

Guidance for States on ESSA State Plans: Aligning the School Climate Indicator and SW-PBIS

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New to the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* of 1965,¹ as amended by the *Every Student Succeeds Act* of 2015,² is specific language supporting state and local educational agencies in implementing schoolwide positive behavioral interventions and supports (SW-PBIS).³ According to U.S. Department of Education significant nonregulatory guidance, SW-PBIS aligns well with ESSA. That is, SW-PBIS is 1) cross-cutting,⁴ 2) schoolwide,⁵ and 3) evidence-based,⁶ all of which ESSA emphasizes. SEAs that will be submitting a consolidated state plan for Title I, Part A Improving Basic Programs Operated by LEAs and Title IV, Part A Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grant Programs, and that are already implementing SW-PBIS, are well positioned to receive funds. For states including “School Climate and Safety” as a measure of their “school quality or student success” indicator,⁷ the SSAE grants for Safe and Healthy Students are available for states to fund SW-PBIS activities to “improve academic outcomes and school conditions for student learning.”⁸

1. Pub. L. 89-10

2. Pub. L. 114-95

3. See ESSA Section 4108(5)(G)

4. U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Non-Regulatory Guidance: (ESSA Title IV, part A Guidance-Student Support and Academic Enrichment Program, Washington, DC, October 21, 2016. <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/index.html>

5. U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Non-Regulatory Guidance: (ESSA Schoolwide Guidance) Supporting School Reform by Leveraging Federal Funds in a Schoolwide Program, Washington, DC, September 29, 2016. <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/index.html>

6. U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Non-Regulatory Guidance: (Evidence Guidance) Using Evidence to Strengthen Education Investments, Washington, DC, September 16, 2016. <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/index.html>

7. See ESSA Section 1111(c)(4)(B)(v)(VII)

8. See ESSA Section 4108(5)(G)

A Note on Education Department Regulations

As of the writing of this brief, and possibly up through the 2017 consolidated state plan submission deadlines, SEAs will be preparing and submitting their state plans using only statutory and Education Department nonregulatory guidance. On March 27, 2017, President Trump signed House Joint Resolution 57⁹ nullifying the ESSA final rules, published November 29, 2016, on accountability and state plans.¹⁰

U.S. Education Secretary DeVos, in her February 10, 2017 letter to Chief State School Officers concerning the formulation of state plans under ESSA, gave assurances of her intentions to fully implement and enforce ESSA’s statutory requirements.¹¹ The schoolwide positive behavioral interventions and supports language in this brief is found in the statute and the Department’s nonregulatory guidance.

Submission of Consolidated State Plans

Templates

Following review of the consolidated state plan template, on March 13, 2017, the Department released its revised template for SEAs to use when submitting.¹² The revised template is shorter and is intended to impose fewer requirements on states. Notable changes are: 1) it is organized by grant program rather than overarching topic areas across programs, and 2) the sections are reorganized, which is

why sections appear to be missing. For states implementing schoolwide positive behavioral interventions and supports, the indicator for School Quality or Student Success appears in both the revised template and the former version. For the 2017 submission cycle, states have the option to submit their consolidated state plans using 1) the template issued November 29, 2016, 2) the revised template issued March 13, 2017, or 3) an alternative template.¹³

Title I, Part A Improving Basic Programs Operated by LEAs

Every state educational agency that includes a Title I, Part A program in its consolidated state plan is required to have “not less than one indicator of school quality or student success.”¹⁴

ESSA lists a number of measures of School Quality or Student Success from which SEAs can choose at their discretion.¹⁵ It is to the state’s advantage, regardless of the other options listed, to choose the “school climate and safety” measure.¹⁶ For state and district administrators, doing so has a ripple effect of increasing the likelihood of success for all other state plan priorities and long-term goals. That is, using the School Climate and Safety measure gives administrators access to innovative technology (e.g., schoolwide positive behavioral interventions and supports, which address concerns such as the link between social-behavior and academic outcomes, attendance, exclusionary discipline practices, bullying and harassment, Office for Civil Rights (OCR) complaints, and disproportionality.

