## Regional Proposals for the Success of Every Student:
# Common Sense Policy

In early December of 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act became law, signed into effect by President Barak Obama. This legislation marks the most recent reauthorization of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), replacing the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. While the Every Student Succeeds Act maintains annual standardized testing, the bill serves to limit the federal government's purview on PK-12 education (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016). In doing so, the new legislation shifts educative power from the federal level to the state and local educational agencies (McGuinn, 2016). This brief puts forth several policy proposals from local education agencies and the Coalition of Rural Appalachian Schools, offering the pedagogic expertise of teachers, principals, superintendents, and university faculty in the areas of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to policymakers and legislators.

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### The Common Sense of State-Local Education Efforts

States across the nation have been calling for increased involvement and more control in the education of their students. In alignment, with the U.S. Constitution, the responsibility of K-12 (or PK-12) education resides in the jurisdiction of the states (Spellings, 2005). Examples of states lobbying for the local educational agencies to regain political responsibility for the academic achievement of students have already received national attention. For example, in states like Texas, organizations such as The Public Education Visioning Institute (2008), in collaboration with the Texas Association of School Administrators and Kentucky's Schlechty Center, have called for bolstering an equitable "state-local partnership" over federal mandates that foster state and local governed educational systems that function in better providing "the learning experiences to help students succeed in today's world" (p. 3).

The Every Students Succeeds Act (ESSA)

answers that call, recognizing the constitutional right and responsibility of states, providing them and their respective local education agencies the opportunity to respond to needs of their students. This new flexibility manifests in the areas of teacher evaluation, evidence-based school improvement, highly qualified teachers, assessment, accountability, and teacher and leader academies.

This policy brief presents suggestions and recommendations regarding ESSA developed by the Coalition of Rural Appalachian Schools (C.O.R.A.S.) and the administrators and educators of the several local educational agencies that the coalition represents. C.O.R.A.S. recognizes that ESSA has taken the educative authority out of the hands of the federal government and has placed it back in the hands of the state and local districts where it rightfully belongs. However, this shift in governance and regulations will be in vain unless the states' policymakers and legislators remain attentive to the constituents and stakeholders at the local level where

teaching and learning occur.

These ESSA-related recommendations do not attempt to resolve every concern but instead address critical issues that Ohio policy makers must consider. C.O.R.A.S. field practitioners developed these 6 categorical recommendations for the Ohio Department of Education (ODE). The work is first and foremost based on the extensive expertise and experience of the several committee members comprised of district superintendents, central office administrators, school principals, classroom teachers, and university faculty, all of which worked cooperatively to cultivate the various recommendations. Ultimately this brief represents an ongoing collaboration between scholarship and practice in education to ensure that the new Every Student Succeeds Act lives up to its name in the state of Ohio.

## Recent Research

### Teacher Evaluation

According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2012a), "Practitioners, researchers, and policy makers agree that most current teacher evaluation systems do little to help teachers improve or to support personnel decision making" (p. 8). Current methods, including value-added models (VAMs), make the assumption that a single test, teacher influence, and the growth of classmates and other aspects of the classroom context are adequate and effective factors for measuring student learning alone; however current evidence does not uphold this supposition (Darling-Hammond et al., 2012a).

Darling-Hammond et al. (2012b) suggested that any evaluation system for teacher evaluation must "create a coherent, well-grounded approach to developing teaching" and should be "crafted collectively by state and district leaders with teachers and their representatives" (p. 4). This includes establish-

ing common statewide standards and local evaluation systems that align to those same state standards (Darling-Hammond et al., 2012b).

Riordan et al. (2015) noted the increasing impetus to design and implement "common, rigorous, statewide teacher evaluation systems" (p. 1). Rigorous systems cited included a number of features for teacher evaluation that prevents one factor from distorting the others. In many states Student Learning Objectives are integrated along with formal classroom observation and walk-throughs and includes student and school performance gains as well (Lachlan-Haché, 2015).

### Evidence-Based School Improvement

Evidence-based improvement is a concept that educational policymakers have borrowed from the medical profession's evidence-based medicine movement (Wrigley, 2015). It is easy to understand why policy and practice based on evidence is so widely accepted; it makes sense that practitioners and stakeholders would want the implementation of strategies based on evidence (Hammersley, 2005).

Hattie is one of the leading voices in evidence-based practice (Wrigley, 2015). Hattie (2009) has conceptualized evidence-based achievement as *visible learning* after examining over 800 meta-analyses on teaching strategies that influence student learning. Hattie's high-yield evidence-based strategies for the improvement of student achievement were ones that helped "students reach the state where they become their own teachers, they can seek out optimal ways to learn new material and ideas, they can seek resources to help them in this learning, and when they can set appropriate and more challenging goals" (p. 37).

