As Effort to Transform K-12 Education Policy Shifts to States,

AFT Members Must Get Involved in ESSA Implementation

AFT members and their local and state leaders across the country are mobilizing to make sure the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act fulfills the promise of the new federal K-12 education law for a new era in our public schools.

“ESSA turns the page on the broken policies of No Child Left Behind,” said AFT President Randi Weingarten. “This is a new era of possibility. Decision-making should be left to the states—and to educators, parents and community members who are the true stakeholders. Teachers know what works in the classroom, and their voices must be heard as the new law is implemented.”

That process already has begun, and it will be crucial for educators to be involved in their states and school districts. While federal officials at the Department of Education have released some guidelines, the real action in this effort will be in the state capitals and local school board meetings as state and school district officials reclaim the local authority over public education that the new law returns to them.

After more than a decade of federal edicts, rules and funding conditions under No Child Left Behind, the new ESSA expresses Congress’s intent that the policies shaping public schools will now be written in the communities where those schools and their students reside.

The AFT has already launched efforts to ensure that the implementation of the law preserves the victories won when Congress passed the ESSA. The new law transforms federal policy in several ways, including getting the federal government out of state and district evaluation and accountability decisions, opening opportunities for evidence-based supports to help struggling schools, continuing targeted funding for children in need and maintaining high standards for paraprofessionals.

“The ESSA gives us the opportunity to remake local rules and revise state law to reclaim the promise of public schools where rationale and proven practices help all students succeed,” Weingarten said.

AFT leaders at all levels are urging educators, parents and other community stakeholders to stay engaged in the implementation work over the next 18 months.

In [**state or city**], [**AFT state or local leader**] said members are organizing efforts to make their voices heard as the law is implemented and polices are revised here. “Approval of the ESSA was a huge victory,” said [**state or local leader**]. “Now we must bring that victory home to [**state**] and the students in our classrooms.” [**Add more here about any state or local mobilization efforts—meetings, forums, committees, etc.] [Include a link where members can sign up to be involved, or phone number to call.**]

Weingarten testified before the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee during its first hearing on implementation of the new law. She described the intense interest in the impact of the ESSA among AFT members. Teachers are asking: “What will be different? We want things to be different,” she told the committee. “They are fighting for the public schools their children deserve.”

Speaking on behalf of the AFT and its members, Weingarten added: “We stand ready to partner at every level with all who share the goal of bringing back the joy of teaching and learning.”

Education policy-making—and decision-making—now rests with the states and school districts. “But,” Weingarten said in her Senate testimony, “states will need time to get it done and get it right.” She renewed the AFT’s call for a moratorium on the consequences of high-stakes testing while states are creating new systems and policies to implement the law.

Moving away from high-stakes testing, punitive sanctions and other failed strategies of the past will be hard work, Weingarten said. But AFT members are ready and “really want to do this work,” she added.

“We have a real chance to make our public schools places where teaching and learning are driven by joy, not fear,” she said. “If AFT members and our allies stay united and make our voices heard, that will happen.”

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