

ESSA State Plan Highlights Oklahoma

April 2020

The *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) was signed into law on December 10, 2015, reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. Historically, the Acts focused on underserved student populations. ESSA created an opportunity to broaden accountability beyond traditional subjects, such as math, to potentially focus on health and wellness in schools via the ‘fifth indicator’, School Quality or Student Success (SQSS). States could select health and wellness-related indicators for SQSS, and identify strategies and initiatives throughout their ESSA plans to improve the school health environment.

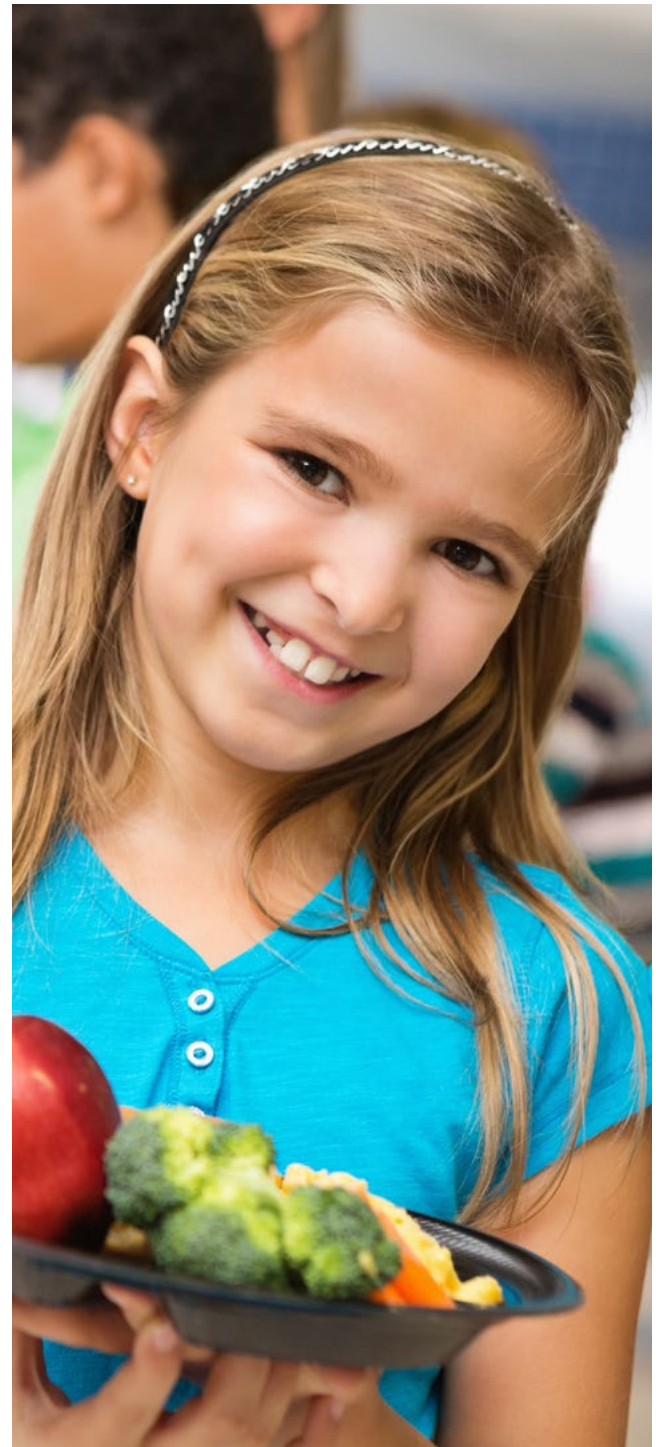
This study identified exemplary State ESSA plans (from [a larger study](#) that analyzed plans from all 50 states and DC) to highlight best practices and lessons learned in developing and implementing their plans. Oklahoma was one of three states selected as a case study. State education agency officials from the three case study states participated in key informant interviews to inform the case study development.

Key Highlights

With regard to nutrition, we have utilized food as an academic intervention...And the evidence is very substantive as far as the connection between nourishment and being ready to learn.

– State Education Official

Oklahoma’s State Department of Education (OSDE) embarked on an exhaustive stakeholder engagement process to ensure stakeholder priorities were incorporated into the ESSA plan. That process included town hall meetings, various advisory convenings and [EngageOK](#) on the Road. As a result, the plan prioritized several health and wellness provisions, including initiatives to address food insecurity, as well as comprehensive inclusion of the [Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child](#) (WSCC) model developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the ASCD. The OSDE is working closely with Tribal Governments and faith-based communities to develop and implement several health and wellness-driven initiatives.



School Quality or Student Success: Chronic Absenteeism.

Oklahoma selected chronic absenteeism as an indicator of School Quality or Student Success and this measure is reflected in their state report card.

