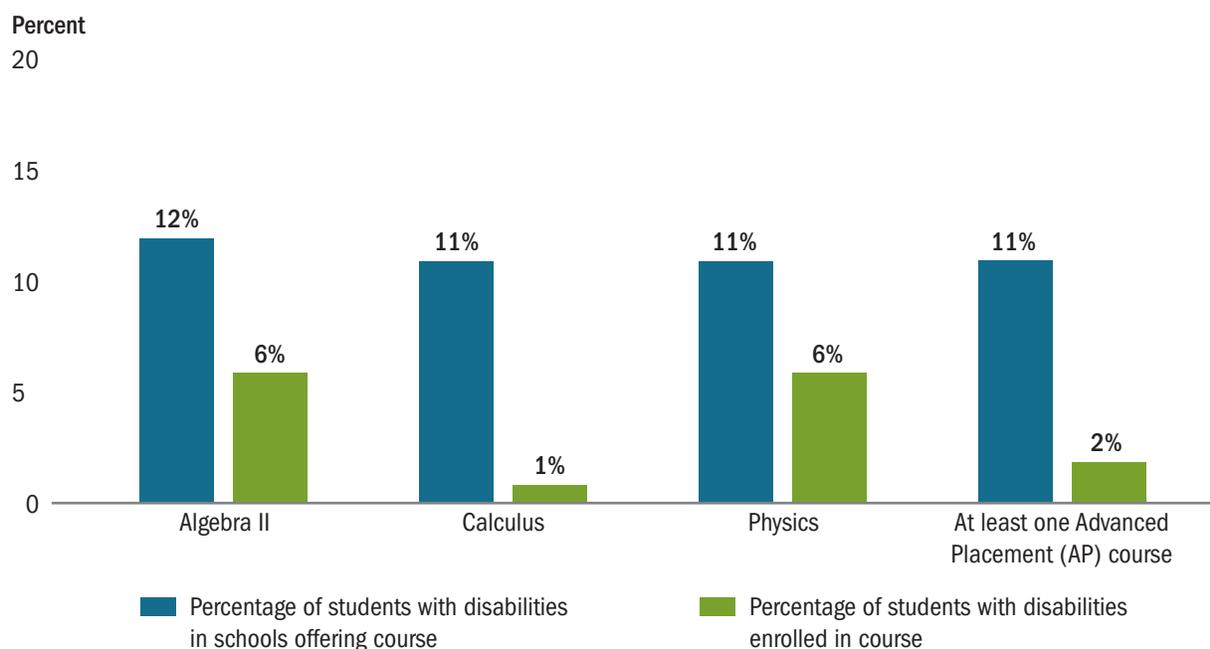
Despite progress in improving CCR for students with disabilities, more effort is needed to ensure a greater number of students complete high school, enter postsecondary education, earn a degree or certificate, and find employment that leads to independence, self-sufficiency, and a living wage career. This section examines the current education and employment outcomes of students with disabilities to understand where there are areas for improvement.

Secondary Education Outcomes

Students with disabilities graduate from high school at lower rates than the general population. During the 2014–15 school year, the high school graduation rate for all students reached an all-time high of 83%, up from 82% the previous year. Although the graduation rate of students with disabilities grew slightly to 65% from 64% the previous academic year, a significant graduation rate gap remains between students with disabilities and the overall rate (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2016). The high school graduation milestone is a critical prerequisite to postsecondary opportunities and demonstrates that states, districts, and schools may be underestimating what should be expected of students with disabilities. Indeed, students with disabilities may not have access to courses that meet rigorous CCR standards. For example, approximately 85–90% of students with disabilities can meet the same graduation requirements as other students when provided with the appropriate instruction, supports, and accommodations (Achieve, 2016). However, the current high school graduation rate of students with disabilities (at 65%) is not aligned with this estimation. Only 19 states and the District of Columbia require the same course requirements for students with and without disabilities to earn a regular high school diploma (Achieve, 2016).

