Recommendations for Advancing Personalized Learning Under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

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Introduction

The December 2015 enactment of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) marks an important turning point in federal education policy. After fifteen years of a strong federal presence under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, Congress decided to give states significant flexibility in how they design their education systems. While this flexibility presents states with an unprecedented opportunity to transform their approach to teaching and learning, it also has the potential to jeopardize success if implementation is not high quality. States must be thoughtful in how they design education systems that align accountability, school improvement, assessment, educator workforce, and extended learning opportunity policies to create a cohesive system that prepares all students for success from cradle to career. This aligned system, established in partnership with districts, communities, and leaders across sectors, should ensure that every student benefits from a personalized education where instruction and supports are aligned to individual interests and needs. Fortunately, ESSA provides a number of high-leverage opportunities to advance a vision for personalized learning throughout each major element of the education system. This guidance will help states identify and explore these opportunities as they begin to design their state's approach to implementation of ESSA.

Effective implementation must begin with the design process. As states consider adoption of any recommendation in this guidance, it is important to establish a clear, high quality definition for personalized learning. This will ensure that every stakeholder in the system understands the core elements essential to successful transformation. KnowledgeWorks recommends that states define personalized learning as a teaching and learning framework in which:

- **Instruction is aligned to rigorous college- and career-ready standards and the social and emotional skills students need to be successful in college and career;**

- **Instruction is customized, allowing each student to design learning experiences aligned to his or her interests;**

- **The pace of instruction is varied based on individual student needs, allowing students to accelerate or take additional time based on their level of mastery;**

- **Educators use data from formative assessments and student feedback in real-time to differentiate instruction and provide robust supports and interventions so that every student remains on track to graduation; and**

- **Students and parents have access to clear, transferable learning objectives and assessment results so they understand what is expected for mastery and advancement.**

KnowledgeWorks hopes states find this guidance useful as they consider the possibility of implementing a vision for personalized learning that aligns federal, state, and local policies to maximize success for all students. The document is divided into five sections: Accountability, School Improvement, Assessment, Educator Workforce, and Extended Learning Opportunities. States are encouraged to explore each section in depth but to not lose sight of its relationship to the other components of the system. Each section of this document consists of the following elements:

1. **Opportunities:** A description of the flexibilities within ESSA that states can leverage to advance personalized learning.

2. **Recommendations:** Strategies for leveraging these federal flexibilities to build a high quality personalized learning system.

3. **Guiding Questions for State and Local Alignment:** Questions that states should explore with stakeholders as they look to integrate these recommendations into an aligned personalized learning system. Questions are grouped into three themes – college and career readiness, equity, and continuous improvement – to ensure stakeholders address each key area in their design process.

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Overarching Themes

As states think through aligning the new opportunities provided by ESSA to their systems of accountability, school improvement, assessment, educator workforce, and extended learning opportunities, KnowledgeWorks recommends they focus on three overarching concepts that will drive a high quality education system:
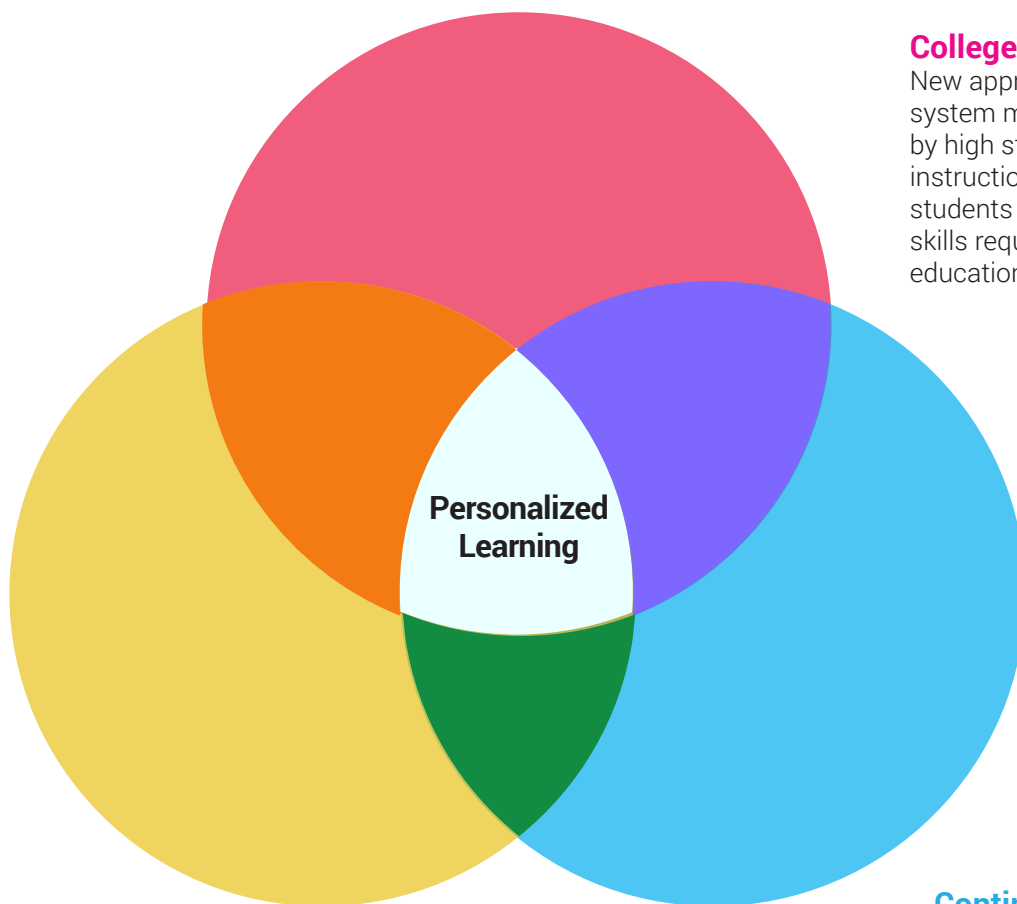
College and Career Readiness
New approaches to the education system must be accompanied by high standards and rigorous instruction, ensuring that all students have the knowledge and skills required for success in higher education and in the workforce.

