



National
Urban League

NO CEILINGS



EDUCATIONAL
EQUITY FOR ALL

ON SUCCESS

STANDARDS OF EQUITY & EXCELLENCE:

A LENS ON ESSA STATE PLANS



ABOUT THE NATIONAL URBAN LEAGUE

THE NATIONAL URBAN LEAGUE is a historic civil rights and urban advocacy organization. Driven to secure economic self-reliance, parity, power, and civil rights for our nation's marginalized populations, the National Urban League works towards economic empowerment and the elevation of the standard of living in historically underserved urban communities.

Founded in 1910 and headquartered in New York City, the National Urban League has improved the lives of more than two million people annually through direct service programs that are run by 90 local Urban League Affiliates in 36 states and the District of Columbia. The National Urban League also conducts public policy research and advocacy work from its Washington Bureau.

The Urban League Movement is committed to five Empowerment Goals: that every American has access to jobs with a living wage and good benefits, that every American child is ready for college, work, and life, that every American lives in safe, decent, affordable, and energy-efficient housing on fair terms, that every American has access to quality and affordable health care solutions, that every American has an equal right and responsibility to fully participate in our democracy and civic processes, and that all people have a right to justice and fairness.

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THE FULL REPORT AND EACH STATE REPORT CARD.**

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"We call on states and local school districts to join us in empowering families and communities as true partners so that together we can ensure that every child graduates high school ready for college, work, and life."

—MARC H. MORIAL
President and Chief Executive Officer
National Urban League



THE EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE PROJECT

THE NATIONAL URBAN LEAGUE’S EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE PROJECT (EEP) supports local, state, and national advocacy, engagement, and education reform efforts by leveraging our greatest asset—the Urban League Affiliate Network and the presidents and chief executive officers who lead it—and by aligning with local, state, and national partners.

Since its launch in 2010, the EEP has touched the lives of thousands across the country through the work of the leadership of our affiliate network, advocated for equity with national, state leaders, and community stakeholders, and engaged with federal policy makers through the work of our Washington Bureau.

All too often, communities of color, including their institutions, families, and community leaders, are “left outside” of education reform efforts and innovations just as students of color are “left behind” in their education. Regrettably, reform is something that happens TO these students, families, and communities instead of something that happens FOR them as a result of their own agency, engagement, and leadership.

The National Urban League believes students, parents, and community stakeholders should opt into a vision of education reform and innovation that expands and deepens opportunity, upends inequity, accelerates progress, and delivers more fully on the promise of education.

The EEP targets seven focus areas that are highly and tightly related to the historic mission of the National Urban League. They are:

1. FAIRNESS:	Equity and excellence at scale
2. INVESTMENT:	Early childhood learning and education
3. PROMISE:	Equitable implementation of college and career-ready standards
4. ADVANCEMENT:	Expanded access to high-quality curricula, teachers, and administrators
5. MEASUREMENT:	Comprehensive, transparent, and aligned data systems for early learning through employment
6. OPPORTUNITY:	Out-of-school time learning with an emphasis on expanded day and summer learning
7. FULFILLMENT:	College completion and attainment

Improvements in any one of these seven areas would help some students across the pre-k to college education spectrum. However, we can help many more students by combining reform approaches in an intentional and meaningful way in order to systematically address the complex problems that students, parents, and communities continue to face. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) provides just that moment.

EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT

24%
OF THE STATES
EVALUATED FOR EQUITY
RATED EXCELLENT

THE EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT, known as ESSA, is the current law that governs America's K-12 public education policy. It was signed by President Barack Obama in December 2015 and is the latest reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA).

ESEA established a civil rights standard for educating students. It ensures that students from historically underserved populations, including people of color, people with disabilities, and those learning English as a second language, receive the resources they deserve as a renewed commitment from the federal government to its citizens.

Reauthorizations of the ESEA, including the Improving America's Schools Act (1994) and the No Child Left Behind Act (2001), attempted to reaffirm that commitment. Now, ESSA offers states a chance to lead in working to ensure equity and excellence to every student and community.

OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH ESSA

ESSA was designed to give states the flexibility and autonomy to create comprehensive, strategic plans that are specific to each state's unique needs. At the same time, ESSA is not a blank check. The law contains several policy requirements that should be used to advance equity in a meaningful way. The National Urban League defines equity as an ongoing process that removes the historic barriers that people of color have faced in attaining a high-quality education. We believe equity will be achieved when our education system provides ALL students with the necessary resources to reach their full potential.