An analysis of civil rights data from the U.S. Department of Education suggests that students with disabilities are less likely to enroll in common CCR courses like Algebra II, Calculus, Physics, and Advanced Placement (AP) than students without disabilities (Figure 2). Students with disabilities are also more than twice as likely to receive one or more out-of-school suspension, are 1.5 times more likely to be chronically absent, and are more likely to be retained or held back in high school than students without disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2016; Horowitz et al., 2017).

Figure 2. Students With Disabilities Participation in Rigorous CCR Courses



Source: Data are from U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2016, pp. 6–7.

Postsecondary Education Outcomes

Even for students with disabilities who graduate from high school and meet the prerequisites for postsecondary education, these gaps persist. According to the 2015 Annual Disability Status Report, the percentage of people with disabilities ages 21 to 64 with only some college or an associate's degree was 31.5%, compared with 31.9% of people without disabilities (Erickson, Lee, & von Schrader, 2016). However, the percentage of people with disabilities ages 21 to 64 with a bachelor's degree or higher level of degree attainment was 14% compared with 33% of people without disabilities (Erickson et al., 2016). These data indicate that students with disabilities enroll in postsecondary education at similar rates as their peers without disabilities yet are less likely to earn a degree.

Employment Outcomes

Employment is a critical step toward independence, self-sufficiency, and economic sustainability, yet gaps in employment are vast for students with disabilities who are less likely to be employed as adults than their peers without disabilities. In 2015, the employment rate for people with disabilities ages 21 to 64 was less than half than for people without disabilities (35.2% and 78.3%, respectively; Erickson et al., 2016). There are gaps in earnings as well. In 2015, the median earnings of people with disabilities ages 21 to 64 who worked full time or full year was \$40,100, compared with \$45,100 for people without disabilities (Erickson et al., 2016). However, these gaps in earnings cannot solely be attributed to the gaps in

secondary and postsecondary degree attainment discussed above, indicating unique challenges for students with disabilities. Studies have shown that even with the same education level, people with disabilities earn less than their nondisabled peers, nearly 37% (or \$10,700) less (Yin, Shaewitz, & Megra, 2014).

Strategies to Support College and Career Readiness for Students With Disabilities

Recognizing that numerous strategies support all youth to be college and career ready, discussed next are ways to promote CCR for students with disabilities who may face unique challenges.¹ The following section provides an overview of key elements and strategies for increasing the number of students with disabilities who are college and career ready, including high expectations and access to the general curriculum, college and career advising and transition planning, career pathways, dual and concurrent enrollment, and personalized and competency-based learning.

High Expectations and Access to the General Curriculum

Students with disabilities should be held to high expectations that acknowledge their capabilities to earn a high school diploma, succeed in postsecondary education, and establish meaningful careers and independent lives. Research shows that when students with disabilities are expected to meet state academic standards and earn a standard high school diploma, they are better prepared for the rigor of college and may more successfully transition to postsecondary education and work. Guidance from the U.S. Department of Education also highlights the responsibility of states and districts to ensure that all IEPs are aligned to state academic standards. According to Rojewski, Lee, and Gregg (2015), students with disabilities earning 80% or more academic credits in general education settings were two times more likely to enroll and persist in postsecondary education than students receiving fewer credits in general education settings. Students with disabilities must have access to the general education curriculum and the necessary personalized supports to complete high school that consider their strengths, competencies, and aspirations, while also encouraging them to achieve their full potential. Appropriately accessing the general curriculum might require the use of assistive technology to enhance learning and participation in the classroom. Assistive technology includes any device or service that helps students with disabilities meet their IEP goals and participate in the general education setting to the greatest extent possible.

¹ For an in-depth look at a comprehensive set of issues and strategies for promoting CCR for students with disabilities, see <http://www.ccrscenter.org/sites/default/files/Improving%20College%20and%20Career%20Readiness%20for%20Students%20with%20Disabilities.pdf>.