Personalized Learning

Equity
As innovative approaches to education take root as a result of rethinking current systems, all students must have access to opportunities that meet their individual needs. At the same time, supports and interventions must be in place to ensure that schools have the resources and expertise necessary to close achievement gaps.

Continuous Improvement
The process of implementing new, personalized approaches to education will result in successes and challenges. At all levels, the system must adopt data-driven strategies to evaluate system performance and make intentional adjustments to maximize outcomes.

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Accountability

Accountability systems in personalized learning environments align to the expectations of college and career while incentivizing deeper levels of learning so every student is challenged and every student succeeds. Comprehensive and readily available data on multiple measures of student and system performance underpin the success of these systems, enabling stakeholders to make improvements in real-time.

Opportunities:

- ESSA provides states with significant flexibility to design accountability systems that align to the state's vision for college and career success. States must establish long term goals with measurements of interim progress for all students and subgroups of students based on academic performance on state assessments, graduation rates, and progress in achieving English language proficiency for English learners (ELs). States' systems must include academic indicators and at least one measure of school quality or student success (which may or not may not be academically focused). The academic indicators must include academic performance on the annual assessments and on the state's long-term goals, student growth or other statewide academic indicator for elementary and middle schools, high school graduation rates, and progress in achieving English proficiency for ELs.

- States also have significant flexibility in how they weight the indicators in their accountability system except the academic indicators must carry substantial weight and in the aggregate, must carry much greater weight than the measures of school quality or student success.

- The law requires states to meaningfully differentiate all public schools annually according to school and subgroup performance on the indicators in their system but does not set parameters on states for how to satisfy this requirement.

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Recommendations:

ESSA provides states with an important opportunity to develop new accountability systems that align to the state's vision for college and career success. As states explore this opportunity, they should create accountability indices that incorporate the following best practices for advancing personalized learning:

- **Include Personalized Learning Indicators –** Incorporate a selection of personalized learning indicators in the state's accountability system to incentivize adoption of personalized learning strategies.

- **Emphasize Growth to Proficiency –** States should place substantial weight on growth measures to ensure that stakeholders can identify exactly where a student is in his or her learning trajectory and set rigorous goals to ensure each student progresses at a rate of growth that will ensure mastery of K-12 standards and aligned competencies by high school graduation.

- **Balance Accountability Across Each Level of the System –** In addition to the minimum, essential goals and measures identified by the federal government for all states to monitor, states should include a set of state-level goals and measures that align with the state's vision of student success and local goals and measures unique to each district's vision for teaching and learning.

- **Incentivize Deeper Levels of Mastery –** States should develop an accountability system that tracks the growth of student performance in real-time so stakeholders have access to more immediate information on student progress to inform instruction and practice continuous improvement. States can accomplish this by tracking the percentage of students that enter a school off-track, the percentage of students that have advanced to on-track at key points throughout the year, and the percentage of students who have progressed to an advanced or honors level.

- **Make Continuous Improvements to the Accountability System –** States should design dynamic accountability systems that have the ability to adapt when necessary to improve teaching and learning. While adaptability is critical, states should be able to demonstrate why a proposed change will improve student learning for all students and subgroups of students. Changes should not occur when they will threaten the overall goals or sustainability of the reform effort.