As such, it is the hope of the National Urban League that states take the opportunity to use these policy levers to their full advantage, providing each and every student with a high-quality and equitable education.

In the same spirit, it is the expectation of the National Urban League and our Urban League Affiliate movement that Congress and the U.S. Department of Education play a strong role in making sure that states:

- 1 ARE USING THIS INCREASED AUTONOMY AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO ADVANCE EQUITY**
- 2 ARE INTERPRETING THE LAW IN WAYS THAT ADVANCE EQUITY**
- 3 ARE HONORING THE LANGUAGE AND THE CIVIL RIGHTS COMMITMENT OF THE LAW BY IMPLEMENTING IT IN A WAY THAT IS CONSISTENT WITH THE BIPARTISAN AGREEMENT THAT MADE ESSA POSSIBLE**

UNDER ESSA

, the U.S. Department of Education was responsible for developing a consolidated, streamlined set of requirements for states to address in their plans and submit for federal approval. However, the U.S. Department of Education replaced its original template for ESSA state plans with a greatly truncated one in 2016. For instance, the updated template removed reporting requirements for states using an n-size larger than 30, made reporting requirements for stakeholder engagement optional, and no longer required exit criteria under Title III (English Language Acquisition). Since the new template did not require states to provide comprehensive information for all ESSA's requirements and individual programs, it is possible that some states—particularly those that submitted using the newer, abbreviated template—intend to adopt more extensive opportunities to advance equity under ESSA than was disclosed in their states' plans.

As part of its Equity & Excellence Project (EEP), the National Urban League has reviewed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Consolidated State Plans that have been submitted to, and approved by, the U.S. Department of Education. The purpose of the review was to determine the likelihood of the plans to advance equity and excellence for vulnerable students in our nation's public schools.

This review of ESSA's state plans comes at an important time in our history. The landmark 2016 election marked a shift in conversations about race, socioeconomic status, and the systematic impact of these social markers on the experiences of people across the nation. With education at the forefront, advocates and stakeholders alike are looking critically at what states have committed to do for students and how they are going to do it.

Through this review, our goal is to equip education stakeholders—community-based civil rights partners, educators, community leaders, equity advocates, parents, students, families, and administrators—with the information necessary to strengthen their state-level advocacy as every state is implementing its ESSA plan. It is also an opportunity for us, united with our partners, to emphasize key equity levers that will be necessary to fortify the next reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and to ensure that every American child is ready to succeed in college, work, and life regardless of his or her race, ethnicity, income, or zip code.

In this executive summary, we will highlight promising practices as well as missed opportunities to advance equity and ways in which states can improve as they implement ESSA. **Our purpose for reviewing these ESSA Consolidated State Plans stems directly from two areas:**

- 1. The work of the National Urban League's Equity and Excellence Project (EEP), which explicitly supports local, state, and national advocacy, engagement, and education reform through thought leadership, stakeholder engagement, advocacy, and communications.**
- 2. The National Urban League's shared principles for the implementation of ESSA, which were developed in partnership with UnidosUS and The Education Trust and represent our organizations' shared commitment to equity. We believe that these principles should guide states and districts in using ESSA to provide equitable, high-quality education for all students, especially those in historically underserved communities.**

THE TIME IS NOW!

"With this reauthorization, states have the opportunity to prove their commitment to an equitable and excellent education for ALL children—and, the National Urban League and our civil rights partners will hold them to this renewed promise."

—MARC H. MORIAL
President and Chief Executive Officer
National Urban League



54%
OF THE STATES
EVALUATED FOR EQUITY
RATED SUFFICIENT

THE NATIONAL URBAN LEAGUE has taken the seven focus areas of the Equity and Excellence Project and the shared equity principles to develop 12 equity indicators for our review of 37 ESSA Consolidated State Plans. These 12 equity indicators represent priority areas for the National Urban League and its affiliates.