SPOTLIGHT



Fedcap School, New Jersey

The Fedcap School is a private school in New Jersey for students with disabilities ages 14 through 21 classified as cognitively impaired, multiply disabled, behaviorally disabled, or learning disabled. Fedcap offers an innovative program model that combines rigorous academics with vocational training, fully compliant with the New Jersey Student Learning Standards, which includes 21st century life and career readiness standards. Students receive academic instruction in English, science, social studies, mathematics, physical education/health, computers, and career education tailored to specific learning styles based on their IEP. Students are required to participate in the New Jersey High School Proficiency Assessment or Alternative Proficiency Assessment State testing and earn a high school diploma. A portion of the school day is focused on vocational training aimed at the acquisition of skills to enter and succeed in the workforce and connections to supports to obtain and maintain employment. At age 16, students participate in high-impact community internships (Fedcap, n.d.).

College and Career Advising and Transition Planning

Transitioning from high school to postsecondary education and the workforce is an adjustment, and the fact that only 14% of people with disabilities earn a Bachelor's degree or higher and only 35% are employed indicates a greater need for transitional support. Student supports such as college and career advising and transition planning can help students understand what postsecondary opportunities exist and plan how the remainder of their K–12 experience will connect them to postsecondary education, vocational rehabilitation, workforce training, and other necessary supports and services for independence (Test et al., 2009). IDEA requires a transition plan is put in place for students when they are 16 years of age and used to guide future decisions. College and career advising and transition planning can begin as early as middle school not only to expose students to a variety of postsecondary options but also to start them on a path to successfully completing high school coursework necessary to transition to postsecondary education and work by clearly establishing expectations and goals. College and career advising should inform students of the various postsecondary options, accommodations, or special programs offered to students with disabilities so that students and their families can make better-informed decisions about the appropriate college or program for them (Rowe et al., 2014). Transition planning should clearly state how high school supports will be continued through the transition to postsecondary education and training and provide clear strategies to help students access ongoing supports and services (Test et al., 2009). WIOA

supports greater collaboration between schools and the vocational rehabilitation system, offering students more supports as they consider future careers and employment. With all these efforts, it is important to ensure that students with disabilities are not tracked into educational or career pathways that lead to lower level outcomes.

SPOTLIGHT



Youth Transition Program, Oregon

The [Youth Transition Program](#) (YTP) is a collaborative partnership between the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, Oregon Department of Education, University of Oregon, and local school districts to prepare students with disabilities for employment or career related postsecondary education or training. YTP provides services to students during their last 2 years of high school and continuing into their early postsecondary years. YTP operates in approximately 120 high schools in Oregon and receives a combination of state and local funds from participating education and rehabilitation agencies. The program prepares students for employment or postsecondary education or training by providing a comprehensive array of pre-employment transition activities and supports to help students achieve their secondary and postsecondary education and employment goals. Students participate in academic, vocational, independent living, and personal social skills instruction; individualized career planning and mentoring; paid employment and job training; and follow-up support for 1 year after leaving the program (University of Oregon, n.d.).

Career Pathways

Providing multiple pathways that connect academics and career preparation through flexible learning opportunities inside and outside of the classroom can help ensure students with disabilities are ready for both postsecondary education and work (Wagner, Newman, & Javitz, 2015). These flexible and varied pathways often involve partnerships with local businesses and community/technical colleges that give students an opportunity to apply their knowledge, make connections to real-world challenges, and learn about and explore various careers (Visher & Stern, 2015). Opportunities such as job shadowing, internships, apprenticeships, work-based learning, service learning, and career and technical education courses expose students to new experiences and opportunities and allow them to practice the application of content to work settings and acquire employability skills they may not learn otherwise in a traditional classroom. Research demonstrates that employers desire a range of core social-emotional, cognitive, and metacognitive skills, such as self-regulation, social awareness, adaptability, and the ability to communicate effectively, think critically, and solve problems (Prince, Saveri, & Swanson, 2017).