Examples of Personalized Learning Indicators

Academic Indicators
- Rate of growth to proficiency on state assessments for all core subjects
- Closing the achievement gap on state assessments
- Mastery of deeper levels of academic competencies
- On-track to graduate in 3, 4, 5, and 6 years

Measures of School Quality or Student Success
- College credit earned in high school (e.g. early college high school programs)
- Mastery of social and emotional competencies (e.g. critical thinking or persistence)
- Access to multiple, personalized pathways for mastery of competencies

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Guiding Questions for State and Local Alignment

As states engage stakeholders in the design of a new accountability system under ESSA, they should consider the following questions to ensure implementation is high quality and aligned at each level of the education system.

State Role
The state's role is to set the vision for college and career readiness and to measure school progress toward achieving this vision.

Local Role
The district's role is to design and implement a teaching and learning framework that will ensure each student achieves the state's vision for college and career readiness.

College and Career Readiness

Questions for States

- What is the state's vision of a successful high school graduate?

- What long-term goals and measurements of interim progress will the state establish to ensure ambitious gains in school and student achievement? How will the state transition to these new requirements?

- What measures will the state select for its accountability system? How will the state weight these indicators to advance the state's vision of a successful high school graduate?

Questions for Districts

- How can the district, in partnership with the community, align its teaching and learning framework to the state's vision of a successful high school graduate?

- What long-term goals and measurements of interim progress will the district establish?

- Are there goals and indicators beyond those required by the state that the district wants to include in its accountability system to ensure all students graduate college and career ready?

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Continuous Improvement

- What measures and practices can the state incorporate into its accountability system to ensure the system has the capacity to meet the needs of all learners? Should the state include any of these measures in its accountability system?

- What steps can the state take to support districts in collecting and reporting accountability information in real-time?

- How can the state better align its accountability and school improvement systems to ensure accountability data is accessible, timely and useful to teachers, parents, and relevant partners across sectors?

- How will the district track progress toward state and local accountability goals and make necessary improvements in real-time?

- Can the district currently collect all of the data points necessary to satisfy state and local accountability, reporting, and continuous improvement policies? If not, how can the district reallocate resources to support state and local efforts towards continuous improvement?

Equity

- Are there additional indicators the state wants to include in its accountability system to advance equity other than performance on state assessments, graduation rate, and English language proficiency? How might the state incentivize closure of achievement gaps, resource equity, and access to high-quality teachers and learning experiences?

- How can the state incorporate growth measures into the accountability system to provide an accurate picture of each student's learning trajectory?

- How can the district build its capacity through partnerships with the community leaders across sectors to ensure every student has the opportunity to achieve the state's vision of a successful graduate?

- How can district and community partners use personalized learning indicators to incentivize student-centered instructional practices that meet the needs of each student?

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School Improvement

A proactive system of supports and interventions is central to an effective personalized learning approach. Educators must have access to rich data on student performance and resources to provide aligned supports and facilitate continuous improvement. In the few cases when end-of-year interventions are necessary, an extensive diagnostic review will help stakeholders develop a plan to ensure all students progress at a sufficient rate of growth to get back on track in time for graduation.

Opportunities:

- ESSA requires states to establish two categories of schools for intervention and to implement more rigorous interventions in the identified schools that do not improve after a state-defined period of time not to exceed four years. States have the flexibility to establish their own framework for providing supports and interventions to identified schools. The two categories of schools for intervention are:

  - **Comprehensive support and improvement schools –** Includes the 5% of lowest performing schools in the state, high schools that graduate less than two-thirds of their students, and schools for which a subgroup is consistently underperforming in the same manner as a school under the lowest 5% category for a state-determined number of years.

  - **Targeted support and improvement schools –** Schools with consistently underperforming subgroups.

- States have the flexibility to establish exit criteria for schools identified as comprehensive support and improvement and targeted support and improvement.

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Recommendations:

ESSA eliminates federally-required school improvement strategies, providing states with an opportunity to redesign statewide systems of support and interventions for schools and districts. States should be thoughtful in how they meaningfully differentiate schools for improvement and provide appropriate supports aligned to each district's vision for a successful high school graduate and needs. Although states have significant flexibility in the design of their statewide systems of support and interventions, states should incorporate the following strategies to maximize system capacity and ensure high quality implementation.

- **Provide Diagnostic Support for Underperforming Schools –** States should strive to provide all underperforming schools with diagnostic support to help schools identify the underlying causes of underperformance and develop a plan for improvement. Schools identified for comprehensive support and improvement and targeted support and improvement should receive frequent diagnostic reviews to ensure continuous improvement of strategies.

- **Provide Districts with Early Warning Data –** States should establish early warning data systems that analyze data in real-time and provide districts with useful reports so school and community stakeholders can diagnose and address problems before they escalate into more challenging issues.

- **Establish a State-Level Framework for Interventions in Identified Schools –** While states should provide districts with the flexibility to design strategies for school reform, states should also establish a set of principles that districts must address in their implementation plan in order to access federal and state school improvement resources.