We chose chronic absenteeism because of the value that it brings...in a way that would be cost efficient... How does it [chronic absenteeism] tie to student performance and the connectivity that they feel and the school culture...that has now broadened into conversations on our teacher advisory about how it impacts our students' connection to the school community.

– State Education Official

Addressing Food Insecurity.

Food insecurity was a recurring issue during Oklahoma's extensive stakeholder engagement process. In response, the OSDE considered food and nourishment as an intervention to improve academic achievement. Throughout the State ESSA plan are mentions of addressing hunger, including increasing participation in U.S. Department of Agriculture programs such as [Breakfast in the Classroom](#) and the [Community Eligibility Provision](#). In addition, the state included innovative initiatives, such as [Food for Thought](#), which partnered with faith-based communities to create a public awareness campaign for OSDE's Summer Food Service Program. In a predominantly rural state, working with community volunteers and faith-based leaders ensured a successful campaign:

We tasked them [the faith-based community] with a drive to get the word out for the summer feeding program, which we branded Food for Thought. And they hung door knockers with location and various information to help bring the awareness...where we believe kids would live that could take advantage of that [SFSP].

– State Education Official

We can't teach when our kids are hungry...If our goal is to help them [students] be ready for their next grade level and ultimately ready for post-secondary...we had a lot of work to do...in changing their level of readiness, both in body and in their academic preparedness.

– State Education Official

Applying The Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) Model.

The Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH) had adopted the WSCC model prior to ESSA as it was “built into the fabric of the Constitution.” As a result, OSDE built upon that precedent to incorporate the WSCC model during the development of the State ESSA plan. The model guided the process of building capacity through engagement and collaboration across departments. In addition, OSDE partners with the [WSCC Institute for Coordinated School Health](#) at the University of Central Oklahoma to implement WSCC in schools and school districts.

We worked carefully to structure the rubric with input from the Department of Health and others to make sure that it was designed in a way that was still accessible, but importantly ambitious and gave people a real vision for what it meant to holistically approach the Whole School, the Whole Community, the Whole Child.

– State Education Official

Lessons Learned & Recommendations

What we have found is that this [ESSA initiative] all weaves together in providing hope. Hope that our children in our classrooms tell us that they feel. This is something we learned can empower teachers as well, that our teachers are learning they can foster hope through those relationships.

– State Education Official

Tap into Collective Wisdom about School and Community Needs:

Oklahoma built upon their travelling professional development and education conference—[EngageOK on the Road](#)—that traveled across all regions of the state to implement a large scale stakeholder engagement process. The process included students, families, educators, administrators, and community members, including those from Tribal governments and faith-based communities. It was in these stakeholder sessions that the importance of addressing food insecurity, health and wellness was raised.

People began to learn they can have a voice and a seat at the table, which I think is what you see reflected in the granular level of what we accomplished through the ESSA plan and even our dashboard [report card] on school accountability.

– State Education Official

Notably, the OSDE’s relationship with Tribal governments across the state was strengthened as a result of ESSA stakeholder consultation process. In response to the ESSA plan, titled “Oklahoma Edge,” the Muscogee (Creek) Nation Department of Education and Training developed an aligned framework for academic success, exceptional schools, and engaged communities, called [Native EDGE](#) (Elevating District Growth and Education).

We have 137,000 kids, and they are representing 38 [federally recognized] tribes. We have really strong relationships that have developed through ESSA and it had started before, but we’ve been very strong in our direction to schools to conduct tribal consultation.

– State Education Official

Actively Seek Student Voice.

The OSDE’s stakeholder engagement included student input through a Student Advisory Council. Students participated in OSDE meetings as well as participated at [EngageOK on the Road](#) seminars. In addition to student leaders on the advisory council, the OSDE intentionally sought the engagement of students struggling with social emotional issues, academics and attendance, in order to include balanced student perspectives.

We’ve had to even tap ourselves on the shoulder and say, “Where are the students? We need student voice here,” instead of adults just being about the business of creating the future for our students and not including them... So that would be a definite advice or tip for anyone else. Don’t get all wrapped up in this and not include the students we’re planning for.

– State Education Official

Work with External Partners.

OSDE partnered with a wide range of external partners to develop and implement health and wellness-related initiatives. Non-profit organizations, such as [HungerFree Oklahoma](#), as well as university partnerships with the [WSCC Institute for Coordinated School Health](#) at the University of Central Oklahoma are two examples of such partners that provided resources and technical assistance to develop and implement health and wellness-related initiatives.

We have a couple of professors in the health and wellness area who are really passionate about this model who are leading this cross agency work.

– State Education Official

Leverage Funds to Support Safe & Healthy Schools.

The OSDE has leveraged Title II and IV funds to create initiatives that serve as support structures for Safe and Healthy Schools Programs in ESSA. As one official noted, the state shifted to a focus on providing support more than a “gotcha” mindset regarding compliance. One important component of supporting the program was professional training and development related to this program, including employee wellness initiatives.