EQUITY REVIEW

The National Urban League has reviewed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Consolidated State Plans that have been submitted to and approved by the U.S. Department of Education. We have developed a series of report cards that use a green-yellow-red highlight system to rate the plans on 12 equity indicators including: early childhood learning, supports for struggling schools, and resource equity. These indicators were selected based on the evidence demonstrating their effectiveness for advancing equity and excellence for vulnerable students in our nation's public schools. These state plans are a preliminary indicator of how states intend to implement ESSA and represent a blueprint for state and district-level decisions that will work to move each state from promise to practice during implementation.

The National Urban League's equity analysis uses the following color designations for each overall plan:

EXCELLENT
plans were off to a strong start making the most of opportunities to further advance equity, with some areas for improvement and a small number of areas deserving urgent attention

SUFFICIENT
plans were adequately attentive to opportunities to further advance equity, with several missed opportunities, and a few areas deserving urgent attention

POOR
plans missed opportunities to further advance equity in a majority of areas with several areas needing urgent attention

Our indicators evaluated how well states incorporated equity into their ESSA plans and were used to develop our report cards. These report cards do not constitute an assessment or analysis of a state's school system. Rather, they identify the extent to which states have included the 12 equity indicators in their ESSA plans.

HOW WELL STATES INCORPORATED EQUITY INTO THEIR ESSA PLANS

Among the 37 states where the National Urban League has affiliates, we found that **Nine States** (CO, OH, NJ, NY, OK, LA, KY, IL and RI) had ESSA Consolidated State Plans, which offer a strong foundation for equity (“excellent”) and need refinement in only a few areas. These states can continue to build on the systems that they have in place for continuing dialogue with stakeholders and to improve their schools in areas where they received only a rating of “sufficient.”

The Bulk of States (20) who submitted initial plans were adequately attentive to equity (“sufficient”) but still had several areas deserving of attention and urgent action by policymakers and advocates. These states should proceed forward cautiously with implementing their ESSA Consolidated State Plans while taking a closer look at the identified areas of weakness in their plans.

Eight States (VA, FL, AZ, GA, MO, KS, MI and CA) had ESSA Consolidated State Plans that missed significant opportunities to further advance equity (“poor”) and that deserve urgent attention in a number of areas. Before proceeding any further with the implementation of their state plans, these states should immediately address the areas where they came up short and look more closely at the areas of concern we have identified.

THE COLOR DESIGNATIONS represent the National Urban League’s (NUL) analysis of ESSA Consolidated State Plans according to the 12 equity indicators identified by the NUL and its affiliates. These designations are not meant to be an analysis or an assessment of any state’s overall school system. Rather, they are meant to be a resource for affiliates and other community stakeholders serving as high-level summaries of states’ public commitments.

PRIORITY AREAS CRITICAL FOR ADVANCING EQUITY

Each state’s ranking was determined based on its weighted average performances across each of our 12 equity indicators. Extra weight was placed on those areas that the National Urban League believes are especially critical to advancing equity—subgroup performance, supports, and interventions for struggling schools and for resource equity. These indicators were selected based on the evidence demonstrating their effectiveness for advancing equity and excellence for vulnerable students in our nation’s public schools.

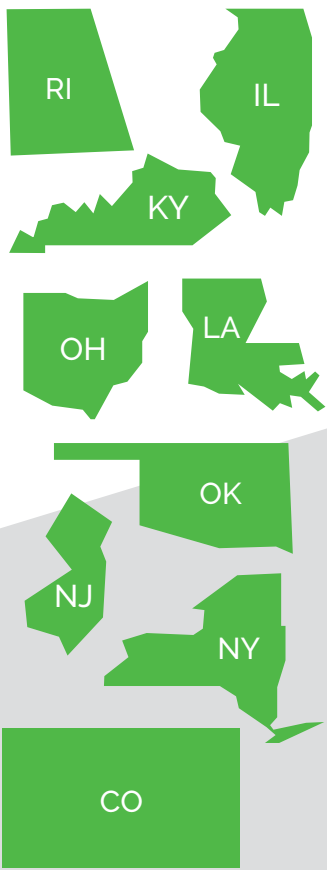
SUBGROUP PERFORMANCE represents how the state counts each subgroup in its accountability system. ESSA offered a level of autonomy for states to get creative in the way that they designed these accountability plans.

SUPPORTS & INTERVENTIONS FOR STRUGGLING SCHOOLS represents how states are identifying schools for supports, particularly how states are designating the targeted support and intervention (TSI) and the additional targeted support (ATS) groups.