Career pathways that involve employers as mentors or counselors and take place in an academy or small school setting allow for stronger, more meaningful relationship building between students and adults that can help students develop the strong technical, interpersonal, and intrapersonal skills employers seek (Visher & Stern, 2015). It is important to ensure students with disabilities have access to multiple pathways that enable them to achieve success while pursuing their individual interests and goals.

SPOTLIGHT

Hall County Schools, Georgia



Hall County Schools in Georgia encourage all students to complete a pathway leading to a career. Students can choose a pathway in one of 17 Career Clusters and/or in the areas of advanced academics, world language, or fine arts, and they can take a core set of classes and electives based on the chosen field. Pathways lead to 2-year, 4-year, or technical colleges, or lead directly into a career of the student's choice. Within Hall County Schools is The Oaks at Lanier Career Academy, a school that serves all high schools in the district and provides students with career and technical education courses in hospitality, culinary arts, cosmetology, and marketing. The Oaks provides a limited number of students the opportunity to learn in a real-world environment by helping to manage and run one of six businesses: Corner Café coffee shop, Get Gifted gift shop, Bistro at the Oaks restaurant, Meeting and Events conference center, Design 360 personalized promotions lab, and Reflections Salon and Spa (Hall County Schools, n.d. a). With support provided by the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency whose primary goal is to “help people with disabilities become fully productive members of society by achieving independence and meaningful employment,” the district ensures students with disabilities have access to work-based learning opportunities through these career pathways, career and technical education courses, and work-based learning opportunities. Hall County Schools also offers a program called Project SEARCH to students with disabilities who have met all graduation requirements. Project SEARCH is offered in collaboration with Northeast Georgia Health System, Inc., and student interns participate in job training through total immersion in varying departments within Northeast Georgia Medical Center's Gainesville campus (Hall County Schools, n.d. b).

Dual and Concurrent Enrollment

When high school students have access to college-level coursework and spend time on a college campus, they often have a smoother transition to college life and the academic workload (College & Career Readiness & Success Center, 2017; Edmunds, 2010). Programs such as dual enrollment and concurrent enrollment

can better prepare students for postsecondary education in terms of both enrollment and persistence, and these programs may have unique benefits for students with disabilities (Swanson, 2008). Dual and concurrent enrollment not only help students earn college credit and become acclimated to postsecondary education but also may be an effective instructional strategy for older students with disabilities who remain in high school past age 18 (Hart, Grigal, Sax, Martinez, & Will, 2006). These students may benefit from taking classes on a college campus where they can interact with their peers and experience more independence and self-sufficiency than in high school. Dual and concurrent enrollment could encourage students who receive special education services to remain in high school through age 21 to continue working toward a standard high school diploma while also earning college credit. However, students with disabilities need to learn to advocate for themselves when they participate in postsecondary education; the supports that are available in K–12 schools for students with disabilities often do not exist in college.

**SPOTLIGHT**

Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment, Massachusetts

The Massachusetts [Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment \(ICE\)](#) initiative funds partnerships between school districts and public 2- and 4-year colleges and universities in Massachusetts to support high school students with intellectual disabilities in their pursuits to attend college. Students eligible for the grant program must be between the ages of 18 and 22, completed 4 years of high school, and able to receive special education services as documented through an IEP. Participating students are concurrently enrolled in academic, social, and career development experiences on the college campus while also receiving special education services through their high school. The Massachusetts ICE initiative provides transition support to students and their families and allows students to develop employability, self-advocacy, and life skills that will allow them to pursue their postsecondary goals. Students participate in personalized career planning, college courses related to their career interests, paid work and internships, and independent living and travel (Massachusetts Department of Higher Education, n.d.).

