


## ESSA Title I Fiscal Equity Provisions: Early State Responses in the 2017-18 Academic Year

Presentation to the National Association of ESEA State Program Administrators (NAESPA)  
Effective Programs and Quality Outcomes Committee

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### Presentation Overview

- Purpose and Context for the Study
- Research Questions
- Methods
- Key Findings
- Conclusions
- Possibilities for NAESPA
- Future Research Possibilities


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### Purpose and Context for the Study

- The purpose of this study was to examine initial state responses to fiscal equity provisions found within the Every Student Succeeds Act
- The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), codified as 20 U.S.C. § 6311 et seq. (2016), revises Title I school improvement requirements and seeks to address underlying resource inequities found within/across Title I schools.
- Specifically, ESSA requires state education agencies (SEA) to work with local education agencies (LEA) and individual schools to periodically review LEA and school-level resource allocation methods that potentially contribute to the inequitable distribution of resources within/across Title I schools.


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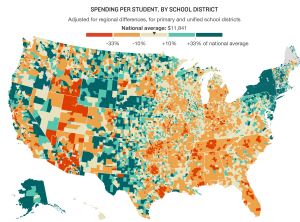
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## Motivation for Review Policy: Variation in Per-Pupil Expenditures



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## Research Questions

- How are state education agency administrators initially responding to the resource equity provisions required by the Every Student Succeeds Act within the context of their state's Title I Programs?
  - What factors shape their initial response(s) to the new policy given their state's learning improvement priorities and/or current policy goals?
  - What barriers do administrators within the state education agency encounter as they develop initial processes and procedures to implement the new policy within SEA, LEA, and schools?
  - How, if at all, are the new policy provisions prompting changes in program structures or work practice across within and across the SEA?

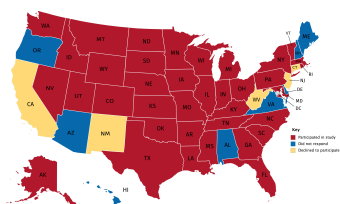
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## Methods

- **Data collection period**
  - Spanned a 4-month period (November 2017 to March, 2018)
- **Data collection**
  - Structured telephone interviews and website document retrieval, including all 50 state ESSA plans
  - Participants included 39 state Title I directors (all NAESPA members) in all regions of the United States
- **Analysis**
  - Iterative analysis using three rounds of qualitative coding, lower level codes were pre-defined while later codes were emergent based on data
  - Research team used ATLAS.ti, a computer-assisted program to complete the analytic portion of the study

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## Research Study Participants

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## Key Findings

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|---|--|
| ▶ | State directors had engaged in significant efforts to implement new fiscal equity requirements nor developed a coherent plan for implementation of the new ESSA provision.             |
| ▶ | State directors expressed concern and frustration about the limitations of the guidance provided by USED about the new policy provisions.  |
| ▶ | The policy was prompting the development of new monitoring tools, collaborative relationships between program/fiscal officials, and an emphasis on 'investment for effective returns.' |
| ▶ | Organizational variation across local education agencies appeared to be a significant concern for state directors, especially in deeming a funding level 'inequitable'.                |

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- State directors had not engaged in significant efforts to implement new fiscal equity requirements nor developed a coherent plan for implementation of the new ESSA provision.

[illegible]

- State ESSA plans made inconsistent reference to the periodic resource allocation review.
- 19 states attached the periodic resource allocation review to existing processes.
- None of the state ESSA plans positioned the review process as an impetus for new fiscal equity work.

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State directors had not engaged in significant efforts to implement new fiscal equity requirements nor developed a coherent plan for implementation of the new ESSA provision.

• Across the 39 interviews, state directors primarily pointed to two factors as justifying the delayed implementation of the new policy:

- State directors pointed to the one-year delay imposed by USED as a reason to defer action on the implementation of the new policy. This delay was enacted to give states more time to develop their fiscal systems.
- State directors pointed to the absence of USED guidance about the new policy as reason to "go slow" and "wait" for further direction. Many directors were inclined to wait rather proceed because of the lack of clarification.




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State directors had not engaged in significant efforts to implement new fiscal equity requirements nor developed a coherent plan for implementation of the new ESSA provision.

• "Well, the feds have delayed implementation of that requirement I believe to 2018-19 and that gives us the time we're gonna need because it's going to take a lot of stakeholder input to figure out what is reasonable for the wide variety of 900 LEAs to do those calculations. We've got to figure out if they have to be somehow validated, audited or otherwise verified." (Male, Midwest Region)




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State directors had not engaged in significant efforts to implement new fiscal equity requirements nor developed a coherent plan for implementation of the new ESSA provision.