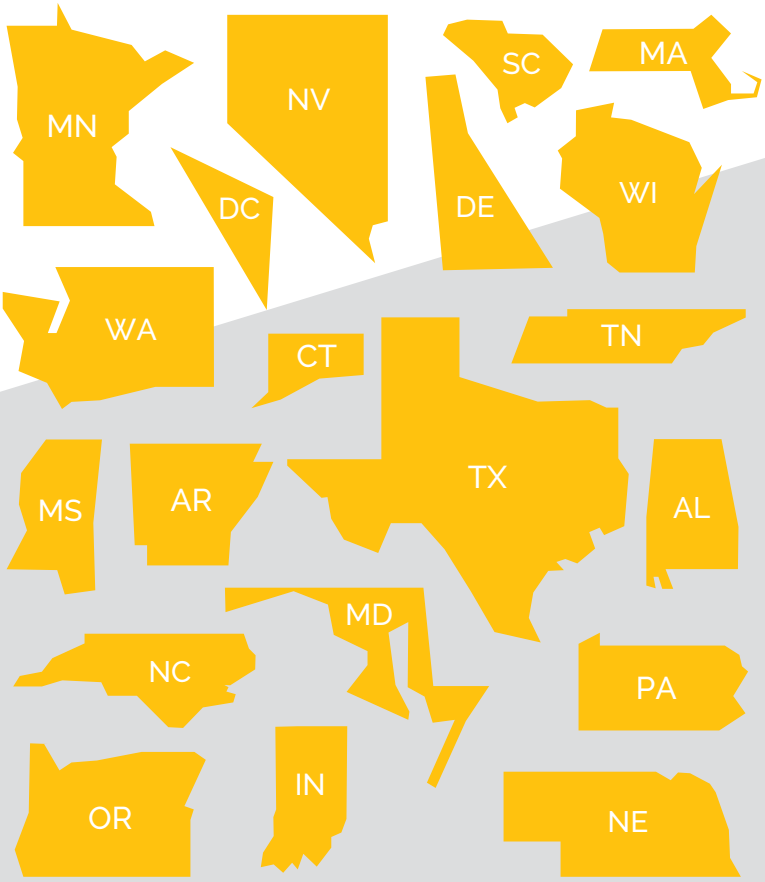
RESOURCE EQUITY represents the level of funds, effort, and emphasis states intend to deploy to identify, report, and address inequities that exist across their schools and districts.

While all 12 equity indicators are important to the National Urban League and its affiliate movement, we believe it is necessary to highlight these three indicators because they represent particular areas through which states can provide tangible supports for historically underserved students.

