

Every Student Succeeds Act: Public Comment Sessions

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction

Public Comment Sessions Summary April-May, 2016

Between April 13th and May 18th, 2016, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) conducted six Public Comment Sessions regarding the federal government's Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). To ensure public access, the sessions were held in various cities across North Carolina, including Wilmington, Cary, Charlotte, Bethel, Kernersville, and Black Mountain. While there, parents, teachers, administrative personnel, student support staff, and members of educational groups and associations had an opportunity to voice their concerns regarding ESSA, and more importantly, to suggest any accountability measures to be used in conjunction with federal guidelines. Here is a summary of their comments:

FINE ARTS:

A concern among teachers was the funding and integration of music education in North Carolina schools. Many teachers felt that music education offers students a well-rounded educational experience that promotes community engagement and parental involvement. They asked that access to music education be included in ESSA's accountability measures.

FUNDING:

Funding concerns were largely centered on a lack of resources and the allocation of Title I funding for low-income schools. Many groups and associations, specifically community-based non-profits, asked to be considered as partners in providing student services under Title I provisions. Other concerns included a lack of library resources and dated technology.

TEACHER SUPPORTS:

Several respondents commented on the lack of support teachers receive in their classrooms. This includes little opportunity for training and development, increased administrative duties that detract from instructional time, and a lack of emotional support in maintaining a proper work-life balance. Respondents asked that ESSA accountability measures consider teacher supports such as funding for developmental training and compensation for required duties outside the classroom.

STUDENT HEALTH AND SUPPORT:

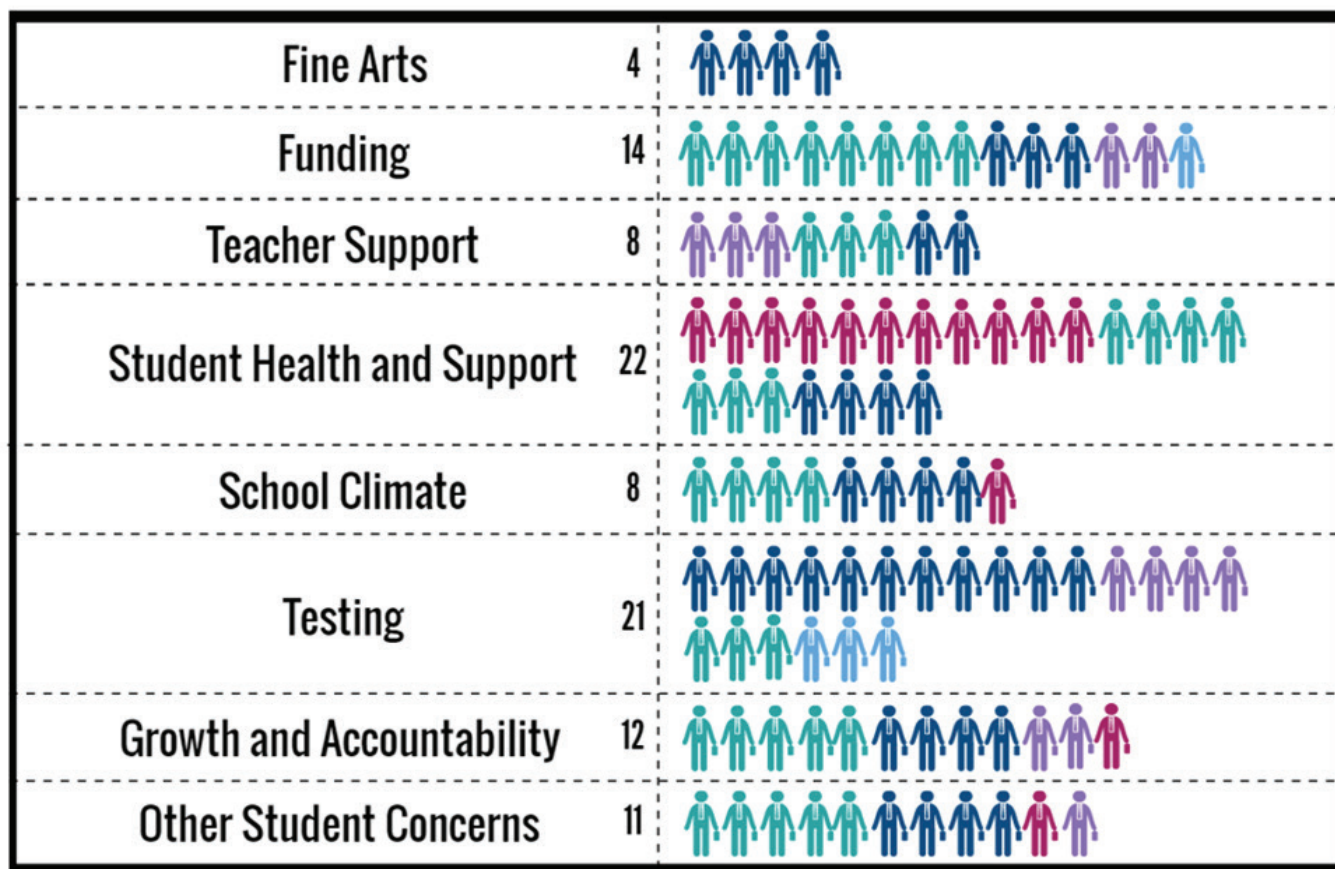
There was considerable concern regarding student health and support, largely posed by school psychologists and community-based non-profits. Many speakers commented on student health needs, both physical and emotional, and the shortage of student support staff to address these needs. Speakers asked that ESSA accountability measures consider student health, which would require a sufficient staff of nurses, counselors, school psychologists and speech therapists among others, but also an appropriate balance between academic instruction and non-academic development.

SCHOOL CLIMATE:

Some participants requested that school climate be considered as part of ESSA's accountability measures. Specifically, they requested student absenteeism and other disciplinary problems be factored into a school's performance measure. Speakers also suggested that teachers and administrators receive training to properly deescalate situations that require swift disciplinary action or physical intervention.

ESSA PUBLIC INPUT SESSIONS*

April - May, 2016



■ Teachers
 ■ Groups and Associations
 ■ School Support Staff
 ■ Administrative Personnel
 ■ Parents

*This graph represents the comments and questions of 79 individuals who spoke across six public comment sessions. Some attendees addressed more than one topic.

TESTING:

A large concern among teachers was the amount of testing their students undergo in a given year. Not only does it detract from instructional time, they said, but it is also a cause of stress for students, parents, and teachers alike. Additionally, teachers felt they had little flexibility in designing lesson plans due to a need to “teach to the test.” Individual responses ranged from calls for less testing, different testing, or no testing at all.

GROWTH AND ACCOUNTABILITY:

Many attendees voiced their desires to see a greater focus on student growth in school accountability measures. Some also stressed the importance of tracking students beyond graduation and measuring both college

enrollment and enrollment in remedial Math and English courses. These outcomes, they said, should be included in ESSA accountability measures as they show a school’s ability to prepare students for post-secondary education.

OTHER STUDENT CONCERNS:

Other student concerns were voiced regarding minority students and exceptional children. Representatives from various groups and associations requested that accountability measures take these students into consideration when assessing growth. Attendees also stressed that the testing of exceptional children should accommodate student disabilities, so as not to overwhelm the child.