However, as Park et al. (2013) have stat-

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The Every Student Succeeds Act has ended the federal government's involvement in prescribing and influencing teacher evaluation systems across the nation. ESSA does not require states to set up teacher evaluation systems based in "significant" part on students" test scores, which was a key component of the U.S. Department of Education state-waiver system. The law permits states to re-design and submit descriptions of their new accountability systems to the U.S. Department of Education. (National Education Association, 2016a)

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## Highly Qualified Teaching

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ed, "strategies for the utilization and adaptation of evidence-based quality improvement methods should themselves be based on a foundation of evidence" (p. 4). As Wrigley (2015) has reminded, the evidence-based movement in medicine was a profession-led effort, while for educators it has come "from outside and above within the context of deprofessionalisation" (p. 278). Therefore, as Sheard and Sharples (2016) acknowledged, an imperative exists to better understand "how school leaders engage with the concept of evidence-based practice and how this engagement empowers them to move their school improvement agendas forward" (p. 669).

### Highly Qualified Teaching

Although ESSA eliminates the "highly qualified" provision of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), specialization and having "profession-ready" teachers remains a concern (NEA, 2016b; Phillips, 2010). Under NCLB highly qualified meant, "Teachers must be college graduates, fully certified by the state in which they teach, and have demonstrated content knowledge in their subject area" (Safier, 2007). The intent of the requirement was to ensure that students in high-poverty and predominantly minority schools were more likely to have an experienced teacher in the classroom (Imazeki & Goe, 2009; Phillips, 2010; Safier, 2007).

However, the NCLB provision was unable to solve a number of the underlying factors that the distribution of highly qualified teachers. Teacher retention has been found to be a major contributing factor. Imazeki and Goe (2009) found that challenges included teacher preferences, institutional policies and constraints, and school and community preferences. That is, "teachers make choices about the schools and the districts in which they want to teach" (p. 4). Often it is the best teachers who decide to leave high-needs schools (Imazeki & Goe, 2009).

Marszalek (2010) found that "teachers who first complete teacher education programs and who are placed in teaching positions that correspond to their certification areas have a strong positive influence on student achievement" (p. 23). Additionally, Marszalek's data indicated that "teachers who have only a content degree . . . and work in

the classroom without first gaining full certification may have a negative impact on student achievement" (p. 23). As a result, Marszalek stated, "Highly qualified teachers have essential knowledge and skills unavailable to content-only specialists" (p. 23). In other words, "teahcers who have participated in approved teacher education coursework understand how students learn and how to facilitate learning" (p. 23).

### Assessment

Hattie and Timperley (2007) identified feedback as being "in the top 5 to 10 highest influences on [student] achievement" (p. 31). Likewise, O'Farrell (2002) supported the importance of feedback, stating, "Assessment should provide feedback to students on their progress towards the achievement of learning outcomes" (p. 6). Extending this thought, O'Farrell stated, "Timely feedback is an important part of continuous assessment as it informs the learner on how well students are progressing and how they can improve" (p. 6).

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) (2011) asserted that using data to support instructional decision making requires making data a part of the continuous improvement cycle, teaching students to examine and learn from their own data, establishing a clear school-wide vision for the use of data, and fostering systems for a data-driven culture within the school. More precisely, NAESP maintained that schools needed to "provide feedback to students that is timely, specific, well formatted, and constructive" (p. 4). To accomplish this effectively, schools should have the data readily available for the decision-making process.

Another important factor that must be considered in any discussion about assessment is setting cut/passing scores. Zieky and Perie (2004) emphasized that "major steps . . . must be followed to set reasonable cut [i.e. "passing"] scores" (p. 2). These steps include determining if cut scores will be useful, selecting the appropriate performance levels, describing what students need to be able to do to reach each performance level, setting provisional cut scores, establishing operational cut scores, and evaluating the results of using the cut scores (p. 2). Setting cut scores also requires a number of complex issues and methods to do so.

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> The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) eliminates the Highly Qualified Teacher (HQT) provision from the previous NCLB law for teachers. Therefore, federal law reverts to whatever standard states have for state certification of teachers. We recommend that states advocate for "full state certification" as a minimum requirement for entry into the classroom to ensure that all teachers are "profession-ready." (National Education Association, 2016b)

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Of utmost importance is that passing scores for all assessments be reasonable and equitable (Zieky & Perie, 2004).

### Accountability

Accountability has been a part of the education discussion for over four decades (Lopez, 1970). Similar to the term "evidence-based," accountability is a word that education borrowed from another discipline, business. Originally it referred to "the process of expecting each member of an organization to answer to someone for doing specific things according to specific plans and against certain timetables to accomplish tangible performance results" (Lopez, 1970, p. 231).