STATES BY RANKING



EXCELLENT



SUFFICIENT



POOR

DESCRIPTION OF THE 12 EQUITY INDICATORS & SUMMARY OF OVERALL STATE RATINGS

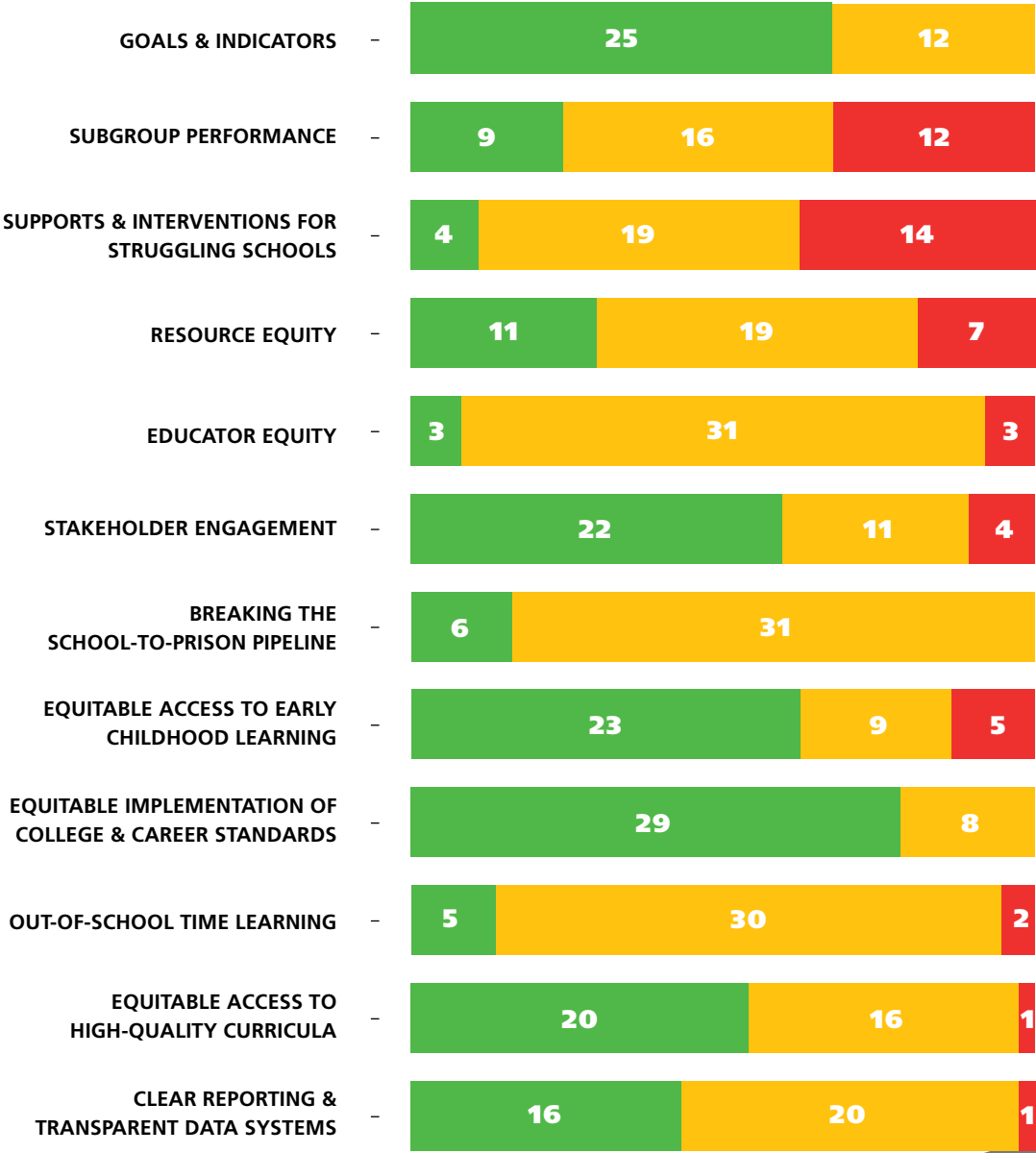
- 1. GOALS & INDICATORS:** 25 state plans earned an excellent, 12 earned a sufficient, and 0 state plans earned a poor rating for having ambitious academic goals for all students and for each student subgroup.
- 2. SUBGROUP PERFORMANCE:** 9 state plans earned an excellent, 16 earned a sufficient, and 12 state plans earned a poor rating for ensuring that state rating systems include the performance of all ESSA student subgroups in all school grades.
- 3. SUPPORTS & INTERVENTIONS FOR STRUGGLING SCHOOLS:** 4 state plans earned an excellent, 19 earned a sufficient, and 14 state plans earned a poor rating for meaningfully identifying struggling schools in need of support and interventions.
- 4. RESOURCE EQUITY:** 11 state plans earned an excellent, 19 earned a sufficient, and 7 state plans earned a poor rating for their efforts to measure and publicly report resource and funding inequities and for supporting districts and schools to address those inequities.
- 5. EDUCATOR EQUITY:** 3 state plans earned an excellent, 31 earned a sufficient, and 3 state plans earned a poor rating for their efforts to ensure that low income and minority students are not disproportionately taught by ineffective, out-of-field, or inexperienced teachers and to increase the pipeline of culturally competent and diverse teachers and leaders.
- 6. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT:** 22 state plans earned an excellent, 11 earned a sufficient, and 4 state plans earned a poor rating for their efforts to meaningfully consult with diverse groups of stakeholders during their ESSA plan development as well as during implementation.
- 7. BREAKING THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE:** 6 state plans earned an excellent, 31 earned a sufficient, and 0 state plans earned a poor rating for holding schools accountable for overuse

