ESSA Special Populations Focus Group

October 14, 2016 – 9:30 a.m. (in-person); October 20, 2016 – 3:30 p.m.

During the focus group session on October 14 and a follow-up webinar October 20, Assistant Superintendent Amy Maisterra shared a presentation on key updates the new ESSA law makes for private school students, homeless students, students with disabilities, students in foster care, and students who are "neglected, delinquent, or at-risk" (Title I Part D). The focus group broke into smaller subgroups to gather in-depth feedback from LEA leaders, teachers, advocates, and experts on each special population. Each subgroup discussed key policy areas and made recommendations for DC's state plan we will submit to the U.S. Department of Education. Note that no final decisions were made in this meeting or follow-up webinar. Below you will find a summary of the discussion based on points raised by various participants.

Area Discussed	Summary of Discussion	Next Steps & Follow Up (if applicable)
1. Private School Students a. What will success look like for this population?	• Would like to see more data on eligibility, participation	
b. What is the city's greatest lever for change, in your opinion?	• Accountability and oversight are key on equitable services - Seems complicated to manage successfully and ethically, contracts are important • Ombudsman for complaints - There's limited capacity among OSSE. The State Board of Ed already has a Student Advocate and also an Ombudsman office. Should this new position be seated at SBOE, OSSE, or somewhere else.	
c. From your perspective, what do you think is most important for OSSE to consider as we work to develop a new state plan that best supports this population?	• Accountability and oversight (guidelines, training, & monitoring) - Be engaged in evaluation to ensure it is results driven—impact as desired and monitor distribution of funds and timely use of funds - Training for DCPS re compliance • Ombudsman: consider: - Funding needs - Capacity of current offices	

	- Confusion—already have ombudsman and student advocacy office - MOU ensuring priority for these kinds of complaints? With existing ombudsman? - Who makes complaints?	
d. Based on the data and what you have heard about the new requirements, what does OSSE need to tackle first/most urgently?	No specific feedback was captured related to this discussion prompt.	
2. Homeless Students Critical Questions: a. What will success look like for this population?	No specific feedback was captured related to this discussion prompt.	
b. What is the city's greatest lever for change, in your opinion?	• Interagency Collaboration is key - There needs to be more coordination between LEAs, DC agencies, and community-based organizations; coordinating efforts with all interested parties/agencies that are working with children/youths. - Interagency collaboration may need to be **a more systemic effort** to connect homeless families. • More funding/resources needed - More support is necessary for full-time homeless liaisons at LEAs with large homeless populations. - Freeing up time for Homeless Liaisons to be able to support homeless families in need—proving more focus. - Funding is needed to provide uniform support and other school needs. • Needs assessments and data reporting needed - A needs assessment should be conducted to determine individual and collective needs for homeless families. Can be analyzed to determine needs district-wide,	

	by ward, by quadrant, etc. - Data reporting will improve if all agencies/parties are communicating—to better track students. • Need culture change/PD - Teachers need more sensitivity training to ensure they understand how the schools can support children/youths who are homeless, hungry, and in need of trauma support. This should be systematic and/or mandated. How is it being translated from the school-level professional staff and the teachers? Also, removing stigma and helping to maintain the stability measures at schools so that students can thrive (ex: negative behavior tends to set the standard of the classroom and teachers often try to identify homeless students by behavior in their informal, water cooler or teacher's lounge kinds of discussions).	
c. From your perspective, what do you think is most important for OSSE to consider as we work to develop a new state plan that best supports this population?	• Defining and evaluating effectiveness is important - What's our goal? - How do we know we've been effective with this population (LEA & SEA)? - A way to measure effectiveness of homeless education programs, looking at the baseline information and then determining where we want to go. This should be measured at the SEA and LEA levels • Professional development for school-based staff - Include professional development plans in the State plan to include sensitivity training district-wide, etc. • Systemic collaboration plan - That the LEA develops a collaborative Care Plan, including feedback and POC information CBOs/Service Providers.	
d. Based on the data and what you have heard about the new requirements, what does OSSE need to tackle first/most urgently?	• Interagency collaboration may need to be a more systemic effort to connect homeless families with resources and increase the level of communication between service providers and LEAs. • Funding and being able to financially support having a dedicated homeless liaison to support homeless families will definitely promote success! Funding needs include: - Uniforms and transportation really drains funding. - Having a dedicated HL will allow HLs to focus on local and district-wide supports to better serve and diversify supports for homeless families.	

