



## Issue #5: School Leader Equity and Access

### ESSA Background

On December 10, 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed into law with strong bipartisan support as the latest reauthorization of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). ESSA is notable for devolving authority to states, emphasizing the use of evidence-based school interventions, and providing states greater flexibility to design broader school accountability systems while maintaining student performance goals.

Importantly, ESSA offers a renewed focus on school leadership and recognizes the impact of leaders on school improvement and effective instruction. The law provides states and districts new opportunities to fund school leadership and explicitly acknowledges leadership as a legitimate target of educational-improvement activities.

Under the law, states were required to submit a plan to the U.S. Department of Education detailing the goals, strategies, and funding priorities for their education system. To gain greater insight into the consideration of school leadership in state education systems, the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA), with the support of state-based review teams, conducted a comprehensive review of the 52 ESSA plans (50 states, Washington, DC, and Puerto Rico).

### The Significance of an Equitable Access to Quality School Leaders

Title II, Part A of ESSA was designed to provide low-income and ethnic minority students with greater access to effective teachers, principals, and other school leaders. Under the law, states are required to describe how “low-income and minority children are not served at disproportionate rates by ineffective, out-of-field, or inexperienced teachers and identify and address any disparities that exist in the rates at which these students are taught by teachers in these categories.” In other words, students from low-income and underrepresented ethnic minority families have a legal right to quality teachers and principals. Thus, states must prove in their ESSA plans how they intend to guarantee this right.

Presently, a large achievement gap exists in the U.S. education system. According to a 2013 Congressional report, students in high-poverty communities are on par with students in the lowest achieving countries of the world. Conversely, those from low-poverty communities rank among the top of the world in terms of student achievement. Another report from McKinsey & Company declared that inequities within the U.S. education system have created a national economic barricade equivalent to a “permanent national recession.” Bridging this achievement gap is not only a question of morals, but also of economic growth.

### Equity and Access: At a Glance

- **92% of plans** intend use Title II, Part A funds to increase the number of educators effective at improving student achievement.
- **81% of plans** intend to use Title II, Part A funds to provide low-income and ethnic minority students greater access to effective teachers, principals, and other school leaders.

One research-based equity initiative states could support is the recruitment and retention of quality school leaders. With an average yearly principal turnover rate of 30%, America’s highest poverty schools are placed at an even greater disadvantage. This statistic is significant because principal retention affects two critical components: student achievement and teacher retention.

**What Did UCEA’s Analysis Find?**

UCEA’s 52-plan analysis examined two focal areas regarding educator equity: 1) increasing the number of teachers, principals, and other school leaders who are effective in improving student academic achievement in schools, and 2) providing low-income and minority students greater access to effective teachers, principals, and other school leaders.

In regards to the first focal area, UCEA researchers determined that 48 out of 52 plans (92%) intend to use Title II-A funds to increase the number of educators effective at improving student achievement. Also, 33 out of 52 plans (63%) specifically described strategies to increase the number of *principals* effective at improving student achievement. Additionally, eight plans (15%) use the generic term *educator*, and seven plans (13%) only reference teachers. The remaining four plans (8%) do not intend to use Title II, Part A funds to increase the number of educators effective in improving student achievement.

*“For low-income and minority students to gain greater access to effective educators, the state will expand capacity to continue implementation of the Equitable Access to Excellent Educators plan strategies: meaningful professional development, leadership training, [and] partnerships with educator preparation programs.”*

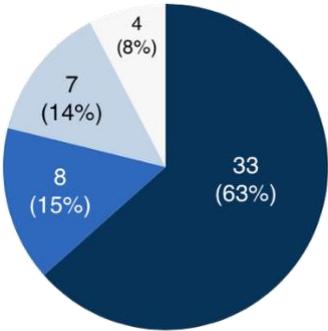
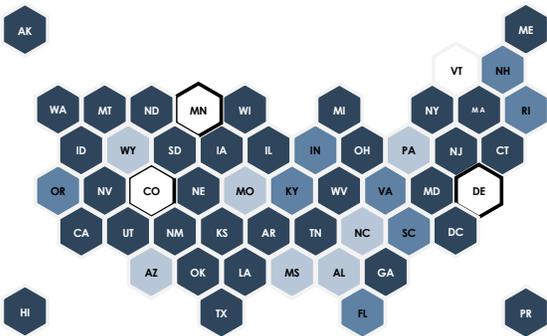
*– Oklahoma’s ESSA Plan*

**Increasing Effective Educators**

*States deciding to use Title II, Part A funds to increase the number of educators effective at improving student achievement:*

**Legend**

33 plans specifically mention increasing the number of effective principals.
8 plans use the generic term <i>educator</i> , which could imply principals.
7 plans only reference teachers.
4 plans do not intend to use Title II, Part A funds to increase the number of effective educators.