- of discipline practices that remove students from the classroom and for including strategies such as positive behavioral supports and interventions that foster student health and safety.
- 8. EQUITABLE ACCESS TO EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING:** 23 state plans earned an excellent, 9 earned a sufficient, and 5 state plans earned a poor rating for prioritizing federal funds to create and expand access to early childhood education for disadvantaged students and to provide professional development and training for teachers and school leaders.
- 9. EQUITABLE IMPLEMENTATION OF COLLEGE & CAREER STANDARDS:** 29 state plans earned an excellent, 8 earned a sufficient, and 0 state plans earned a poor rating for prioritizing funding to increase access to and success in college and career-ready coursework or experiences, such as access to Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate courses and career pathways.
- 10. OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME LEARNING:** 5 state plans earned an excellent, 30 earned a sufficient, and 2 state plans earned a poor rating for their efforts to prioritize funding for out-of-school time learning or evidenced-based school improvement practices as well as for student support and academic enrichment.
- 11. EQUITABLE ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY CURRICULA:** 20 state plans earned an excellent, 16 earned a sufficient, and 1 state plan earned a poor rating for expanding or implementing career and technical education, science, technology, engineering, math, and social/emotional learning content in their school curricula.
- 12. CLEAR REPORTING & TRANSPARENT DATA SYSTEMS:** 16 state plans earned an excellent, 20 earned a sufficient, and 1 state plan earned a poor rating for assigning a clear label or rating on the quality of schools and creating a report card system that is accessible, transparent, and easy for parents, teachers, and the public to understand.

WHERE THE STATES LANDED ON EACH INDICATOR

The following chart highlights how well states performed across the twelve equity indicators. An in-depth description of the criteria used to determine each state’s ratings on each indicator can be found in the criteria rubric, which is attached to each report card. To view these report cards, please visit the National Urban League’s No Ceilings on Success website at naturbanleague.org

12 EQUITY INDICATORS



TOTAL NUMBER OF STATE PLANS EVALUATED

37



AREAS OF INVESTIGATION & OVERSIGHT

22%
OF THE STATES
EVALUATED FOR EQUITY
RATED POOR

HOW STATES HANDLED ESSA'S NEW

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS—Many states neglected to mention how they would meet the law's requirement to report per pupil spending. While the truncated template did not require states to address this area as a new reporting requirement in ESSA, states and districts are likely to face challenges in reporting their spending data in a timely, consistent, and transparent manner. Several said they would report spending and other elements on their websites but not on their report cards.

Others said this information would be updated on a separate schedule less frequently than the annual report cards. When these data are not readily available, it is harder to evaluate equity. Efforts to obscure these important new data violate the values of transparency and stakeholder engagement that lawmakers infused into ESSA.

INTEGRATING STATE & LOCAL

ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS—Several states had separate accountability systems for state and federal purposes. While some opted to include state ratings as a component of their federal accountability system, other states gave schools separate ratings based on different criteria. Dual and competing accountability practices make it difficult for parents and the public to understand school performance and the priorities of state leaders.

ADDRESSING RESOURCES & FUNDING

INEQUITIES—Most states said they would review data to identify funding inequities, inequitable

access to effective, experienced, and in-field teachers, and elements of college and career readiness. However, few made clear how they would change state practices or support districts to remedy any inequities that became apparent from these analyses. While technically compliant with the letter of the law, reviews without required action often fall short of spurring systems to change. Most states missed opportunities to use federal dollars to address inequities and to require and assist districts to do the same.

ADVANCING SUBGROUP ACCOUNTABILITY & SUPPORTS FOR STRUGGLING SCHOOLS—

A number of ESSA Consolidated State Plans purposefully minimized the number of schools that would be identified for support and improvement. Some states collapsed the law's tiers, and others declined to identify schools in all tiers. Other states minimized the importance or scrutiny placed on subgroup performance. Still others delegated responsibility for identifying and responding to inequities and challenges exclusively to districts, offering few or no supports beyond monitoring for adherence to the law.

These tactics violate the spirit of the law, which placed the responsibility with states to support schools serving needy children to improve the quality of education for all groups of students. States and districts should not only identify schools for improvement but also should be making sure that they are being equitably provided with the urgently-needed resources to improve.

For many states, the 2018 elections brought changes in political leadership and new possibilities for updates and amendments to ESSA Consolidated State Plans. **As we continue to advocate for students through the implementation phases of ESSA, the National Urban League is making these resources available for use at our No Ceilings on Success website at naturbanleague.org**

WHAT TO DO NEXT?