Cook-Harvey and Stosich (2016) posit that ESSA offers the potential to expand the accountability paradigm to include "the quality of students' opportunities to learn, the school environment that supports learning experiences, and access to equitable and adequate resources" (p. 1). Suggestions for pioneering accountability systems incorporate measures for college and career readiness; flexibility for innovation; news systems of assessment; and recognizing the professional capacity of principals, teachers, and specialized service providers (Cook-Harvey & Stosich, 2016).

Likewise, Darling-Hammond et al. (2016) presented a number of principles underlying a much broader notion of accountability—a notion founded on the idea that "accountability should be designed to help leverage improvement, not just to label or sanction schools" (p. 2). The "pathways" envisioned call for an accountability system that is

- Reciprocal and comprehensive, with each level of the system—school, district, state, and federal government—held accountable for the contributions it must make to produce an effective system;
- Focused on capacity building, including . . . improvement processes to support high-quality education;
- Performance based in its means for gauging progress and success; and
- Informed by multiple measures that illuminate what is working and what needs to be improved. . . . (p. 3)

Milligan (2015) has put forth the idea of a school-centered evidence based accountability system that looks beyond achievement scores alone. According to Milligan, "As educators struggle as to how to best capture what a school is accomplishing, artifacts in addition to test scores as evidence would seem to be the paramount to demonstrate improvement" (p. 462).

### Teacher and School Leader Academies

Zeichner and Conklin (2016) examined the way in which research on "innovative" and "groundbreaking" alterative pathways to certification has been misused in discussions and dialogues relating to the teacher education. The researchers offered several specific suggestions for improving the quality of this debate. These suggestions include "greater transparency in the process of reform, better communication between researchers and stakeholders, using research that has been vetted to inform the debates, and genuinely exploring different policy options for teacher education." Zeichner (2016) warns, "[P]olicymakers should consider carefully the extant evidence about the nature and impact of different pathways into teaching, including the entrepre-neurial, stand-along programs that ad-vocates proclaim to be the future of teacher preparation" (p. 3). Similarly, research would indicate that adequate thought should be given to leadership programs for principal preparation (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005; Harvard & Holland, 2011).

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## Recommendations

After a series of democratic organizational meetings, the team participants, with the support of C.O.R.A.S. members, established key recommendations for critical aspects of ESSA. These components fall under the topical headings of teacher evaluation, evidence-based school improvement, highly qualified teaching, assessment, accountability (including local report cards and non-academic gap closing), and teacher and school leader academies.

### Concerning Teacher Evaluation

- Remove the Student Growth Measures (SGM) as a separate component of the evaluation (currently 50%) and incorporate SGM into the performance component of the evaluation with an appropriately created rubric.
- Require the trained evaluator to rate the teacher's performance on SGM based on evidence as described in the rubric. This mirrors what is done in all other areas of the performance component of the evaluation. At the beginning of the school year, the evaluator and teacher should mutually decide what assessments (evidence) will be used throughout the year to later rate the teacher's SGM performance on the performance rubric.
- The evidence collected for SGMs could include: Teacher level Value-Added data, Building level Value-Added data, vendor assessments, local created assessments, etc.
- ODE should create a State approved "Assessment Bank" for SGM as an additional **resource** that teachers and administrators could use when collecting evidence to rate a teacher's SGM effectiveness.

### Concerning Evidence-Based School Improvement

- Develop a Data Dashboard that provides districts, buildings, and classrooms the necessary access to do item analysis
- Provide support for Wrap-Around Services - Consideration should be given to how the state could facilitate collaboration between schools and outside agencies that support students and families and provide funds to place these on-site services.

### Concerning Highly Qualified Teachers and Teacher Equity

- Standards outlined by Ohio Revised Code (ORC) 3319.074 should be minimally followed by the ODE.
- Do not require subject area expertise for special education core academic classes, inclusion settings of core academic classes, and intervention specialists who teach students eligible for the alternate assessment in seven through twelfth grade.
- Lessen the burden to prove Local Equitable Access for Comprehensive Continuous Improvement Plan (CCIP) to ESSA minimal requirements.
  - Differentiate the requirements placed on HQT component of CCIP for Rural/Small Town, Urban, and Suburban school districts; this requires a great burden in completion of the Local Equitable Access plan placed on Rural/Small Town districts.
  - Provide current data through Collaboration Center to allow proper analysis and planning for improvement.
- The standards outlined by ORC 3319.074, ORC 3319.22, and Ohio Administrative Code (OAC) 3301-51-01, (a teacher is licensed in area s/he is teaching) should be the only requirement for Highly Qualified.

