

PREPARING FOR SYSTEM-LEVEL CHANGES

The implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) will occur in earnest over the next two academic years. In practice, the magnitude and precise nature of this change will vary considerably from state to state; however, now is the best time for authorizers and charter schools to start preparing for these changes.

Step 1: Set Goals and Expectations

We can say we want a “smooth transition,” but what does that actually look like when thinking about the nuts and bolts of authorizer practice? Establishing expectations for yourself and your schools gives you a foundation to build your actions on as you start this big change.

NACSA suggests making this a two part process. First, define the goals for your office. Then set expectations for what you and your schools can do to help fulfill these goals.

Goals: NACSA suggests defining success in two ways: globally; and related to each of the core authorizing functions: new school approval, renewal, and oversight. *This may get you started:*

A smooth transition is one where I can continue my oversight and accountability responsibilities in a fair and consistent manner during the transition period and once new ESSA systems are in place.

For new charter school applicants, this means:

- The application provides evidence that the school will be able to fulfill future performance objectives and requirements, which may be unknown at this time, and I can adapt the charter contract I’m executing to as-yet unknown state requirements.

For charter schools up for renewal or revocation, this means

- I can fairly and accurately evaluate past performance, and
- I can make legally enforceable renewal or revocation decisions.

For ongoing oversight, this means:

- My oversight tools—such as performance frameworks, and annual reports—help me monitor any new state and federal requirements in the current terminology.
- The contracts for all charters in my portfolio have metrics and goals in the current terminology.

Expectations: Expectations help you communicate within your office and with schools about what each party is responsible for and the general ethos they will approach this transition with. *This may get you started.*

Expectations for All: Much is unknown. There may be a lot of change, or there may be very little change. We will strive to remain adaptable as situations change.

Expectations for Authorizers: During the transition process we strive to:

- Be consistent.
- Keep our schools informed of information we receive.
- Solicit feedback from our charter schools.
- Provide notice to our charter schools when changes do or will occur.
- Answer questions when we can, and tell you if we don’t have an answer.

Expectations of Charter Schools: During the transition process we expect our charter schools to:

- Pay attention to guidance received from U.S. Department of Education, the State, or the LEA.
- Ask questions of the appropriate oversight entity.
- Engage in opportunities for feedback.
- Continue adhering to the charter contract, including working to fulfill performance goals.
- Work to adapt practices to fulfill any new requirements at the authorizer, local, state, or federal level.

Step 2: Identify What Could Be Impacted by the Change. Finalize When Possible. Reevaluate Regularly.

ESSA implementation will happen intermittently as transition guidance is issued, plans are adopted, and final rules and regulations are rolled out. Authorizers need to be prepared to deal with the impact of changes that have already been made, as well as adapt to new changes as they occur. This often includes updating existing authorizer tools and processes for the short and long-term.

NACSA suggests conducting an “impact assessment” to identify three categories: 1.) Element being changed; 2.) Impact of Change; and 3.) Effected Tool or Practice. Pay special attention to any changes that may impact your ability to legally enforce accountability decisions—it will be a priority to address them. Identifying the affected tools or practices will help you conduct a “tool and policy audit,” where you identify the areas of common authoring tools that may need to be changed in the short and long-term. Revisit the assessment as information is released.

Staying up to date on compliance changes can be especially tricky. NACSA recommends asking your SEA for guidance first, as during the transition they should be interpreting federal transition guidance and informing LEAs and other entities about what those changes mean within your State context. Regular checks in with your SEA can be part of your Quarterly Work Plan, discussed below. If your SEA doesn’t have an answer, the [US Department of Education](#) keeps a hub with resources and guidance (including a “Transition FAQ”) that so far has addressed some compliance issues, and they keep adding new materials. And of course check out [NACSA’s ESSA for Authorizers](#) page for updates.

The [Impact on Authorizing table](#) on page 9 may help.

Step 3: Establish Quarterly and/or As-Needed Objectives, With a Regular Communications Schedule

The roll out of new state systems may not coincide well with the regular authorizing cycle and the related statutory deadlines and processes. Constructing a Quarterly Work Plan with a handful of objectives can help get some of the initial work completed so you can more easily “plug in” the new state systems into your authorizing work. The Quarterly Work Plan should be tailored for your authorizing calendar and should be reflective of some of the major ESSA implementation milestones.

The [Quarterly Work Plan](#) on page 5 may help.