Congress should hold hearings on the areas of concern

and oversight that the National Urban League has identified. These areas include, but are not limited to: resource equity, states’ efforts to amend their previously submitted ESSA plans, data transparency and accessibility, and the federal role in oversight as well as how to determine whether the approved states’ plans meet statutory requirements.

State leaders should learn from one another and adopt promising practices from their peers where we identified areas for improvement.

Advocates and state leaders should use the law and public reporting requirements to analyze expenditures and to make sure budgets prioritize students with the greatest need.

Advocates should encourage states to amend their plans based on the National Urban League Equity Report Cards.

Community stakeholders—community-based civil rights partners, educators, community leaders, equity advocates, parents, students, families, and administrators—should hold their school districts accountable for the equitable implementation of ESSA. The National Urban League advocated for the inclusion of family and community engagement in the ongoing implementation and continuous improvement of ESSA. That partnership is crucial to ensuring that ESSA meets the promise that each child receives an equitable and excellent education that ensures his or her success in college, work, and life.

Visit the National Urban League’s No Ceilings on Success website at naturbanleague.org to view the full report and each state’s report card.



The National Urban League is a BBB-accredited organization, has earned a 4-star rating from Charity Navigator, and is placed in the top 10 percent of all U.S. charities for adhering to good governance, fiscal responsibility, and other best practices.

NATIONAL URBAN LEAGUE AFFILIATES

ALABAMA

Birmingham Urban League

ARIZONA

Greater Phoenix Urban League
Tucson Urban League

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The Urban League of the
State of Arkansas, Inc.

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Greater Sacramento Urban League
Los Angeles Urban League
Urban League of San Diego County
Urban League of the San Francisco Bay Area

COLORADO

Urban League of Metropolitan Denver

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Urban League of Southern Connecticut, Inc.

DELAWARE

Metropolitan Wilmington Urban League

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Springfield Urban League, Inc.
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Indianapolis Urban League
Urban League of Northwest Indiana, Inc.

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Urban League of Kansas, Inc.

KENTUCKY

Louisville Urban League
Urban League of Lexington-Fayette County

LOUISIANA

Urban League of Louisiana

MARYLAND

Greater Baltimore Urban League

MASSACHUSETTS

Urban League of Springfield, Inc.
Urban League of Eastern Massachusetts

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Grand Rapids Urban League
Southwestern Michigan Urban League
Urban League of Detroit
& Southeastern Michigan
Urban League of Flint

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Mississippi Urban League

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New York Urban League
Urban League of Long Island, Inc.
Urban League of Rochester, Inc.
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Urban League of the Central Carolinas, Inc.
Winston-Salem Urban League

OHIO

Akron Community Service Center
& Urban League
Columbus Urban League
Greater Stark County Urban League, Inc.
Greater Warren-Youngstown Urban League
Lorain County Urban League
Urban League of Greater Cleveland
Urban League of Greater Southwestern Ohio

OKLAHOMA

Metropolitan Tulsa Urban League, Inc.
Urban League of Greater Oklahoma City, Inc.

OREGON

Urban League of Portland

PENNSYLVANIA

Shenango Valley Urban League
Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh
Urban League of Philadelphia

RHODE ISLAND

Urban League of Rhode Island, Inc.

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Charleston Trident Urban League
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Urban League of Greater Madison
Urban League of Racine & Kenosha, Inc.



**THE NATIONAL URBAN LEAGUE WOULD LIKE TO
EXTEND ITS SINCERE GRATITUDE AND THANKS**

to the individuals and organizations who contributed to the development of our ESSA State Plan Equity Report Cards, especially our Urban League Affiliate CEOs and state education leaders across 36 states and Washington, D.C. who provided their feedback.

We would like to recognize the authors of this executive summary, Susie Feliz, Jazmyne Owens, Adenike Huggins, Beth Glenn, and the editors Robyn Brady Ince and Michael Tomlin-Crutchfield.

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The National Urban League is a non-profit, non-partisan, historic civil rights and urban advocacy organization promoting economic equality and civil rights through direct service programs, research, and policy advocacy.

Through our network of 90 affiliates in 36 states and the District of Columbia, we focus on the potential of African Americans and underserved communities by closing the quality gap at every stage of life.