	• Measure of effectiveness—what's our goal? How do we know that the program is effective at the LEA-level (including school-based data) and at the SEA-level?
e. Other issues raised	• A lot of things are in place at AppleTree, but some of the questions that come up are around funding—how will they pay for services. • Better coordination of wrap-around services. • Defining what the guidelines are around substandard housing. This is not covered under the new requirements, but this is a challenge for LEAs to define and address. How do you verify if housing is unsuitable? Also, it's an on-going challenge to verify homeless status—currently, LEAs just accept • Streamlining transportation and school stability. • A challenge is that LEAs try to push out homeless students deemed to be a problem prior to becoming homeless who are now housed far away so they use the distance as a way of pushing the child/ren out. They use attendance issues as a way to push them out. • What provisions are going to made to improve attendance, ability for LEAs to improve systems of care or coordinated services. • Provisions for SPED students and students/families that have health issues are provided with health services—and helping them to connect with the school to collaborate and coordinate supports. • Need more communication with all active supports for each child if there are many agencies involved. • Funding and being able to financially support having a dedicated homeless liaison to support homeless families will definitely promote success! Uniforms and transportation really drain their funding. Dedicated HL support will allow them to focus on local and district-wide supports to better serve and diversify supports for homeless families
3. **Students with Disabilities Critical Questions:** a. What will success look like for this population?	No specific feedback was captured related to this discussion prompt.

b.	What is the city's greatest lever for change, in your opinion?	• Preventing Overuse of Exclusionary Discipline Practices for Special Education Students
		  - There is already a detailed reporting process in place.
		  - Much more training is needed for teachers to support special ed students with their behavior. Understanding parents, families, and behavioral challenges is important.
		  - OSSE released guidance on discipline – based on U.S. Department of Education guidance and civil rights laws. OSSE could share this more widely, and also share best practices for positive and restorative discipline.
		  - OSSE could survey LEAs to learn what behavioral models are being used now, and highlight best practices rather than impose a system.	

c.	From your perspective, what do you think is most important for OSSE to consider as we work to develop a new state plan that best supports this population?	• Clear & purposeful guidance around 1% cap on alternate assessment for students with the most significant disabilities (e.g., determinations/definitions, test accommodations, justification for LEAs, exceeding 1% participation rate, and waiver) - Clarity on process and expectations for both LEAs and parents; strong communication plan • Increased & accessible resources and professional development opportunities to empower school staff to meet needs of ALL students • Comprehensive plan for parent engagement & education	
d.	Based on the data and what you have heard about the new requirements, what does OSSE need to tackle first/most urgently?	No specific feedback was captured related to this discussion prompt.	

e.	Other issues raised	• **Alternate Assessment Aligned with Alternate Academic Standards (AAAAAS) for students with most severe cognitive disabilities and 1% cap**
		  - How/ will these assessments be included and weighted in the statewide school accountability system?
		  - Although national research shows that on average, only 1% of students have cognitive disabilities severe enough to need alternative assessments, many LEAs' population may exceed this. DC's unique structure with many single-school LEAs makes it more likely our LEAs will be above the cap than in other states with large LEAs. (Interest in how the 1% threshold was developed; believe students with disabilities are underrepresented in participation in alt assessments)	

- OSSE's data team is examining PARCC 2015-16 data now to determine the most recent percentage of AAAAAS.
- The 1% cap should not be used as a loophole for LEAs to place students who they think won't perform well on the tests
- The waiver process for LEAs must be clear and helpful for LEAs who are likely to exceed the cap (e.g., Can OSSE deny a waiver request/ justification for exceeding the 1% cap?)
- Need more information on how the 1% cap will apply to LEAs and potential consequences
- More training or on-demand resources is needed for LEAs who enroll a student with significant cognitive disabilities and need to know what to do.
- There are still many special ed students who may not meet the strict definition for AAAAAS, but for whom PARCC is still not appropriate. The same is true for students who are not identified as special ed with IEPs, but who have behavioral or attention deficit problems. (Participants feel that the criteria for alt assessments misses the mark for a lot of students who cannot access the PARCC curriculum but are not of the highest need/ significant cognitive disability)
- PARCC's accommodations include frequent breaks, a dictionary (in math only), and other support, but these accommodations are not well-known and are underutilized; general lack of knowledge/ awareness about available PARCC accommodations
- Efforts to administer PARCC accommodations are focused on students with existing IDEA or 504 eligibilities, not on the entire student population although they are also entitled to access the accommodations

- Need support re: State assessments, generally:
  - Need more training (recommendation: prerecorded, easily accessible webinars) on determining and using PARCC accommodations available to all students
  - PARCC does not meet the needs of DC students, many of whom are significantly below grade-level

- Parent Engagement should be improved.
  - There are many events, policies, etc. of which parents aren't aware.

- Behavioral health factors are not taken into account by schools
  - Behavior interventions/ discipline

	- Current monitoring framework is sufficient to protect SWDs in the discipline process - Schools wants greater support through increased professional development and accountability - Incorporate trauma-informed care, restorative justice, and student-centered schoolwide behavior plans - Need strong guidance and procedures to drill down to student-level • Requested more resources from OSSE on recommended best practices and examples from around the District • DCPS has expanded behavior intervention procedures - Recommend expanding nonpublic requirements re: seclusion and restraint to LEAs	
4. Students in Foster Care Critical Questions: a. What will success look like for this population?	• Earning credits, progressing towards graduation, improved academic performance. • Outside help with success: tutors, nonprofits, etc. OSSE funded-tutoring • Maintain school stability / social relationship with friends, etc., to the maximum extent possible, especially for older students. • Look to the Title I-D ESSA slide for model of considerations and areas of emphasis regarding successful transitions.	

