

Office of the Governor
State of North Carolina

Roy Cooper
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The Hon. William Cobey, Chairman
State Board of Education
6301 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, N. C. 27699-6301

The Hon. Mark Johnson, Superintendent
N. C. Dept. of Public Instruction
301 N. Wilmington Street
Raleigh, N. C. 27601

Dear Chairman Cobey & Superintendent Johnson:

Thank you for submitting to me for review North Carolina's draft plan for implementing the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA).

I would like to thank the Department of Public Instruction and State Board of Education staff for their work in developing the plan. North Carolina has long been a leader in public education and aspects of the ESSA plan reflect that. However, I have four main concerns that I respectfully request be addressed before the plan is submitted to the US Department of Education.

First, the accountability portion of the plan focuses almost exclusively on standardized testing where it should include other measures as well. ESSA provides an opportunity for states to move beyond an accountability system driven by standardized testing and to include additional measures of school quality and student success. The General Assembly placed specific requirements on the Department regarding accountability. That does not, however, preclude adding non-testing measures related to school quality and student success to the NC School Report Cards.

I recommend including in the plan that the Department and State Board will report a measure of chronic absenteeism on the NC School Report Cards. I also recommend that the Department and State Board administer a survey on school climate and report the results on the NC School Report Cards. Such a survey would provide more information on how our schools meet students' non-academic needs and could measure, among other items, the quality and character of student and teacher relationships, students' and teachers' safety at school, and the quality of the learning environment in our public schools. At least 3 states from the initial plans submitted to the US Department of Education are including the administration of a school climate survey in their ESSA plans, including Illinois, which has been administering a school climate survey statewide for several years.

Second, the plan should do more to address how the Department will support school districts in providing equitable educational opportunities for high-achieving students, specifically high-achieving, low-income students. I share the concerns of many educators and policymakers about the extent to which high-achieving, low-income students do not get the same level of access to rigorous educational opportunities as their higher income peers. All students, no matter their socioeconomic status, must have access to a rigorous education that will prepare them for a career or opportunities to pursue postsecondary education. While decisions regarding serving high-achieving students are made at the local level, the Department and State Board should explore adding to the NC School Report Cards a school and district-level indicator focused around student access to rigorous educational opportunities.

Third, I believe it is critical that the plan indicates what the Department will do to ensure support and professional development for principals in low-performing schools, especially schools identified for turnaround. Effective principals are critical to turning around low-performing schools. The plan should share with the US Department of Education and stakeholders from across North Carolina more information about how the Department will use Title II funds to support principals in low-performing schools and what types of professional development the Department will provide to those principals.

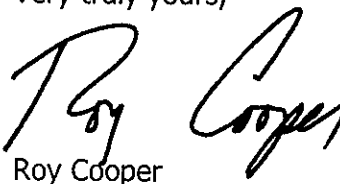
Last, given the extensive evidence on the critical importance of teachers to students' success in the classroom and beyond, the plan should explain how the Department will work to ensure the equitable distribution of effective teachers across schools. Teachers are the most important factor in students' school success; yet too often, students of all kinds but especially those who are most in need do not have access to effective teachers. More information about how the Department intends to support local school districts in ensuring that effective teachers are equitably distributed across schools should be included. The plan would be further strengthened by highlighting how the Department intends to support districts in the recruitment and retention of effective teachers, especially teachers from diverse backgrounds.

Each of the areas I raise here is critical to our shared vision for a public education system that provides each student with a strong education, which in turn leads to a better educated and prepared workforce, and a stronger and healthier economy for our state.

Again, my thanks to the Department and the State Board for working to develop North Carolina's ESSA plan. While it already has many strong elements, the plan would be further strengthened by addressing the items raised here. I look forward to your response and to working with you to improve the educational opportunities available for all students in our state.

With kind regards, I am

Very truly yours,



Roy Cooper

RAC/sm