Personalized and Competency-Based Learning

Personalized learning allows instruction to be tailored to the interests, needs, and skills of the student, and it offers students diverse opportunities to engage in and direct their learning. A part of personalized learning is competency-based learning, which allows students to learn at their own pace, anywhere and any place (Surr & Redding, 2017). With personalized and competency-based learning, students can demonstrate their mastery of content in various ways, including portfolios, performances, and presentations. These varied

assessment methods are ideal for students with disabilities who may have different learning styles and need to demonstrate their knowledge in multiple formats (Parsi, Whittaker, & Jones, 2017). A student's IEP is a personalized approach to learning, which aligns with the increasing trend of personalized and competency-based learning that schools and educators are adopting. This approach gives teachers and school leaders an opportunity to more tightly connect the broader goals of a student's IEP with the more specific, personalized learning goals. Although personalized learning can provide many benefits for students with disabilities, school staff must be well supported and trained in these approaches to ensure that students do not fall behind and that they have the equitable supports necessary to succeed (Jones & Casey, 2015).

SPOTLIGHT



Performance Assessment for Competency Education, New Hampshire

The Performance Assessment of Competency Education (PACE) pilot builds on New Hampshire state policy that eliminated the traditional Carnegie Unit and allows for competency education in all schools. Under this new system, students demonstrate competencies not by the amount of time spent in a classroom or by passing a single cumulative test, but in multiple ways, including traditional tests, performances, and other activities. PACE offers a reduced level of standardized testing and locally developed common performance assessments aligned to statewide college and career ready competencies (New Hampshire Department of Education, n.d.). PACE provides students with disabilities and their peers multiple ways to demonstrate their learning, offers districts the flexibility to design assessments, and gives the state responsibility over providing a continuum of supports for districts building their capacity to implement the new assessment system (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2017). Early results documenting the effect of these performance assessments on learning for students with disabilities have been positive. For example, preliminary study findings show that districts implementing PACE were more successful than comparison districts at raising the Smarter Balanced scores of students with disabilities in eighth-grade math (Duffort, 2017).

Leveraging ESSA and IDEA to Promote College and Career Readiness for Students With Disabilities

This section examines how ESSA and IDEA, two major pieces of federal legislation, can align their efforts to better support CCR of students with disabilities.

When IDEA was reauthorized in 2004, it had a profound impact on the education of students with disabilities. Following the lead of NCLB, IDEA set higher expectations for student outcomes, consistent with those of all students, and it shined a light on progress toward rigorous CCR outcomes by including students with disabilities as an integral part of a state's accountability system. In 2014, Results Driven Accountability required states to develop a State Systemic Improvement Plan to ensure compliance with IDEA and improve educational outcome of students with disabilities.

As the new federal law governing K–12 education, ESSA underscores the importance of CCR for all students and provides states with a framework to design their accountability systems to improve outcomes for all students. Both ESSA and IDEA require states to develop plans that ensure students with disabilities have access to a rigorous curriculum and adequate supports and services that allow them to pursue their CCR goals and meet the state's accountability standards. State plans for ESSA and the State Systemic Improvement Plan should align to the maximum extent possible so that programs under each law work in a complementary manner to provide supports to students, teachers, and schools, and the goals of CCR are realized.

Several titles under ESSA also specifically complement IDEA, and their alignment can help prepare more students with disabilities for college, careers, and economic self-sufficiency.² For example, Title I of ESSA requires that all students are taught to high academic standards that prepare them to succeed in college and careers. Under Title I, states are encouraged to use more CCR indicators in their accountability system and state report cards, allowing schools that successfully prepare students for postsecondary education and the workforce to be recognized for their efforts (English, Rasmussen, Cushing, & Therriault, 2016). Under ESSA, there is a new provision for a state-defined alternate diploma for students with significant cognitive disabilities, which is supposed to be aligned with general state standards, but it may not carry the full weight of a traditional high school diploma and, therefore, may impact their ability for a successful transition to postsecondary opportunities. States need to ensure that students with disabilities, but especially students with significant cognitive disabilities, are not prevented from working toward the requirements of a regular high school diploma (Thurlow, Test, Lazarus, Klare, & Fowler, 2016).