About 50 educators have gone through a pilot this year just focused on one aspect of the Safe and Healthy Schools Program of Excellence rubric. Those educators were classroom teachers, counselors, and some of them are office staff - folks that interact with students on a regular basis.

– State Education Official

We recognize that students need one caring adult, whether that's in the classroom or the building principal, or the counselor implementing some of the initiatives that we've just discussed. We also deliver or administer professional development to educators on how they can be healthy about their own mental health as well as their physical health.

– State Education Official

Weave Health & Wellness into Accountability:

The OSDE created the [Oklahoma Flipped Model on Accountability](#), which includes supports for 9 essential elements and strategies; [Programs of Excellence](#) is an aspect of the model that recognizes high-quality programs that serve the whole child. Schools use rubrics to self-identify as gold, silver, and bronze in three of eight topic areas, including [Safe and Healthy Schools](#), inspired by the WSCC model. Programs of Excellence and rubric scores are reported on each school's report card.

...how can we recognize schools that are already doing great things? How can we share the great things that they are doing and then connect them with other schools who might be interested in doing the same thing?... the flipped accountability model that we are promoting highlights what is great in our schools in addition to what is federally required as part of the accountability system.

– State Education Official

The feedback I've gotten from school leaders is that it's refreshing that we're not solely focused on the assessment as the only way that we're talking about whether a school is a good school... the schools in my experience so far have been just overall appreciative, just thankful that we're paying attention to the system more holistically.

– State Education Official

Key Agencies

The OSDE developed a strategic plan that included a mission, goals, and pillars that reflect a well-rounded education; this structure served as a framework for the state's ESSA plan. **The State Superintendent for Public Instruction** oversaw the development and implementation of the State ESSA plan. Her **core team** included the Chief of Staff, Chief of Government Affairs, and the Deputy Superintendent of School Support and Accountability, who were tasked with leading the stakeholder engagement activities and developing the State plan.

Internal restructuring within the OSDE and collaboration across statewide agencies reduced duplication and enabled better systemic support to school districts. For example, to align the plan to the WSCC framework, a new division—Division of Student Support—was created that links offices for Counseling, Prevention and Intervention, Alternative Education, College and Career Readiness, and Family Engagement. The new division allowed each area to provide their expertise in informing initiatives that integrated WSCC components. A prominent initiative is the implementation of the state's Individual Career Academic Planning (ICAP) as cited in the state's ESSA plan goals. In addition, in the case of [Certified Healthy Schools](#), the OSDE and the Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH) worked together to remodel the certification process to include WSCC components.

Demographic Profile

Oklahoma State Demographics (2017)		
	n	%
Total population	3,896,251	
% White (non-Hispanic)	2,828,569	72.6
% Black (non-Hispanic)	283,821	7.3
% Hispanic	394,879	10.1
% American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN)	289,871	7.4
% Student eligible for free or reduced price meals	432,062	62.3
% Rural-remote school districts	148	24.7

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2017 and U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD) 2016-2017

Oklahoma ESSA Resources

- Oklahoma State ESSA plan: <https://sde.ok.gov/essa>
- Oklahoma State and School Report Card: <https://oklaschools.com/>
- Oklahoma State Department of Education: <https://sde.ok.gov/>
- Links to Oklahoma initiatives:
 - EngageOK on the Road: <http://engage.ok.gov/>
 - Food for thought: <https://meals4kidsok.org/>
 - Programs of Excellence: <https://sde.ok.gov/championexcellence>
 - Safe and Healthy Schools: <https://sde.ok.gov/safe-and-healthy-schools>
 - Certified Healthy Schools: <https://certifiedhealthyok.com/>
 - ICAP: <https://sde.ok.gov/documents/2017-08-29/icap-one-page>

Health & Wellness-Specific ESSA Resources

- [Using State Policy to Create Healthy Schools: Coverage of the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child Framework in State Statutes and Regulations—Child Trends](#)
- [State ESSA Plans to Support Student Health and Wellness: A Framework for Action—Healthy Schools Campaign](#)
- [Social and Emotional Learning and Development, Conditions for Learning, and Whole Child Supports in ESSA States Plans—Council of Chief State School Officers](#)

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About Healthy Eating Research

Healthy Eating Research (HER) is a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Technical assistance and direction are provided by Duke University under the direction of Mary Story PhD, RD, program director, and Megan Lott, MPH, RDN, deputy director. HER supports research to identify, analyze, and evaluate environmental and policy strategies that can promote healthy eating among children and prevent childhood obesity. Special emphasis is given to research projects that benefit children and adolescents and their families, especially among lower-income and racial and ethnic minority population groups that are at highest risk for poor health and well-being and nutrition related health disparities. For more information, visit www.healthyeatingresearch.org or follow HER on Twitter at [@HERResearch](https://twitter.com/HERResearch).

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