



**Comments of NJPSA Executive Director Patricia Wright
Before the
Joint Committee on the Public Schools
on
State Efforts to Implement the Every Student Succeeds Act
October 11, 2016**

Thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts on implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act. We represent over 9000 school leaders who are both hopeful and anxious to see how this new law will impact their schools and districts. As a former teacher, reading specialist, supervisor, assistant principal, principal and superintendent I am excited to be part of this discussion as we explore the potential impact of ESSA on education in NJ.

Under NCLB, school leaders were forced to lead in an atmosphere that concentrated heavily on labeling schools as failing based on test scores and on threatening sanctions instead of providing targeted and effective support.

Through the ESEA waiver, NJ was able to develop its own plan but still within federal mandates like adoption of college and career ready standards and teacher/principal evaluation systems that include measures of student growth. NJ already had a long history of setting rigorous standards so we were already meeting the first mandate. The implementation of new evaluation systems became a strong focus in NJ with the advent of Achieve NJ.

Now we welcome the promise of ESSA - the opportunity to provide targeted support and resources, while allowing states, districts and schools the flexibility we need to decide how we can best meet our goals, serve our students and assess our success. ESSA retains key accountability measures to help identify schools and students in need of assistance, but allows us to look beyond just test scores at other components of effective schools that support the growth of the whole child. Measures such as school climate, social and emotional learning, student engagement. While test scores have their place, ESSA allows us to broaden the discussion on accountability to fairly address the components of quality schooling that every principal knows make a real difference in overall student achievement.

I would like to highlight a component of ESSA that is very important not only to our members but to our teachers and our students. In the last few years under our waiver, NJ's school leaders have worked tirelessly to ensure that their students are receiving high quality standards-based instruction and that teachers are evaluated using new frameworks. They also led the implementation of a new assessment – PARCC. In order to do this work the job of the principal shifted greatly from manager to instructional leader. Educational research proves that effective school leadership is the second most important, in-school factor that impacts classroom instruction and student achievement, particularly in schools with the greatest challenges. Principals want to be the instructional leaders of their school, yet competing demands and compliance- based activities often pull them away from focusing on improving teacher practice

and student learning. **This must be their focus. In order to make this shift, leaders need opportunities for professional learning. Often leaders are focused on providing quality professional learning opportunities, yet they have little time for their own learning.**

For the past decade, members of NJPSA and our national affiliates have consistently asked for the investment in leadership growth and development. This request was heard with ESSA.

But, we now need the State to take advantage of the ESSA provisions (Section 2101(c)(3)) that provide for a real opportunity for leadership development by allowing states to reserve up to 3% of district Title II allotments for statewide school leadership efforts.

NJPSA has already proposed new ideas and partnerships to the DOE. These partnership proposals focus on:

- the preparation and support of school leaders in high need schools,
- building instructional leadership capacity linked to our state's educational vision,
- expanding the reach of the New Jersey Leadership Academy which focuses leadership training on teams of superintendents, principals and supervisors,
- Providing long overdue assistance and support to principals and leaders responsible for early childhood learning programs to ensure alignment with elementary schools, effective transitions from preschool to kindergarten, staff support and increased parent and community engagement.

These are just a few of the statewide needs and issues that would be addressed with this set aside and I believe that the investment will reap great rewards in the instruction provided in our schools.

ESSA requires the DOE to work collaboratively with all stakeholders when developing the ESSA implementation plan. I applaud the efforts of the NJDOE to reach out to our association and many other stakeholders in order to begin this conversation. These include organizations representing educators, parents, taxpayers, the business community, ELL/Special Education organizations, the preschool community and community organizations that advocate for our students.

Conclusion

Thank you for holding this conversation today. NJPSA and I look forward to working together in the best interests of all New Jersey students.