- **Empower High-Impact Principals with Greater Autonomy –** States should encourage districts to empower high-impact principals with greater autonomy to execute school improvement strategies. This should include autonomy around budgeting and hiring decisions in addition to the design and implementation of school improvement strategies.

- **Emphasize Growth & Sustainability in Exit Strategy for Identified Schools –** While states and districts should initially monitor leading indicators such as attendance and disciplinary incidents to determine the success of a school improvement plan, schools should ultimately demonstrate significant gains in student achievement and closure of achievement gaps. States should establish exit criteria for schools that emphasize growth in student performance on state assessments as well as evidence of a strong plan for sustainability of reforms.

Examples of High Impact Personalized Learning Principles

- **Community Engagement and Ownership of Vision –** Local practitioners should engage a broad array of community partners in meaningful ways, from the planning stage all the way through implementation to ensure high quality learning happens anytime and anywhere. Community partners can play essential roles in school design, supporting instruction, and providing wrap-around supports.

- **Transparency of Standards –** Educators, parents, and especially students must have a clear understanding of the standards and aligned performance expectations required for advancement. This transparency enables students to take ownership of their learning process.

- **Teaching and Learning Aligned to Achievement Level, Not Age –** Educators should continually group students by achievement level as students advance through standards so they remain challenged and receive the supports they need to succeed.

- **Real-Time Access and Use of Student Achievement Data –** Educators must have access to real-time student achievement data from formative assessments and support to provide every student with daily instruction aligned to his or her performance level.

- **Learning Experiences Shaped by Student Voice and Choice –** Teachers and leaders should integrate student interests into every stage of the learning process to ensure students have customized pathways to mastery of standards.

- **Emphasis on Content Knowledge and Social and Emotional Competencies –** Students are expected to master academic knowledge and social and emotional competencies in order to advance to the next level of learning.

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Guiding Questions for State and Local Alignment

As states engage stakeholders in the design of a new school improvement framework under ESSA, they should consider the following questions to ensure implementation is high quality and aligned at each level of the education system.

State Role
The state's role is to create a statewide system of support for all districts that provides resources, diagnostic support, and technical assistance aligned to each school's needs.

Local Role
The district's role, in partnership with the community, is to design and implement school improvement strategies aligned to each school's needs.

College and Career Readiness

Questions for States

- How will the state identify and differentiate interventions among underperforming schools to ensure resources, diagnostic support, and technical assistance benefit schools with the greatest need?

- How will the state transition from its current school improvement system to the new approach outlined in ESSA? What will the transition mean for schools previously identified for improvement?

- How will the state develop a framework for supporting all schools identified for support and improvement while providing districts with the flexibility to identify the turnaround strategies best aligned to their needs? What additional strategies will the state implement to address chronically underperforming schools?

- What tools, processes, and diagnostic support does the state need to provide districts to identify problems in underperforming schools and identify evidence-based strategies for improvement?

Questions for Districts

- What steps will the district take to engage a wide range of community partners in the design and implementation of a school improvement plan?

- How will the school improvement plan incorporate an analysis of district and community needs and assets to ensure the district leverages existing resources and addresses identified needs?

- What steps does the district need to take to align all teaching and learning elements, including instruction, curriculum, and assessment, with the school improvement plan?

- How will the district evaluate school reform partners and strategies to ensure they are evidence-based?

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Continuous Improvement

- How can the state education agency build its own capacity to support the continuous improvement of all schools?

- How can the state support districts in collecting early warning data that would help districts address problems when they arise and ultimately avoid identification for improvement?

- What exit criteria will the state use to determine when comprehensive support and improvement and targeted support and improvement schools have made sufficient progress? What processes should the state put in place to continually monitor the progress of identified schools on the exit criteria measures?

- How will the state provide support to districts that have exited turnaround status to ensure they successfully implement plans to sustain results?

- What partnerships can the district establish or expand with community partners to build expertise and capacity in the areas of data management, access, and use for continuous improvement?

- What strategies can the district and its community partners implement to identify best practices based on data and incorporate those into the school improvement plan to ensure continued improvement and sustainability of results?

Equity

- How will the state assist schools identified for targeted support and improvement with the resources, diagnostic tools, and technical assistance to close achievement gaps?

- What strategies will the state implement to provide immediate intervention for students attending schools identified for comprehensive or targeted support and improvement?

- How can the district partner with the community to engage students in their learning experience, especially students who were previously unengaged? How can the district, in partnership with the community, use early warning data to identify and provide real-time supports for students in greatest need?

- What strategies can the district implement to increase transparency of learning objectives and aligned supports, especially to traditionally at-risk student populations, to ensure each student has a clear pathway to success?