b. What is the city's greatest lever for change, in your opinion?	• Transportation, including making adjustments to the DC One Card program
	  o DC One Cards do not work in MD (or VA). DC students in surrounding county foster homes who take Metro to DC schools have to enter the system in MD/VA by paying out of pocket and then exit the system at the MD/DC line to start using their free DC One Cards.
	  o Group members reported knowing students in foster care who are asked to use their own CFSA-provided allowance money to transport themselves to school.
	  o Concern that CFSA is going to curtail the limited transportation they provide now and push more of it onto the LEAs. Thinks state leadership is going to be key to avoid this. Asserts that students already move schools because current CFSA transportation contract doesn't go past 6:00 pm which prevents students from participating in athletics and other after-school activities.
	• Facilitate the exchange of records between the schools
	• Educate foster parents about graduation requirements, etc.
	• Ensure credit transfer/translation between sectors & jurisdictions	

	• This is a unique area because the school level is almost always the greatest lever for change; here the state has a definitive role.	
c. From your perspective, what do you think is most important for OSSE to consider as we work to develop a new state plan that best supports this population?	• A smooth credit and transcript transfer process is essential so students know where they are on the path to graduation in their new school. • There should be a more active role for DC in terms of oversight of students attending surrounding county public schools, where students frequently move to and from DC schools. • Reduce number of moves to improve credit accumulation and improve performance. • These provisions were not written for DC; with 65+ LEAs, the state needs demonstrate/exert leadership to ensure/force transportation agreements are reached and are meaningful in terms of providing options for students.	

d. Based on the data and what you have heard about the new requirements, what does OSSE need to tackle first/most urgently?	• Identify funding or existing infrastructure for school stability transportation. DOT is an existing transportation infrastructure; can students in foster care access school stability transportation through DOT?
	• Ensure smooth transfers for students in foster care who change schools.
	• Make sure that credits transfer and transfer quickly.
	• Set a required timeline schools to conduct transcript audits for incoming students so that they can quickly be enrolled in the correct classes
	• Someone in DC needs to know what's going on with the students in MD because they are likely to disrupt foster home placements and need to move within MD or return DC.
	• One member of the group felt that OSSE should establish a review process, because "9 times out of 10 folks know in advance of a foster home move." That process would be:
	   o Ideally OSSE should be able to access the local county school district's files
	   o OSSE should review all of the student's records
	   o OSSE recommends the best place (school) for the student based on the new foster parent location.	

e. Other issues raised	• What is LEA role in determining which school foster care students will attend?
	  - LEA and CFSA must work collaboratively to determine best interest of the child and facilitate transportation, enrollment, and other services.
	  - CFSA remains the lead agency under the federal Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act.	

5. Neglected, Delinquent, and At-Risk Students **Critical Questions:** a. What will success look like for this population?	• Increased skill levels in math, reading • Increased school attendance • Increased grade completion and high school graduation • Increased job attainment/vocational programs/dual-enrollment opportunities • Positive transitions, including housing (DYRS has observed that once a student's commitment is over, youth becomes homeless)	
b. What is the city's greatest lever for change, in your opinion?	• City has phenomenal resources, more coordination of resources/need partnerships with communities (e.g., mentorship programs, sports, exposure to other things, real world, need to make school relevant) - Ability to create partnerships within the government sector and in the community • Dual-enrollment program to get certified—work on this before they leave the institution • Encourage/incentivize youth to participate during commitment	

c. From your perspective, what do you think is most important for OSSE to consider as we work to develop a new state plan that best supports this population?	• Create sustainable partnerships in the government sector and with community stakeholders to build a stronger wraparound support to delinquent, neglected, and at-risk youth
	  - OSSE and DYRS can partner with community organizations and businesses on vocational internships, etc. but need more outreach.
	  - Assist with partnerships—help make connections and support better coordination among service providers
	  - Increase accountability among agencies and providers
	  - Raise awareness and outreach
	
	• More credit-bearing opportunities would be helpful.
	  - Use competency-based assessments so students don't need to retake classes in high school, community college, and job-training programs.
	  - Blended/ online learning
	  - Dual-enrollment programs
	
	• Celebrate success for at-risk students who complete key milestones.	

d. Based on the data and what you have heard about the new requirements, what does OSSE need to tackle first/most urgently?	• Everything in the list provided ("new emphasis")—they are all connected • Create community partnerships (e.g. mentoring, online tutoring, prevention approach) • Credit-bearing requirements • Timely re-enrollment	
e. Other issues raised	• OSSE has 2 other facilities not funded under this Title—how can we ensure they are doing everything in ESSA?	

Attendee Names & Organizations

- Advocates for Justice and Education
- AppleTree PCS
- Children's Law Center
- DC Division of Child Support Enforcement
- DC Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services
- DC Public Schools
- DC State Board of Education
- Education Forward DC
- E.L. Haynes PCS
- KIPP DC
- Mary McLeod Bethune PCS
- National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty
- Next Steps PCS
- State Advisory Panel (SAP) on Special Education