States can address CCR in their ESSA state plans under Title I, Part A in two major areas. First, they can include CCR in the programmatic and use of funds sections of their plans by using CCR strategies, such as career pathways as a school improvement or turnaround strategy; infusing CCR into middle school through early college and career exploration; using CCR as a student support through college and career advising

² See the Appendix for further discussion of ESSA titles referenced throughout this brief and their alignment to IDEA.

and mentoring; or promoting district work-based learning opportunities. Second, states can address CCR in their accountability plans by including items like earning industry certifications; measuring participation in dual and concurrent enrollment or AP courses; alignment of K–12, higher education, and workforce measures; or looking at postgraduation outcomes such as postsecondary degree/certification attainment and employment. As outlined, several of these CCR strategies are available under ESSA can be used to specifically help support students with disabilities.

Title I, Part B of ESSA allows for an innovative system of assessment that could include competency-based assessments and allow students to demonstrate mastery of academic content in differentiated and personalized ways. IDEA includes provisions to support the development of appropriate accommodations or alternate assessments that are valid and reliable for assessing the performance of students with disabilities. IDEA also promotes the use of Universal Design for Learning (an educational framework based on research that guides individualized learning), and ESSA states that assessments must use Universal Design for Learning to ensure access for students with disabilities.

Title IV of ESSA, the Student Support and Academic Enrichment grant, can be particularly helpful in supporting CCR, as it includes career and technical education, college and career counseling, and dual and concurrent enrollment as allowable strategies to promote a well-rounded education (English, Cushing, Therriault, & Rasmussen, 2017). Specifically, one provision of IDEA working in concert with ESSA could help more students with disabilities be college and career ready. IDEA provides educational services to eligible students with disabilities beyond age 18 (based on the state, this could be between 19 and 26 years of age). Eligible students who have not yet met the requirements to graduate high school are likely to require ongoing support postschool, but often the high school setting at age 20 or 21 is not an ideal placement. ESSA allows support of dual enrollment classes, so it is possible that older students with disabilities who are still enrolled in high school could take dual enrollment classes at a postsecondary institution. Students can engage with their peers and earn college credit before they leave the more supportive K–12 system.

Title IV of ESSA also permits the use of technology to personalize learning, which can be used to support students with disabilities who need assistive technology to access the general education curriculum. Title IV is flexible and gives states and districts the ability to be creative in meeting the needs of their students in novel ways. This strategy could create well-defined pathways for students with disabilities.

Title II of ESSA is important as it supports professional development and allows states to develop strategies for integrating academic and career and technical education content and applied learning into instruction. As teachers become more aware of careers and industries, they are in a better position to design engaging and relevant curriculum, help students apply their knowledge to the real world, and explore career possibilities. Teachers of academic subjects, career and technical education, and special education can all participate in professional development together, promoting the sharing of pedagogical strategies that are particularly effective for helping students with disabilities prepare for college and careers.

Although ESSA provides positive support for professional development, the removal of the highly qualified teacher provisions from the law and from IDEA could lead to less qualified teachers in classrooms if states and school district leaders are not vigilant. However, states must still report data on the qualifications of teachers and their distribution among high and low-poverty schools, as well as indicate how they will ensure that ineffective teachers are not disproportionately assigned to teach low-income students and students of color.

In IDEA, an important provision related to CCR is the requirement to develop a transition plan for students when they turn 16, or before if the state requires it, to help students move from secondary to postsecondary activities. The transition plan considers the student's strengths, competencies, and goals, and it is developed with the input of the student, family, teachers, and other advisors/counselors. Although ESSA does not address transition planning for students with disabilities, it does allow funds under Title IV to be used for college and career planning, which can include the consideration of a specific career pathway (American Federation of Teachers, n.d.). Transition planning in IDEA and college and career planning in ESSA should be aligned to create an individualized pathway that could help students with disabilities successfully move from high school to postsecondary education and/or employment.