Assessment

Personalized learning environments require balanced systems of assessment that provide stakeholders with an accurate picture of each student's learning trajectory to enhance the quality of teaching and learning in real-time. A system of formative, interim, and summative assessments provides stakeholders with rich data to validate mastery and align supports and interventions when necessary.

Opportunities:

- ESSA permits states to design student-centered assessment systems for purposes of Title I that incorporate the following elements:
  - State systems can measure achievement through multiple statewide interim assessments that, when combined, produce an annual summative score.
  - Assessments may measure individual student growth. Assessments may be partially delivered through portfolios, projects, or extended performance tasks.
  - States may use computer-adaptive assessments to measure a student's academic proficiency to determine a student's actual performance level.

- The law permits states to spend their state assessment grants on the following:
  - Developing or improving balanced assessment systems that include summative, interim, and formative assessments, including supporting local educational agencies in developing or improving such assessments.
  - Developing or improving models to measure and assess student progress or student growth on state assessments.
  - Measuring student achievement using multiple measures from multiple sources.
  - Developing comprehensive assessment instruments such as performance and technology-based assessments, computer adaptive assessments, projects, or extended performance tasks that emphasize the mastery of standards and aligned competencies in a competency-based education model.

- The law establishes a pilot program called the Innovative Assessment and Accountability Demonstration Authority in which up to seven states initially may design, build, and implement innovative, competency-based systems of assessments that drive continuous improvement of learning. A state may use these assessments to meet federal accountability requirements. A state may pilot its new assessment system in a group of districts but must take the system statewide by the end of the demonstration period. Assessments must demonstrate high technical quality including comparability to the Title I required statewide assessments.

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Recommendations:

ESSA provides states with significant opportunity to replace or enhance their current assessment systems with better assessments that align to personalized learning environments. Assessments should measure complex demonstrations of mastery, integrate multiple points of learning evidence, and provide an accurate picture of each student's learning trajectory so school and community stakeholders can respond with customized supports and interventions. As states reexamine their assessment systems, they should, at a minimum, integrate the following elements:

- **Break summative annual assessments into smaller, more frequent assessments administered throughout the year.** This will enable students to demonstrate mastery when ready and provide stakeholders with more timely feedback to make necessary improvements to maximize performance.

- **Use computer adaptive assessments for formative, interim, and summative assessments to identify where each student is in his or her learning trajectory and align customized supports.** This will help stakeholders better identify student learning needs and develop a plan to ensure students master standards (and aligned competencies as applicable) at a sufficient rate of growth toward proficiency.

- **Ensure assessments provide evidence of student mastery of social and emotional competencies to ensure students are ready for success in college and career.** States should integrate this information into their accountability systems and align high-quality supports and interventions accordingly.

- **Ensure assessments include performance tasks so students have the opportunity to demonstrate deeper levels of mastery.** Performance tasks should align to student interests, when possible, to increase student engagement.

States currently exploring competency education should also assemble design teams to review the opportunity to apply for the Innovative Assessment and Accountability Demonstration Authority in ESSA. As mentioned above, this pilot program provides interested states with a unique opportunity to pilot high-quality, rigorous assessments that validate mastery of academic knowledge and core competencies through more complex performance-based tasks. These assessments will provide a data-rich picture of each student's performance level – not just those that meet or exceed proficiency – to ensure continuous improvement of learning. Approved states will have the flexibility to pilot state-approved and monitored local assessments and to use those results for accountability decisions. This flexibility will give states the opportunity to transition from a one-size-fits-all assessment approach to one that better aligns to the needs of a personalized learning system.

Guiding Questions for State and Local Alignment

As states engage stakeholders in the design of a new system of assessments under ESSA, they should consider the following questions to ensure implementation is high quality and aligned at each level of the education system.

State Role
The state is responsible for designing, building, and implementing a high quality system of interim and summative assessments that validates student mastery of state standards and aligned competencies as applicable.

Local Role
Districts are responsible for developing and implementing a formative assessment system that supports teaching and learning and validates readiness for student mastery of state standards and aligned competencies as applicable.

College and Career Readiness

Questions for States

- What improvements does the state need to make to its current system of assessments to align to any changes it will make to its academic standards and accountability system?

- Does the state need federal flexibility to pilot any improvements to the assessment system? If so, how will the state engage in an inclusive planning and design process to participate in ESSA's Innovative Assessment and Accountability Demonstration Authority?

- Can the state articulate a clear purpose for each assessment in its system and eliminate those that do not prove useful to the state's vision?

- Does the state provide flexibility for students to assess when they are ready and take an assessment multiple times, if needed, to demonstrate mastery? How will the state incorporate that information into its accountability and school improvement systems in real-time?

Questions for Districts

- What improvements can the district make to its formative assessment system to ensure educators, parents, and students have real-time information on each student's learning trajectory?

- What capacity-building strategies are necessary to ensure all educators can use formative assessments to customize instruction and advance students to mastery?

