



The Education Trust

November 30, 2017

Advancing Equity with ESSA: The Good, The Bad, and the Wonky

Dr. Lillian Lowery
Vice President for P-12 Policy, Research and Practice

When ESSA passed, it was hailed as an opportunity for state leaders to step up to the role of “equity champions” that many claimed to be.

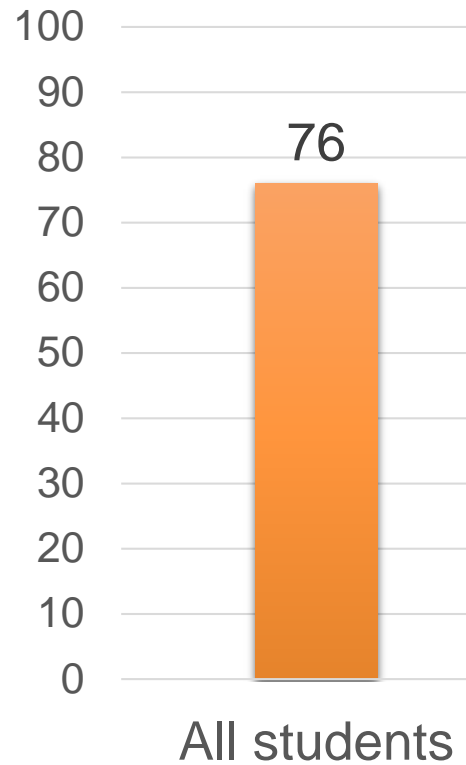
But two years later, most states’ ESSA plans contain plenty of equity rhetoric, but very little action.

That's especially true when it comes to **school accountability** – perhaps the most important set of decisions that state leaders had to make in developing these plans.

Although states chose strong indicators of school performance, many are choosing to base school ratings on overall averages, largely ignoring results of individual student groups.

As a result, a school with results like these could easily get an A.

Math proficiency rate – Example Elementary School



When identifying schools that need to improve for one or more student groups, most states also set the bar far too low, further sanctioning underperformance.

Moving forward, advocates will need to monitor how these systems play out.

How are schools that get A's actually doing for students of color, low-income students, English learners, or students with disabilities?

But they'll also have to pay close attention to what actually happens in schools that are identified for support and improvement.

ESSA provides some basic parameters, many of which promote improving opportunity and achievement for historically underserved students



But the law leaves many decisions up to states – making the voices of equity advocates – policymakers and community leaders - more important than ever before.