



COLORADO
Department of Education
Commissioner of Education

201 East Colfax Avenue
Denver, CO 80203-1799

Feb. 10, 2017

Dear Colorado residents,

For years, the state of Colorado has been a pioneer in education policy, writing some of the nation's foremost legislation to address standards, accountability, assessments, school improvement and educator effectiveness.

In 2012, Colorado sought and obtained a waiver from the federal No Child Left Behind education law that gave us flexibility based on Colorado education policies and allowed us to continue to innovate. Because of the waiver and the state's innovative education laws, many of the requirements sought by the new federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) are already in practice in Colorado.

Nevertheless, Colorado, along with every state in the union, has been called to draft and submit plans on how they will implement ESSA, which replaces the 15-year-old No Child Left Behind act. The new law shifts the country's education law from relying more on federal oversight to giving states more flexibility and more decision-making power at the local level.

Colorado, with a history of innovation and fierce individualism, fully embraces this approach to education. In fact, we have been doing it for quite some time.

Using state law as the backbone of our plan, Colorado has thoughtfully and diligently worked with many stakeholders to develop a set of plans under ESSA's new rules that address standards, assessments, school and district accountability, school improvement and educator quality.

We are proud today to release the draft of Colorado's ESSA plan for public review and to collect feedback. It is the culmination of a year's worth of hard work, thoughtful conversations and deep consideration about Colorado's education system. This stage of Colorado's ESSA plan development is important as it is another chance to react to the plan. The plan will be open for public comment for 30 days, from February 10 to March 13, 2017. The comments we receive from you will be compiled, included with the plan when it is submitted to the U.S. Department of Education (USDE), and incorporated into the plan as appropriate.

The plan's development required a robust outreach to collect input from stakeholders and the general public. I'm very proud to report that Colorado residents have been thoroughly engaged in the process.

Last year the Colorado Department of Education launched a statewide tour that visited seven sites around the state and discussed the plan with approximately 1,500 attendees. Since February 2016, the state has held more than 170 meetings on ESSA and received nearly 4,000 comments about the plan.

In August, CDE created a hub-and-spoke committee process to consider every aspect of the ESSA guidelines. About 130 community members joined seven topical spoke committees that held 30 meetings



altogether since August. The hub committee with more than 20 statewide leaders held eight lengthy meetings. Since they began meeting last summer, committee members have given generously of their time, made some tough decisions, and have worked hard to produce this draft of the ESSA plan. The public also engaged in decision points through online surveys that collected about 840 responses. My sincere thanks to all who have been involved.

The final plan to be approved by the State Board of Education and signed off on by the governor will be submitted to the USDE in April. The state is finishing its work even though uncertainty remains around how the federal plan will be implemented under the new presidential administration. We feel it is necessary to submit the plan to give educators an early understanding of what is expected of them in the coming school years.

Based on the direction set by the State Board of Education and the transition at the federal level, the plan Colorado submits to the USDE will address only the federal requirements. The state's ESSA plan will show that Colorado has developed an education system built to provide all children significant opportunities to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education and to close educational achievement gaps. Colorado has been and continues to be focused on implementing smart and effective state and federal policy in a manner that offers opportunities for each and every student to graduate college and career ready.

That doesn't mean the work is done once this plan is sent to the federal government. Really, our work is only beginning. The hundreds of comments and ideas that the ESSA process raised make Colorado's ESSA plan a living document, something that will be revisited continually, scrutinized regularly and modified as needed based on the ideas and feedback of people within this state.

In fact, as the department worked with stakeholders on the ESSA plan, many important ideas were brought forward. Not all of the input received is required to be included in our state plan, but instead it will inform the state's implementation of ESSA. Therefore, at the time the department submits its final ESSA plan to the USDE, CDE will be releasing an overview that summarizes common themes heard through our robust community engagement process and initial plans for implementation.

While the ESSA plan is a federal requirement, the education of our children is a Colorado priority. The plan may be a federal document, but it is a Colorado responsibility. And we intend to make it ours, for our children and for a better future for everyone.

Thank you.

Sincerely,



Katy Anthes, Ph.D.
Colorado Education Commissioner