- How can district leaders partner with the state to build a comprehensive system of assessments that incorporates formative, interim, and summative assessments?

- How can district leaders partner with the state to ensure summative assessments are aligned to student learning progressions?

- Can the district articulate a clear purpose for each assessment in its system and eliminate any local assessments that do not prove useful to its vision?

Continuous Improvement

Questions for States

- How will the state build capacity to monitor technical quality of the system of assessments to ensure validity and reliability of results?

- How will the state build capacity for implementation of new, effective assessments, including training for educators administering the assessments?

- What steps can the state take to ensure all districts have the technological infrastructure to ensure problem-free assessment delivery and reporting of results?

Questions for Districts

- What district-level policies are necessary to ensure validity and reliability of assessment results?

- If educators will play a role in the delivery of interim and summative assessments, what strategies will the district implement to ensure they receive the necessary training for high quality implementation?

- What improvements can the district make to its technology infrastructure and devices to improve assessment delivery?

Equity

Questions for States

- What improvements can states make to their system of assessments to ensure it provides an accurate reflection of each student's performance level and eliminates bias?

- What changes does the state need to make to ensure the system of assessments aligns to the state's system of support for all schools? How can the assessment system help stakeholders design timely and customized supports for each student?

- Are improvements necessary to ensure the system of assessments is accessible for all students, including students with disabilities and English Learners?

Questions for Districts

- How can district leaders use assessment data to monitor student progress and adjust day-to-day learning activities to ensure every student is challenged and every child succeeds?

- How can district leaders, educators, and community partners use formative assessment data to close achievement gaps in time for the administration of summative assessments?

- What is the district's plan to ensure assessments are accessible for all students, including students with disabilities and English Learners?

Educator Workforce

Personalized learning environments require a highly trained and engaged educator workforce with the skills to work individually and collectively to design customized pathways to graduation for every student. An aligned system of pre-service, certification, professional development, and evaluation programs provides teachers and leaders with personalized support to embrace new roles and deepen mastery of professional competencies.

Opportunities:

- The law replaces the requirement under NCLB that all Title I teachers and teachers of core academic subjects must be highly qualified (defined by a minimum of a bachelor's degree and subject matter competency in each of the subjects taught) with a requirement that all teachers working in Title I schools meet applicable state certification and licensure requirements.

- The law continues Title II, Part A resources to states and school districts to implement various activities to support teachers, principals, and other educators, with an emphasis on induction services for new teachers, ongoing evidence-based professional development for teachers, and opportunities to recruit new educators to the profession.

- The law permits states to reserve up to 3% of their Title II, Part A funds to build a workforce of leaders with the skills to help schools transition to personalized learning environments.

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Recommendations:

ESSA provides states with an opportunity to design a new strategy for educator quality that will prepare teachers and leaders for success in personalized learning environments. This will require significant changes to pre-service preparation, certification, professional development, and evaluation programs to reflect new teaching and leading roles. States should begin this process by developing a comprehensive set of professional competencies that reflect the skills and responsibilities teachers and leaders will need to excel under this new system, including the capabilities to access and use data to inform instruction, practice rapid cycle continuous improvement, and engage students in these processes. States should then align all educator workforce policies to these competencies to provide teachers and leaders with clearly defined pathways for professional growth.

- **Pre-Service Preparation –** States should encourage teacher and leader preparation programs to collaborate with K-12 systems to define professional competencies for personalized learning environments and align preparation around mastery of those competencies. States should also use Title II, Part A resources to explore partnerships with institutions of higher education (IHEs), alternative certification programs, and school districts to expand the pipeline of educators ready to serve in personalized learning environments. Preparation programs should be flexible, competency-based, and aligned to modernized credentialing policies.

- **State Credentials –** States should modernize their credentialing policies to ensure they align to statewide professional competencies for personalized learning and reflect the range of new teacher roles that will emerge in personalized learning environments.

- **Professional Development –** States should reform their Title II, Part A professional development programs to ensure they align to statewide professional competencies so teachers and leaders have the opportunity to advance along individualized career pathways. States should also reserve 3% of their Title II, Part A funds to provide intensive and high-quality support for leaders serving in schools identified for comprehensive support. All professional development programs should be highly personalized, ongoing, and job embedded.

- **Educator Evaluation –** Although ESSA does not require states to implement teacher or leader evaluation systems, interested states should ensure that these systems align to statewide professional competencies and customized professional development opportunities to ensure educators continuously improve their practice. These systems should also incorporate multiple points of evidence, emphasize growth toward mastery of professional competencies, and provide formative, real-time feedback.

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Guiding Questions for State and Local Alignment

As states engage stakeholders in the design of a new educator workforce system under ESSA, they should consider the following questions to ensure implementation is high quality and aligned at each level of the education system.