Guidance for State Leaders

To ensure all students are college and career ready, state leaders must use their authority to create a statewide culture of CCR and provide the supports necessary to districts and schools to meet the needs of students with disabilities. States can do this by taking action in a number of ways: aligning plans, policies, and priorities across various laws and programs; ensuring high quality and fidelity of implementation; convening state- and local-level stakeholders to set clear expectations; providing high-quality technical assistance to districts and schools; ensuring appropriate professional development of teachers, administrators, and other school staff; and more. This section provides suggestions and guidance to help states think about the connections between ESSA and IDEA, and how they can better support CCR for students with disabilities by coordinating efforts of these two major pieces of federal legislation.

- **High expectations and access to the general curriculum:** To start, states must make clear that students with disabilities will be held to high expectations, beginning in early grades. The assumption that all students will be college and career ready must permeate the culture and attitude of all educators. States can promote strong, positive messages about the achievements of students with disabilities and ensure that they promote high expectations and access to the general curriculum in state accountability plans, materials, technical assistance, and professional development. Both ESSA and IDEA require that students with disabilities have access to the general education curriculum and instruction, which might require the use of assistive technology. State leaders must ensure that students with disabilities are able to earn the most rigorous diploma

available, as opposed to placement in a lower-level academic track or earn a diploma or certificate that does not have value with higher education or employers.

- **Well-rounded education:** For students with disabilities to access and participate in the general education curriculum, which should be aligned to state CCR standards, states must ensure that districts and schools provide appropriate supports and accommodations to students with disabilities. This is a key tenet of IDEA, and Title IV of ESSA helps expand beyond high expectations and access to the general curriculum through the requirements of a well-rounded education. States can promote a well-rounded education through various activities, by focusing on improving access to college and career counseling, AP courses, dual and concurrent enrollment, and any other activities that support a well-rounded educational experience.
- **Career pathways and transition planning:** ESSA, along with the Perkins Act and WIOA, supports using career pathways to postsecondary education and work opportunities as a strategy for student success. IDEA's transition planning strategies fit naturally into a career pathways approach. Title IV ESSA funds can be used to provide well-trained counselors who can promote college and career advising and transition planning, and efforts to prepare students for college and career can start early in the elementary and middle grades. States can support professional development for career counselors, increase the number of career counselors, and provide comprehensive transition support and career and college planning for all students beginning in middle school.
- **Personalized and competency-based learning:** Students benefit from a personalized instructional approach that takes into account their strengths, needs, and career interests. IDEA has always supported personalized learning by developing a student's IEP and postsecondary transition plan. ESSA promotes personalized learning and pathways as well as the use of a broader range of assessments that can be based on growth and mastery, which are important aspects of competency-based learning. To ensure students with disabilities benefit from personalized and competency-based learning, states must ensure teachers have the skills needed to teach them. Both IDEA and ESSA funds can be used to help teachers personalize their instruction and could support joint training of general, special education, and career and technical education teachers.
- **Subgroup accountability:** ESSA requires states to track outcomes for students with disabilities in their accountability system. It is important that states set an appropriate "N size" for subgroup accountability so it does not discount students with disabilities. For example, if a state sets an N size of 30 for subgroup accountability for students with disabilities, and most of the schools in the state have fewer than 30 students with disabilities, then those schools will not have to account for the performance of those students. State plans should ensure the N size used for subgroup accountability for students with disabilities, as well as for other subgroups, will actually measure most, if not all, students in the state.
- **Alignment across policies and programs:** States should look holistically across ESSA, IDEA, and other important federal legislation such as the Perkins Act, WIOA, ADA, and Rehabilitation Act to better align and strengthen efforts to support CCR and education and workforce outcomes of students with disabilities.

Conclusion

States have an important role to play in ensuring students with disabilities have access to the most rigorous standards, receive the supports necessary to meet these standards, and are college and career ready. By continually examining the status and performance of students with disabilities, states can identify challenges and begin using and aligning ESSA and IDEA to improve services to students with disabilities. State efforts to continuously improve policy and strategies that increase equitable opportunities for students with disabilities are critical to improving education and workforce outcomes of students with disabilities and reducing the persistent gaps in outcomes between students with and students without disabilities.

