



Learning First Alliance Principles on Stakeholder Engagement as Required in ESSA

The Learning First Alliance believes that the stakeholder consultative process outlined in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) presents an important opportunity to create more effective education policies by ensuring that the expertise of the parents, educators and other leaders working with, and on behalf of, students every day informs the development of state and local policies and practices. We suggest that all leaders seize the opportunity to fundamentally change the process by which decisions are made.

The consultative process requires states and communities to convene discussions to review their assets and the abilities they have to support the education of their young people, and to assess what they need to be successful. That knowledge will allow states and communities to draft plans that reflect their shared vision. This process can also effectively focus parents, teachers, educational leaders and others on the specific areas they need to address to implement that vision. In addition, it will allow them to continue to work together on the evaluation and revision of their plans and activities. The process also has the potential to minimize the continuous chaos caused by changes in leadership at the federal, state and local levels that results in many new initiatives to be rolled out with each new leader.

In reviewing what states have published on their interpretation of stakeholder engagement, we find that there is a critical missing element: the understanding that the consultative process is not simply about sharing information. Rather, it is about acknowledging that the education decision making done at each level of government now needs to be performed as a collaborative process.

We recommend that the stakeholder consultative process be guided by the following principles:

1. The stakeholder consultative process is an **affirmative interaction** between colleagues who have at times specific and overlapping responsibilities, while at other times different responsibilities, to ensure that each child has access to an effective education.
2. The stakeholder consultative process is a collaborative **discussion process** that includes goal-setting and the development of guiding principles aimed at defining and executing policy. While it should include a procedure for reviewing a draft plan or document, that is not its only purpose. It is also not just an advisory process where interested parties are asked their views, with one party deciding what information will be used from the discussion.
3. The stakeholder consultative process should be **sustained**, with stakeholders participating in discussions at the decision-making, implementation and evaluation stages. The consultative process goes beyond gathering input into an overall plan; stakeholders are also discussants for the implementation process and how and what data is used to evaluate the implementation.
4. Stakeholders should be initially convened to **define how the consultative process will be designed and what the desired outcomes are**. Significant effort needs to be made to communicate the requirements and expectations of the process, including the mechanics of how the process will work. For example, conveners should be clear as to announcing where meetings will be held, what specific

topics will be covered, and the expected duration of the process. They should be considerate of stakeholders' other obligations, choose meeting times to facilitate full participation, and provide resources such as leave time, coverage of classes, transportation stipends and other allowances as needed. In addition, the initial convening should address who will act as the facilitator of the process. Early discussions should also define how decisions will be reached.

5. Stakeholders participating in the process should be **representatives of those named in the statute who are chosen by and accountable to their constituencies**. The named stakeholders should invite others to participate in the process to ensure that it is representative and reflective of the community. This can include stakeholders who reflect an under-represented or unique population, business leaders and community leaders, and can include the recognized expertise of individuals or groups on particular issues as needed.
6. When the stakeholder consultative process has not been initiated, or when the process is stalled, **a named stakeholder may initiate (or re-initiate) the process**. If a named or needed stakeholder is not being included in the process, it should be proactive in connecting directly with policymakers and other named stakeholders to ensure that the spirit of the consultative process is being respected and that its voice is heard.
7. The stakeholder consultative process should be **transparent and open to the public**. This must include notification of meeting times and places, and of named stakeholders and the constituency they represent. Part of this transparency should also include posting materials, such as drafts, on state or local stakeholder websites, with information on how to provide input. However, that action alone does not constitute a consultative process.

There are states and districts that have begun the consultative process and are moving forward in ways consistent with these principles. However, some states are approaching the consultative process as an information-sharing activity. That is only a first step. States must acknowledge that decision making is a shared activity and develop a process that respects that fact.

For those states that have not yet begun the interactive part of the consultative process, these principles offer a path forward. For those states that have begun the process and are working in a way that doesn't reflect these principles, they offer the opportunity to reflect and a guide for strengthening it in a way that ensures the spirit of the consultative process is being met.

As a coalition that represents many of the named stakeholders in ESSA, along with other associations directly working with, and on behalf of, students every day, we look forward to ensuring productive and effective consultative processes in states and school districts across the country. We are committed to working at the national level and with our state affiliates and members to support robust stakeholder engagement that results in strong education policies and practices for our nation's students.

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The Learning First Alliance is a partnership of leading education organizations representing more than 10 million members dedicated to improving student learning in America's public schools. Alliance members include: American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education; AASA: The School Superintendents Association; American Federation of Teachers; American School Counselor Association; Consortium for School Networking; International Society for Technology in Education; Learning Forward; National Association of Elementary School Principals; National Association of Secondary School Principals; National Education Association; National PTA; National School Boards Association; National School Public Relations Association; and Phi Delta Kappa International. **To learn more about LFA, visit www.learningfirst.org.**