State Role
The state is responsible for building an aligned system of pre-service, certification and licensure, professional development, and evaluation policies that contribute to the establishment of a highly effective educator workforce.

Local Role
The district's role is to recruit, retain, and develop a highly effective workforce of teachers and leaders with the skills to prepare all students for college and career readiness.

College and Career Readiness

Questions for States

- Who should the state convene to develop statewide professional competencies for teachers and leaders that reflect the skills necessary to succeed in today's education workforce?

- How can the state partner with IHEs, alternative certification programs, employers, community-based organizations, businesses, and districts to strengthen its pipeline of incoming teachers and leaders? How can those partnerships help the district develop professional competencies for teachers and leaders to succeed in personalized learning environments?

- How can the state recruit professionals from other industries to fill new educator roles that will enhance the learning experience?

- What steps does the state need to take to modernize its credentialing process to ensure certification reflects emerging teacher roles, including those involving extended learning opportunities and learning experiences outside the classroom?

- How will the state strengthen its professional development system to ensure educators receive timely, customized, and relevant options? Will the state serve as a provider, an aggregator of opportunities, or as a validator of district offerings?

Questions for Districts

- What changes does the district need to make to its recruitment, hiring, and retention processes to ensure teachers and leaders have the skills to excel in personalized learning environments?

- What types of new teacher and leader roles are necessary to achieve the district's vision of a successful high school graduate?

- How will the district improve its professional development system so teachers and leaders have the opportunity to pursue customized learning experiences aligned to professional competencies?

- How can the district align its evaluation and professional development systems so teachers and leaders receive timely feedback that informs customized plans for mastery of professional competencies?

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- Will the state implement an evaluation system for teachers and leaders? And if so, how will the state ensure the system provides timely feedback that is aligned to the professional development system?

Continuous Improvement

Questions for States

- What data system capabilities are necessary to create a personalized professional development system that monitors information on preparation, certification, and evaluation?

- Should the state formally recognize teachers and leaders who are directly supporting the state's transition to personalized learning?

Questions for Districts

- What information does the district need to provide to the state to demonstrate that professional development opportunities are high-quality and aligned to professional competencies?

- How will the district measure improvements in teaching?

Equity

Questions for States

- How could state certification ensure that quality teachers are equitably distributed—that teachers at Title I schools have equally rigorous training as teachers at other schools?

- Does the state require emergency and alternative certification processes? If so, what do those processes entail?

- What types of professional development experiences can the state provide to build the capacity of leaders and teachers serving schools identified for comprehensive and targeted support and improvement?

Questions for Districts

- What variation may exist between districts in educator competencies? Do districts have an opportunity to create local educator competencies?

- What improvements can the district make to its professional development programs to ensure educators have the opportunity to achieve deeper levels of competency as they advance in their profession?

- How can the district recruit highly-effective leaders to help transform underperforming schools? How can the district provide them with sufficient autonomy to lead?

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Extended Learning Opportunities

High quality personalized learning environments provide students with access to a wide range of extended learning opportunities (ELOs) aligned to standards and expectations for success in college and career. Students and educators work together to design customized pathways to mastery that may include a combination of traditional instruction and expanded learning opportunities where students can engage in experiential learning. A variety of high quality learning opportunities aligned to standards increases student engagement and strengthens the relevance and rigor of an educational program.

Opportunities:

- ESSA creates a new direct student services provision in which states may reserve up to 3% of their Title I, Part A grant to provide grants to school districts for direct student services. States must prioritize districts serving the highest percentage of schools identified for comprehensive support and improvement and targeted support and improvement. Activities must include enrollment in academic courses not available at a student's school, credit recovery and acceleration courses, activities that assist students in completing postsecondary credit, components of a personalized learning approach, and transportation for students attending comprehensive support and improvement schools who wish to switch to a higher performing school.

- The law consolidates a number of existing federal grant programs into a new Title IV state block grant that may fund district activities to provide all students with access to a well-rounded education, improve school conditions for student learning, and improve the use of technology to improve academic achievement and digital literacy.

- The law maintains the 21st Century Community Learning Centers grant program to support academic enrichment activities during non-school hours, but expands the scope to include extended day programs that help students meet challenging state academic standards.

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Recommendations:

ESSA provides states with a number of new opportunities to leverage federal resources toward the provision of high quality ELOs. States should develop a strategic plan to leverage these opportunities in an aligned way that advances a statewide vision for personalized learning.

As states explore these opportunities, they should consider the following ideas:

■ **Use the 3% Direct Student Services Reservation in Title I to Increase Access to High-Quality Learning Opportunities for At-Risk Students.** States should create a new initiative to ensure students attending schools identified for comprehensive and targeted support and improvement have access to rigorous and engaging learning experiences using one of the following strategies:

  • **Develop a Digital Registry of High Quality Learning Opportunities Aligned to Standards and Competencies –** States should establish a digital registry of credit-bearing personalized learning opportunities, both inside and outside the classroom, that are aligned to state standards and competencies. Over time, the registry should identify the highest-impact learning experiences determined by the State using a quality assurance process that takes into account student/parent satisfaction, higher education and workforce satisfaction, and rating through the state's accountability system.