*“Education is the key to a strong democracy, economic competitiveness and a world-class standard of living.”*

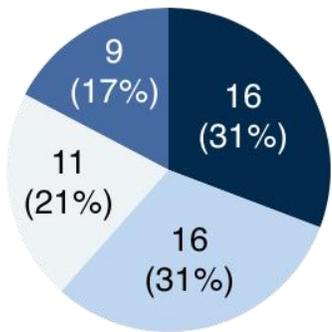
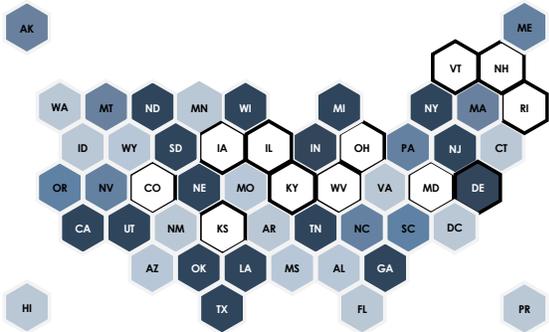
*– Equity and Excellence Commission, 2013*

### Greater Access for Low-income and Ethnic Minority Students

States deciding to use Title II, Part A funds to provide low-income and ethnic minority students with greater access to quality educators:

#### Legend

16 plans specifically mention increasing the number of principals.
9 plans use the generic term <i>educator</i> , which could imply principals.
16 plans only reference teachers.
11 plans do not intend to use Title II, Part A funds to provide greater access to quality educators for low-income and minority students.



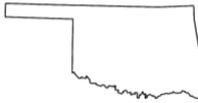
Regarding the second focal area, UCEA researchers determined that 41 out of 52 plans (79%) intend to use Title II, Part A funds to provide low-income and ethnic minority students greater access to effective teachers, principals, and other school leaders. Also, 16 out of 52 (31%) plans specifically described strategies to give low-income and ethnic minority students greater access to effective principals. That is compared to 16 plans (31%) using the generic term *educator* and nine plans (17%) only mentioning teachers. The remaining 10 plans (19%) do not intend to use Title II, Part A funds to support initiatives that provide low-income and ethnic

minority students greater access to effective educators.

Notably, while many states addressed the importance of equity in their ESSA plans, when asked to describe “how” they plan to achieve it states often reverted to the language of general development under the assumption that broad development will support low-income and minority communities.

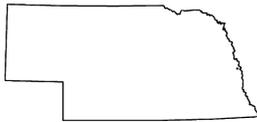
#### Highlight States

Based on its 52-plan analysis, UCEA researchers choose to highlight four states’ plans, which demonstrated thoughtful attention to school leadership through enumerating their strategies to improve equity. These examples of state investments are merely highlights without claims of exhaustive representation of the variety of thoughtful plans for the use of Title II, Part A funding.



**Oklahoma** has three strategies for ensuring equitable access to quality educators: investing in (a) meaningful professional development, (b) leader training, and (c) partnerships with educator preparation programs. A more specific state initiative also will provide training in the state’s 39 recognized Indian tribes.

**New York** will use Title II, Part A funds, in conjunction with a Wallace Foundation grant, to support the Principal Preparation Project, which aims to “enhance school building leadership preparation, thus contributing to improved student success.”



**Nebraska** intends to use Title II, Part A funds to invest in the Education Workforce Index. The index will be used to mobilize schools and districts to embrace systems of evaluation and support that drive continual and focused growth; produce evidence to inform focused

professional growth activities; build capacity of building administrators to serve as instructional leaders; establish a broader and shared understanding around comprehensive, systemic approaches to human capital management; and advance equity-focused conversations and activities across the state.

Texas intends to leverage Title II, Part A funds to create the Texas Equity Toolkit, which will assist “districts with engaging in a continuous improvement process focused on issues of equity.” Additionally, Texas plans to implement an “instructional leadership initiative designed to provide to local education agencies and schools that did not earn satisfactory ratings on the state accountability system with comprehensive instructional leadership training for principal supervisors, principals, assistant principals, and teacher leaders in an effort to build skills in coaching, growing, and developing educators.”



## Implications

At the signing ceremony of the ESEA, President Lyndon Johnson declared, “By passing this bill, we bridge the gap between helplessness and hope for more than five million educationally deprived children.” In essence, the ESEA was a piece of civil rights legislation. ESSA seeks to ensure the continuance of that legacy by guaranteeing every student has access to a quality education.

Of the two focal areas UCEA examined regarding equity, states appear to be investing more in increasing the number of effective educators as opposed to providing low-income and ethnic minority students with greater access to effective educators. This dichotomy becomes wider when examining the descriptions of principals in states’ ESSA equity plans. While nearly fourth-fifths of plans intend to use Title II, Part A funds to provide greater access for low-income and ethnic minority students, only 16 of those plans (39%) describe providing greater access to effective *principals*.

Similarly, out of the 48 plans stating intent to use Title II, Part A funds to increase the number of effective educators, only 33 (68%) describe

increasing the number of effective *principals*. While ensuring all students have access to quality teachers is important, if quality teachers are not supported by quality principals, they are more likely to become burned out and exit the profession or move to a different district. Thus, investing in high-quality principals can serve as a long-term strategy to support quality instruction and indirectly bolster achievement for *all* students.

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