9. See U.S. House Joint Resolution 57, presented to the President, March 16, 2017, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-joint-resolution/57>; and signed by President Trump March 27, 2017. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/03/27/remarks-president-signing-house-joint-resolutions-37-44-57-and-58-under#content-start>

10. U.S. Department of Education, Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act: Rules on accountability and state plans, 86076-86248. Published in the Federal Register on November 29, 2016

11. See <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/secletter/170210.html#skipnav2>

12. See https://www.ed.gov/news/press-released/us-secretary-education-betsy-devos-announces-release-updated-essa-consolidated-state-plan-template?utm_content=&utm_medium=email&utm_name=&utm_source=govdelivery&utm_term

13. Id

14. See ESSA111(c)(4)(B)(v)

15. Id

16. See ESSA Section 1111(c)(4)(B)(v)(VII)

“SW-PBIS is an evidence-based, data-driven framework proven to reduce disciplinary incidents, increase a school’s sense of safety, and support improved academic outcomes,”¹⁷ all of which address ESSA requirements (Horner et al., 2009; Sprague & Horner, 2007). Over 23,000 U.S. schools are implementing PBIS and saving hours of annual instructional time otherwise lost to school discipline. Implementing PBIS improves school climate and helps keep students and teachers in safe and productive classrooms.

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) comes directly from the language used in the 1997 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). PBIS, based on the principles of applied behavior analysis, the prevention approach, is a valuable use of ESSA funds. PBIS is a framework for assisting schools in adopting and organizing evidence-based behavior interventions into a continuum that enhances academic and social behavior outcomes for all students. PBIS is not a packaged curriculum, scripted intervention, or a particular, manualized strategy, but instead is a set of core features that can be achieved through an array of options, and creates safe, positive, school environments to benefit all students (Lewis & Sugai, 1999; Sugai & Horner, 2002; Sugai et al., 2000).

Schools adopting a PBIS framework apply a multi-tiered approach to prevention that focuses on teaching expectations, recognizing and rewarding positive student behavior, and monitoring disciplinary data. Rooted in the principles of behavior analysis, PBIS emphasizes school-wide, targeted, and individualized interventions and supports to create a coherent social climate to benefit all students. Research supports that use of PBIS. A growing body of empirical evidence demonstrates that schools implementing PBIS to criterion are more likely to experience positive outcomes (e.g., lower rates of problem behavior, higher achievement,

higher emotional regulation) (Bradshaw, Waasdorp, & Leaf, 2012; Flannery, Fenning, Kato, & McIntosh, 2014).

Consolidated State Plan Peer Review Criteria

On March 28, 2017, the Department issued final ESSA State Plan Peer Review Criteria for Title I, Part A. The peer review criteria 1) supports state educational agencies as they develop their consolidated state plans, and 2) informs peer review teams as they evaluate each consolidated state plan. SEAs implementing SW-PBIS are in a good position to address the state plan peer review criteria requirements for School Conditions in Section 1111(g)(1)(c). That is, SW-PBIS supports local educational agencies to 1) improve school conditions for student learning, 2) reduce incidences of bullying and harassment, 3) reduce overuse of discipline practices that remove students from the classroom, and 4) reduce the use of aversive behavioral interventions that compromise student health and safety.

Supporting School Reform by Leveraging Federal Funds in a Schoolwide Program

According to The Department’s September 29, 2016 significant nonregulatory guidance, SWPBIS is a recognized schoolwide program for purposes of a consolidated state plan. SEAs can learn more on how Title I funds can be used for SW-PBIS at <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/essaswpguidance9192016.pdf>

Guidance on Title IV, Part A Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants

SEAs submitting consolidated state plans can learn more on how to align SW-PBIS with the “Activities to Support Safe and Healthy Students” grant program found in Title IV, Part

17. U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. Letter from Acting Assistant Secretary Chism to State Assessment Directors re: ESSA State Plan Peer Review Criteria [final] for Title I, Part A; Title III, Part A; and the Education for Homeless Children and Youths Program under the McKinney-Vento Act, March 28, 2017. <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/plans.html>

A (Section 4108) at <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/essassaegrantguid10212016.pdf>

Technical Assistance for States Building SW-PBIS Capacity

States implementing SW-PBIS and planning to submit a consolidated state plan are encouraged to contact the Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (www.pbis.org). The Center was established by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs to define, develop, implement, and evaluate a multi-tiered approach to technical assistance that improves the capacity of states, districts, and schools to establish, scale-up, and sustain the PBIS framework.

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Suggested Citation for this Publication

Von Ravensberg, H., & Blakely, A. (2017). *Guidance for States on ESSA State Plans: Aligning the School Climate Indicator and SW-PBIS*. OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. www.pbis.org.

This project is supported by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). Opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the position of the U.S. Department of Education