Chapter 3: Engaging ESSA Audiences

Who should I talk with?

State Education Agencies and State Superintendents

State education agencies are responsible for writing and submitting the new Title I plan to the U.S. Department of Education. The agencies will be soliciting feedback throughout the writing process and posting the draft plan online in the winter.

- Understand their timeline
- Get on their email lists
- Attend their meetings
- Review their plans
- React/submit comments on their plans

Find contacts at your state education agency
Find your chief state school officer

Local Education Agency (LEA) Superintendents

LEA superintendents will be responsible for orchestrating the local plans needed under the law. They will also determine how Title IV, Part A Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grant dollars can be spent, including the creation of a needs assessment where applicable.

- Aim to get afterschool mentioned in your local plan
- Aim to get afterschool listed in outgoing guidance from LEA to schools
- Ask LEA advocates to reach out to their superintendent to encourage he/she prioritize afterschool

Learn more about local superintendents

Principals

Principals control the use of Title I dollars and make decisions on how the funding can be spent. Some principals are already champions of afterschool and summer programming because they understand the connection back to academic success, but others need to become informed so they can become champions as well. Principals will also be key to the needs assessment process for Title IV, Part A funds.

- Develop relationships with principals in your state
- Ensure they understand afterschool is an allowable use of Title I funds
- Encourage parents to contact their principals and share stories
- Invite principals to visit afterschool sites

State 21st Century Community Learning Center (21st CCLC) Coordinators

Coordinators or directors will be developing the new proposal process and funding application for 21st CCLC programs.

- Develop a relationship with your director/ coordinator
- Share success stories
- Contribute to the proposal rewrite process

Find your 21st Century Community Learning Center coordinator
Chapter 3: Engaging ESSA Audiences

Who should I talk with? (cont.)

State and Local Boards of Education
This may be a good venue to do a presentation to ensure that the connections between afterschool, student support, and opportunities in ESSA are explicitly drawn out.

Find out how many seats there are on your state board of education
Learn more about your state board of education
Learn more about your local school boards

Providers
Afterschool and summer providers throughout your state can be champions for ensuring afterschool is a priority throughout state plans. They can talk with principals and superintendents and share stories and data about how their afterschool programs help students increase academic achievement, reduce absenteeism and help working families. Providers can also comment on the draft plans issued by the state and encourage parents to weigh in as well.

Individual Parents and Parent Groups
Parents are able to share their stories, contact their policymakers and talk with their principals about why they support afterschool and summer programming and how important it is to working families.

Students
Students, especially middle and high school students, can share valuable input about the types of supports they need to help ensure academic success. They should be included in the process of determining student supports. Informing them of their options and listening to their needs will be important.
How should I prepare?

Research shows that out-of-school time programs contribute to many of the goals outlined in ESSA, including helping schools graduate academically prepared students on time and ready for college and career; reducing absenteeism; closing achievement gaps; and building strong partnerships between schools and communities. Quality afterschool and summer learning programs also provide critical support to working families, benefit the economy, and help build strong, safe communities.

Leaders and others who influence implementation of ESSA need to understand the benefits of out-of-school programs and how they contribute to priorities defined within individual state education plans, as well as top priorities set by districts and schools.

Consider the following in preparation for meetings, presentations, events and other opportunities to engage with important stakeholders:

- **Know your audience.** Think about their perspective—what do they need to hear? What is in it for them? Be as specific as possible when asking them to do something.

- **Be clear about your message.** What are the two or three points you want the person to learn or remember? Test your message with a teenager or a neighbor. Do they get it? Are they “sold”? If not, try again.

- **Tell brief stories.** People are moved by stories and the emotion behind them more than they are by data. Prepare in advance a short, simple story that paints a picture of how afterschool or summer programming has helped a child, teacher or family. It should convey your optimism and connect to an issue that is important to your audience.

- **Anticipate tough questions and practice the answers.** You should almost never be caught off guard or surprised. Sometimes the hardest question is “how can I help.” Know what you want your audience to do. Be prepared to make a plan and agree on next steps.

- **The ask.** An “ask” is a specific request that you make of someone during a meeting. A good ask is within the power of the person you’re talking with, and gives him or her a specific task that will help your network. Your ask should be timely and connected to an issue that is important to the person you’re talking with.
What should I share?

The ESSA toolkit (essa.afterschoolalliance.org) includes a series of factsheets and graphics that connect out-of-school programs to a range of topics that are prioritized within ESSA: chronic absenteeism, academic achievement, STEM learning, graduation rates, student discipline and behavior, student health and wellness, social emotional learning, summer learning loss and closing achievement gaps.

These materials were developed to help networks and partners prepare for formal meetings, speaking opportunities, casual conversations, and media interviews. The intent of the messages is to provide top-line language that describes our collective efforts to increase support and funding for quality afterschool and summer learning programs.

Some of the factsheets and graphics include data from the America After 3PM series that can be tailored with state-specific data.

Networks are encouraged to share these assets at meetings, during presentations, and with providers, parents and partners. The materials can be printed, included in presentations and shared via email and across a variety of online platforms.

If you have any questions about the messages or need additional information about the factsheet series, please contact Jillian Luchner, JLuchner@afterschoolalliance.org.