### Concerning Assessment

- Immediate, timely feedback is needed for all assessments.
- End of Course (EOC) Exams need to provide timely feedback, item analysis, and sample problems to aid districts in improving instruction and preparing students.
- ACT is a concern - A college readiness assessment is not appropriate for every student; a change to ACT would require additional changes to curriculum again.
- For both EOC exams and ACT, remediation free/passing scores need to be lowered to a reasonable level (Consider using average college acceptance scores).
- Consider differentiated designations on diplomas for students not needing remediation.
- Maintain *Adaptive testing* which provides immediate feedback (to drive instruction).

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- Tests should be scheduled later in the year, allowing for more instruction.
- Alternative assessments should be determined on individual student basis; Reinstitute the waiver for exceeding 1% on Alternative Assessments on an individual basis with justification.

## Concerning Accountability/LRC/Non-Academic Gap Closing

- *N-size must remain consistent*
  - We recommend that N-size stay the same (30) but if compelled to change then go no lower than 25; argue margin of error is greater the lower the N size.
- *Non-Academic Indicator (must be student data)*
  - The recommendation is that a measure of the **reduction in the chronic absenteeism rate be used for this indicator**. The yearly target for improving this chronic absenteeism rate should be realistic.
- *Prepared for Success*
  - We recommend that earning 9 credit hours via CCP would be calculated as a full point in the base formula rather than CCP course completion being a 0.3 add-on. The new, more stringent requirements to take CCP courses are evidence as to why CCP courses merit this point value in the base formula. Further, earning a passing score on ASVAB and earning an associated degree should each equate to 0.3 points in this formula.
- *Retesting*
  - The recommendation is that first attempts at end-of-course exams are the only "attempts" counted in the indicators met rating. Passing rates for retesting should be reported but not factored into the indicators met rating.

## Concerning Teacher and School Leader Academies

- States must be extremely careful about authorizing preparation academies. These Academies must be a partnership between Universities, Districts and Communities.
- Academies must have the following:
  - District, University and Community Partnerships that include onsite preparation
  - Meet existing licensure requirements, effective teacher skill sets, and Law and Finance components
  - Contain job embedded intern-ships and externships with district level support and incentives for participation
  - Meet all Ohio and National Standards for teachers and building level leaders
- School Leader Academies must prepare educators to understand and impact the following:
  - Elements of Good Teaching, Effective Hiring, Retention and Evaluation Practices;
  - Building Culture & Ethics and Professionalism;
  - Management of Human Capital, Conflict/Disruption Resolution & Managerial Tasks;
  - Networking with Community Services; Differing Roles and Responsibilities; and
  - Serving as Change Agents.
- Do not provide funding streams/policies to privilege independent programs without evidence.
- Analyze costs and benefits for different approaches to preparation, not just whether teachers raise student achievement.
- Monitor provisions in state and federal policies to prevent further stratification.
- Push all programs to meet high standards for preparation of educational professionals.

### Accountability (including Local Report Card & Non-Academic Gap Closing)

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> The Every Student Succeeds Act calls for state-designed accountability systems, ends the era of No Child Left Behind's one-size-fits-all approach to accountability, and severely limits the U.S. Department of Education's power to make policy—e.g., by granting waivers to the law. (National Education Association, 2015)

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## Final Thoughts

The six categories of recommendations presented here do not represent of a comprehensive overview of concerns that a districts or a region, such as Appalachian Ohio, may have regarding the provisions of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). However, they characterize the heart of ESSA, which is a sensible and rigorous collaboration between state and local agencies in the education of our children. A state-dominant enterprise is unable to foster the learning experiences that are appropriate and applicable to students of the local community; a purely decentralized locally-driven arrangement does not have the necessary resources to ensure that education prepares each student to become active participants greater democratic society.

The recommendations put forth in this document are the beginning of that collaborative endeavor. We initiate a dialogue with the state on behalf of our staff members, our stakeholders and, most importantly, our students. We realize that will be an ongoing effort, but we also realize the significance of beginning the conversation now. As American author and management consultant, Margaret Wheatley once said, "All great things begin with a conversation between two people." We believe that the same holds true in our state and local educational entities. Together state-local relationships must remain vibrant and reciprocal relation-ships to ensure that every student does in fact succeed.

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> There is growing agreement among educators, policy makers, and researchers that the focus on test-based accountability that has proliferated since the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) is insufficient for ensuring that all students have access to the meaningful learning experiences that can prepare them for success in college, career, and life.
> (Cook-Harvey & Stosich, 2016, p. 1)

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