Appendix. ESSA Titles Referenced and Alignment With IDEA

Title I of ESSA

Title I of ESSA authorizes competitive programs, noncompetitive programs, and accountability requirements. The purpose of Title I is to provide all students with the opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education and to close achievement gaps by providing various forms of supports to students considered most academically at-risk. Notably, Title I, Part A provides states with flexibility in the design of their statewide accountability system, which could include measures of college and career readiness. Furthermore, Title I, Part B permits states to develop an innovative system of assessment, which could include competency-based assessments that allow students to demonstrate mastery of academic standards in multiple, differentiated ways. Major provisions of Title I include:

1. Local education agency grants (Part A)
2. State plans (Part A) that include:
 - a. Academic content and achievement standards
 - b. Academic assessments in math, reading, and science
 - c. Accountability system and measures
 - d. Identification of schools in need of improvement
 - e. School support and improvement activities
 - f. School report cards
3. State assessments grants (Part B)
4. Education of migratory children (Part C)
5. Prevention and intervention programs for children and youth who are neglected, delinquent or at-risk (Part D)
6. Flexibility for equitable per-pupil funding (Part E)³

Title I of ESSA aligns with Part B of IDEA that includes provisions related to formula grants that assist states in providing a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment for students with disabilities up to 21 years of age. Some provisions of Part B of IDEA support the development and provision of appropriate accommodations or alternate assessments that are valid and reliable for assessing the performance of students. Part B of IDEA also provides technical assistance to schools implementing comprehensive or targeted support and improvement activities to improve academic achievement of students with disabilities. Additionally, Part B of IDEA authorizes alternative programming for students with disabilities who have been expelled from school or receive services while in correctional facilities.

³ For more information on Title I, see: http://www.ncsl.org/documents/educ/ESSA_summary_NCSL.pdf

Title II of ESSA

Title II of ESSA authorizes funds intended to increase the number of high-quality teachers and principals. Funds can be used for a variety of purposes, including recruiting and retaining teachers, reducing class sizes, and providing professional development. The purpose of these funds are twofold:

1. Student achievement: Increase student academic achievement with strategies such as improving teacher and principal quality and increasing the number of highly qualified teachers in the classroom and highly qualified principals and assistant principals in schools.
2. Accountability: Hold local educational agencies and schools accountable for improvements in student academic achievement.⁴

Title II of ESSA also aligns with Part B of IDEA. Some provisions of Part B of IDEA authorize professional capacity-building activities to improve outcomes for students with disabilities. Specifically, funds can be used to support improved delivery of direct services to students with disabilities, including technical assistance, personnel preparation, and professional development and training.

Title IV of ESSA

Title IV of ESSA includes a flexible block grant program, the Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants. This grant program authorizes activities in three areas:

1. Safe and healthy activities: Mental health awareness training, school-based counseling, student safety and violence prevention, professional development for specialized instructional support personnel, nutrition education, physical education, bullying and harassment prevention, and integrated systems of student and family supports
2. Well-rounded activities: College and career guidance programs, increasing access to accelerated coursework, such as International Baccalaureate, Advanced Placement, and dual/concurrent enrollment, using music and the arts to promote student engagement, STEM and computer science programs, foreign languages, environmental education, and any other activities that support a well-rounded educational experience
3. Technology activities: Educator professional development in the use of technology, building technology infrastructure, using blended learning projects, and providing students in rural communities with resources for digital learning experiences⁵

⁴ For more information on Title II, see: <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg20.html>.

⁵ For more information on Title IV, see: http://www.ascd.org/ASCD/pdf/siteASCD/policy/ESSA-Title-IV-FAQ_Mar32016.pdf.

Title IV of ESSA also aligns with various provisions of Part B of IDEA. Specifically, some provisions of Part B of IDEA authorize the development and implementation of transition programs to postsecondary education and careers, which includes the coordination of services across agencies involved in supporting the transition of students with disabilities to postsecondary activities. Part B of IDEA authorizes the use of technology in the classroom to enhance learning and maximize accessibility to the general education curriculum for students with disabilities.

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