  • **Establish A Network of High-Impact Early College High Schools –** States should support districts serving schools identified for comprehensive and targeted support and improvement in the establishment of an early college high school program. Each program should provide students with the opportunity to complete up to 60 college credits and an associate's degree during their high school experience.

■ **Use the Title IV State Block Grant to Incentivize District Innovation Focused on Personalized Learning –** States should use the Title IV state block grant to create an innovation fund for districts interested in scaling personalized learning strategies. In addition to Title IV resources, districts could receive greater flexibility from state policies in the following areas: curriculum and instruction, assessment and student supports, professional and leadership development, technology and data, and learning environments and partnerships. Districts should demonstrate alignment to one of the three purposes of the Title IV program: 1) a well-rounded education; 2) improve school conditions for student learning; and 3) improve the use of technology in order to improve the academic achievement and digital literacy of all students.

■ **Use the Title IV State Block Grant to Help Districts Leverage Technology to Expand Personalized Learning Opportunities –** States should reserve a substantial portion of the Title IV state block grant to provide subgrants to districts for technology improvements or programming that enhance the quality of teaching and learning. Priority should go toward applicants that demonstrate a strong vision for personalized learning and have a technology policy that allows for ubiquitous, safe access to the internet at all times of the school day.

■ **Prioritize Extended Learning Opportunities in the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Grant Program –** States should redesign their 21st Century Community Learning Centers program to give priority to applicants with a plan to provide students with access to high-quality credit bearing opportunities outside of the traditional classroom environment. Applicants should also receive priority treatment if they propose to serve students attending schools identified for comprehensive support and improvement and targeted support and improvement.

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Guiding Questions for State and Local Alignment

As states engage stakeholders in thoughtfully developing ELOs under ESSA, they should consider the following questions to ensure implementation is high quality and aligned at each level of the education system.

State Role

The state has a responsibility to ensure that federal and state resources for ELOs support high quality programs that align to state standards and competencies as applicable.

Local Role

Districts, in partnership with the community, are responsible for designing and implementing high quality ELOs aligned to state standards, competencies as applicable, and local needs.

College and Career Readiness

Questions for States

- What partnerships can the state establish with districts, businesses, IHEs, community-based organizations, and other stakeholders to increase student access to high quality ELOs aligned to the state's vision of a successful high school graduate and long-term economic development needs?

- How can the state utilize public entities like libraries, museums, state parks, and universities to help establish high quality ELOs?

- What processes can the state implement to support districts in evaluating and monitoring the quality of ELOs to ensure they align to state standards and competencies as applicable?

- What federal and state resources can the state prioritize to expand student access to high quality ELOs? How will the state distribute those resources across districts?

- How will the state provide policy flexibility for districts to create multiple pathways for student mastery that include high quality ELOs?

- How can the state involve community leaders and cradle to career partnerships in aligning ELOs to maximize impact on student outcomes?

Questions for Districts

- What partnerships can the district establish with local stakeholders to create high-quality ELOs that align to the district's vision? How can district partnerships align to local labor market needs, engaging local IHEs and employers?

- How will the district ensure that ELOs align to its instructional strategies to maximize student progress toward mastery of standards and competencies as applicable?

- How will the district communicate ELO opportunities to educators, parents, and students to ensure students understand the pathway options to achieve mastery of standards and competencies as applicable?

- What financial resources and community assets can the district identify to support the establishment of high-quality ELOs?

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Continuous Improvement

Questions for States

- What improvements does the state need to make to its current data system to measure, monitor, and report on the impact of ELOs?

- What best practices can the state disseminate to ELO providers and districts to ensure high quality implementation?

Questions for Districts

- How will district and community partners work together to plan, implement, and build a sustainable and coordinated system of high-quality ELOs?

- What kind of data does the district need to collect and analyze to evaluate the impact and return on investment of ELOs?

- How will the district build the capacity of local public agencies to expand future ELO partnerships?

Equity

Questions for States

- How will the state expand and target access to high quality ELOs for at-risk populations of students?

- How can the state leverage technology to increase ELO participation among at-risk students?

Questions for Districts

- What strategies will the district implement to ensure at-risk populations do not face barriers to participation in ELOs, including transportation, scheduling, and access to technology?

- How will the district monitor ELOs to ensure they are customized to the needs of all learners?

- What partnerships can the district establish with local stakeholders to create high-quality ELOs focused on the development of well-rounded students, such as those that build social and emotional competencies or improve nutrition and health?

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