

Key Language Differences in Every Student Succeeds and No Child Left Behind

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The bill replacing the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), now known as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), contains language signifying distinct shifts in our national consciousness about standards, federal oversight, and research. Here is a look below at some of these key differences in ESSA and NCLB language usage:

Standards

- 1) **ESSA:** While there are 301 total references to standards, there are 0 explicit references to “college and career ready standards”. However, there is a sentence stating, “Each State shall demonstrate that the challenging State academic standards are aligned with entrance requirements for credit-bearing coursework in the system of public higher education in the State and relevant State career and technical education standards.” Most times in the bill, the standards are described as “challenging academic state standards” or “rigorous and challenging academic state standards.”

NCLB: There are 411 total references to standards and 0 explicit references to “college and career ready standards.” The requirement to provide “college and career awareness and preparation” is only stated once in reference to supports for low achieving, at-risk children in schools. In general, the descriptors for standards oscillate between “academic” or “content” standards and “challenging academic standards.”

Federal Oversight

- 2) **ESSA:** There are 7 explicit references to the idea that the federal government and secretary of education are not allowed to pressure states into adopting or keeping Common Core standards or any other standards common to a specific number of states. There are 13 references to “mandates” that the federal government is not permitted to impose on state and local governments.

NCLB: As this bill was written 9 years prior to the release of Common Core standards, there are no references to this now politically charged topic. However, there is one sentence that states, “Students, teachers, parents, and administrators can measure progress against common expectations for student academic achievement.” There are 6 references to “mandates” that the federal government is not permitted to impose on state and local governments.

Research

- 3) **ESSA:** The phrase “evidence-based” is used 70 times, while “scientifically based” appears just twice. In fact, there are three instances in which “scientifically based” was removed from a prior version of the bill and replaced with “evidence-based” or the “most recent evaluation...” The word “research” is referenced 42 times.

NCLB: The phrase “evidence-based” does not appear at all in the bill, while “scientifically based” appears 119 times. The word “research” is included 270 times.

Note: To see how both bills define these terms, please scroll to the end of this document.

While writing ESSA, legislators had the opportunity to evaluate the nation’s reactions to 14 years of adherence to NCLB. The intentionality behind the language used in ESSA can therefore be linked to some of the lessons learned from NCLB’s high-stakes accountability climate:

- 1) While there is a greater sense of commitment to providing K-12 instruction that more rigorously prepares all students, not just at-risk students, for college and career readiness, legislators are hesitant to use the commonly used label, “college and career ready standards,” lest it becomes as contentious as “Common Core State Standards” over time.
- 2) There are significantly more restrictions in place to limit the reach of both the federal government and the secretary of education. There is also a wariness associated with standards that may be commonly held by multiple states.
- 3) The precedence for Congress supporting education research can be traced back to 1998, when schools were given \$150 million per year in federal funding for the adoption of reform models that are proven to be effective based on experimental or quasi-experimental research design. The 119 references to implementing scientifically-based programs and interventions in NCLB reflects this fervor. However, the increased emphasis on “evidence-based” over “scientifically-based” is more applicable to practitioners and explicitly places student outcomes and ongoing evaluation at the forefront of the research.

The definitions of **evidence-based** vs. **scientifically-based** are taken from the bill below:

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

EVIDENCE-BASED.—

“(A) IN GENERAL.—Except as provided in subparagraph (B), the term ‘evidence-based’, when used with respect to a State, local educational agency, or school activity, means an activity, strategy, or intervention that—

“(i) demonstrates a statistically significant effect on improving student outcomes or other relevant outcomes based on—

“(I) strong evidence from at least 1 well-designed and well-implemented experimental study;

“(II) moderate evidence from at least 1 well-designed and well-implemented quasi-experimental study; or

“(III) promising evidence from at least 1 well-designed and well-implemented correlational study with statistical controls for selection bias; or

“(ii) (I) demonstrates a rationale based on high-quality research findings or positive evaluation that such activity, strategy, or intervention is likely to improve student outcomes or other relevant outcomes; and

“(II) includes ongoing efforts to examine the effects of such activity, strategy, or intervention.

SCIENTIFICALLY BASED READING RESEARCH.—The term ‘scientifically based reading research’—

“(A) means research that applies rigorous, systemic, and objective procedures to obtain valid knowledge relevant to reading development, reading instruction, and reading difficulties; and

“(B) includes research that—

“(i) employs systemic, empirical methods that draw on observation or experiment;

“(ii) involves rigorous data analyses that are adequate to test the stated hypotheses and justify the general conclusions drawn;

“(iii) relies on measurements or observational methods that provide valid data across evaluators and observers and across multiple measurements and observations; and

“(iv) has been accepted by a peer-reviewed journal or approved by a panel of independent experts through a comparably rigorous, objective, and scientific review.”.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

SCIENTIFICALLY BASED RESEARCH- The term ‘scientifically based research’--

‘(A) means research that involves the application of rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures to obtain reliable and valid knowledge relevant to education activities and programs; and

‘(B) includes research that--

‘(i) employs systematic, empirical methods that draw on observation or experiment;

‘(ii) involves rigorous data analyses that are adequate to test the stated hypotheses and justify the general conclusions drawn;

‘(iii) relies on measurements or observational methods that provide reliable and valid data across evaluators and observers, across multiple measurements and observations, and across studies by the same or different investigators;

‘(iv) is evaluated using experimental or quasi-experimental designs in which individuals, entities, programs, or activities are assigned to different conditions and with appropriate controls to evaluate the effects of the condition of interest, with a preference for random-assignment experiments, or other designs to the extent that those designs contain within-condition or across-condition controls;

‘(v) ensures that experimental studies are presented in sufficient detail and clarity to allow for replication or, at a minimum, offer the opportunity to build systematically on their findings; and

‘(vi) has been accepted by a peer-reviewed journal or approved by a panel of independent experts through a comparably rigorous, objective, and scientific review.