• According to 10 directors, their states had taken modest initial steps to begin implementing the new provisions. These steps included:

- Developing prototype monitoring protocols
- Enlisting the services of an IT contractor to begin building new data collection forms
- Developing new fiscal guidelines for program related expenditures
- Consulting with practitioners about 2018-19 data collection activities




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State directors expressed concern and frustration about the limitations of the guidance provided by USED about the new policy provisions.

- Of the 39 state directors interviewed, 19 referred in some way to the limitations of USED guidance as a source of concern and frustration.
  - "I think not having clarity around what the expectations is – even from an audit perspective, if it won't be from the U.S. Department of Education's perspective – that part is going to be a little bit of a challenge for us over the next couple of years." (Female, Southern Region)
  - "Districts are waiting on us, they're frustrated with us, because they want us to provide some guidance and we are really in the dark because USED simply has not done its job and has not provided much information to us to guide this implementation." (Male, Eastern Region)

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The policy prompted the development of new fiscal monitoring tools, collaborative relationships between program/fiscal officials, and an emphasis on "investment for effective returns."

- Of the 39 directors interviewed, 18 noted that they were working in collaboration with other SEA colleagues to develop at least one of the following types of tools:
  - Fiscal monitoring protocols, questionnaires, or templates that would inform the collection of data about Title I/non-Title I expenditures
  - Title I program handbooks that described the difference between braided, blended, and hybrid program funding approaches as well as outline "best" practices for investment
  - Online resources and websites that provided documentation and other resources linking resource allocation decisions to effectiveness

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The policy prompted the development of new fiscal monitoring tools, collaborative relationships between program/fiscal officials, and an emphasis on "investment for effective returns."

- "We first have to define practically what those requirements are. We then have to collect the data. Then the monitoring of that has to be done by a combination of program people, people who are familiar with Title I programmatic requirements and then also fiscal requirements. We have a very robust program and fiscal monitoring process right now, but all of those protocols are gonna have to be revised in light of the specific requirements to monitor resource allocations." (Male, Midwest Region)

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- ▶ The policy prompted the development of new fiscal monitoring tools, collaborative relationships between program/fiscal officials, and an emphasis on "investment for effective returns."

• *"So how can the funds be used to support the goals of the school? So that's a different mind shift. Because in the past the funds have been distributed based on the ranking and allocation. With very little thought other than the high percentage or the poverty percentage about why those funds are going to those schools. So to me that's the big mindset that we're gonna be working on over the next couple of years." (Female, West Region)*




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- ▶ Organizational variation across local education agencies appeared to be a significant concern for state directors, especially in deeming a funding level 'inequitable'.

• Of the 39 directors interviewed, 12 indicated that variation related to school district size, program composition, and region served as a significant challenge for assessing equity.

- *Directors pointed to the difficulty of establishing a uniform measure given many districts were small and/or rural*
- *A key challenge relates to what measures to use (e.g., per-pupil expenditures, teacher-to-student ratios, etc.)*
- *Determining what should be included in the equity calculation*




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- ▶ Organizational variation across local education agencies appeared to be a significant concern for state directors, especially in deeming a funding level 'inequitable'.

• *"I think the hardest thing about this is to determine what a school's base resources are, if we pulled out all the federal money, what would those schools look like and would they be able to offer a basic program. And that's kind of my starting point with this and then you have to look the additional Title I dollars. There will also be some state funded priority schools that are not Title I that will be getting some extra help. Then within districts you have to look at what the school is doing programmatically. So is this a magnet school, specialty school, and all that sort of thing. So, how do you sort through the finances and say these schools have equity?" (Male, Southern Region)*




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## Conclusions

- State directors responses have been shaped by the one-year delay imposed by USED; most stated implementation will begin in 2018-19.
- A significant barrier involves the absence of guidance from USED, particularly how equity should be defined across state contexts.
- Challenges mostly relate to the difficulty assessing equitable allocation practices across varied organizational settings (e.g., small/large, urban/rural, high/low wealth).
- Directors appear to be increasingly focused on collaboration with fiscal officers as well as outreach to LEAs to prepare for policy implementation.




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## Possibilities for NAESPA

- Working with NAESPA and other state policy organizations, develop equity guidance and model policies specific to Title I
- Develop common monitoring instruments to assess the implementation of the policy and create standardized dataset pertaining to equity outcomes
- Create an online warehouse of monitoring tools, policy guidance, and other materials which motivate states to share best practices and approaches




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## Future Research

- Continuing with a multi-method research agenda
  -  Focus on state, district, school cases demonstrating novel efforts to implement new equity practices in Title I resource approaches (i.e., deep dives into SEA/LEA dyads)
  -  Begin looking at the national Title I community, identify how policy ideas flow across, between within states using Social Network Analysis (SNA)
  -  Move toward quantitative research examining the relationship between particular program investments and student achievement outcomes




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## Questions?

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