



AAUL IN PARTNERSHIP WITH MEASURE | THE CENTRAL TEXAS ISD CONVENING BRIEF

AAUL IN PARTNERSHIP WITH MEASURE

The Central Texas ISD

Convening: Excellence & Equity Project: Expanding Education Access and Opportunity via Reform and Innovation

30 OCT 2018 | Quincy Dunlap, Mercedes Perry, Eric L. Byrd, Tiffanie Harrison, Monica Sanchez, Meme Styles

FORWARD I

Every Student Succeeds Act

In December 2015, President Barack Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), effectively replacing The No Child Left Behind Act which was commonly criticized for forcing educators to “teach to the test”. The enactment of the Every Student Succeeds Act relieved states from the reigns of federal government in education policy. ESSA creates an opportunity for states and districts to flood resources into the spaces that need them the most. This new act also gives states and school districts an opportunity to continue high levels of stakeholder engagement through the implementation phase. In fact, the ESSA law requires parent, student and community engagement in the development of state plans. This piece of legislation shifted a large amount of power from the federal government to the states in terms of education policy reform. This shift allowed states, for the first time, to create their own systems of accountability around improving public education.

The “Achievement” Gap

The Achievement gap is a phrase used to describe the phenomenon where youth of color, disproportionately African-American, are academically and emotionally unprepared for college, career, and life. This phenomenon occurs when African American student achievement is predictable based on indicators such as their race, gender, and socioeconomic status. Ultimately, the predictability that is derived from identifying achievement gaps amongst different sub-groups of students becomes a contributing factor to understanding why youth may not have access to equitable educational practices, content, great teachers, and thriving learning communities. Unfortunately, this same data is also used to predict whether or not African American students will end up in prisons, further increasing the amount of students being funneled into the school to prison pipeline or jobs that lack career potential and the rewards of upward mobility.

OVERVIEW I

This brief will provide a summary of the convening held by the Austin Area Urban League in Partnership with Measure on the Every Student Succeeds Act, federal legislation that governs public education, in the context of the Central Texas Independent School Districts. In providing this summary, we will briefly describe the collaborative approach utilized for this convening and the Urban League’s Equity & Excellence Project, which is a programmatic approach to providing all public education stakeholders with a common language to advocate with. Lastly, we will provide the recommendations derived from the suggestions and feedback gathered from parents, students and educators during the convening.

The Importance of this Collaborative Convening

Due to the long-lasting, documented effects of inequitable education systems that continue to perpetuate an “Achievement Gap” amongst students of color, The Austin Area Urban League (AAUL) and MEASURE believe that families and educators must have the tools to effectively hold State Education Agencies accountable.

To achieve this ultimate measure of educational reform, the community collaborating to identify, understand, then fix the obstacles, at hand, is critical. When the community, educators, families and education agencies are partners in the education of our youth, we see an increase in the quality of academic, social, and emotional learning within the schooling environment, for everyone but particularly, students of color(cite source). First, as partners, we must



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identify and provide families and educators with the information and tools needed to reform their own learning communities.

This convening gave community members an opportunity to begin to work towards providing input and oversight of state and local education agencies, as well as, space to create some next steps towards continuing the conversation after the convening, in their own respective learning communities. The recommendations provided in this briefing outline the strategies and tools the community identified as necessary in order to impact education reform in the Central Texas region in an equitable and sustainable way.

Participatory Action Research

When rules that govern the entire learning community are created by those concentrated at the top; students, teachers, guardians and community input may get ignored. A lack of input from those most impacted by public education policy, and school safety will continue to reinforce the “Achievement Gap.” Every student has a right to feel safe at school and all stakeholders, especially communities members and parents of students, should be empowered to share what a safe and fair school environment means to them. AAUL+MEASURE grounds this work on this fundamental rule of involving families and students that are most likely to be affected by school policies that can potentially harm them and create more barriers towards achieving academic, social, and economic success.

Through participatory action research, this convening allowed parents, students, teachers, education policy experts and community members to contribute to the process of reform. Participatory Action Research (PAR) allows collaboration to fuel the change both participant and researcher want to see. At its heart is collective, self reflective inquiry that researchers and participants undertake, so they can understand and improve upon the practices in which they participate and the individual situations that may be present. The reflective process is directly linked to action, (in this case a convening with a panel of local educators and parents, live polling and qualitative data collection hosted in a centrally located venue), influenced by the understanding of student, family and neighborhood history,

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culture, and local context and embedded in social relationships. ¹ (Inserting student, family and neighborhood for emphasis on humans affected.)

THE CENTRAL TEXAS ISD CONVENING I

I. PURPOSE

On October 20, 2018 - The AAUL in partnership with MEASURE organized a community convening and panel discussion to engage with the Every Student Succeeds Act and the current impact of the act across the Central Texas Independent School District Region. Several parents, students, educators, administrators and policy-makers provided the feedback given in this brief for districts to address as they embark on the **task of** implementing equitable reform and accountability in local schooling communities. The event was held in Austin, Texas, at a centrally located venue with the hopes of attracting students, families, and educators from the surrounding Central Texas Independent School Districts.

II. EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT OVERVIEW

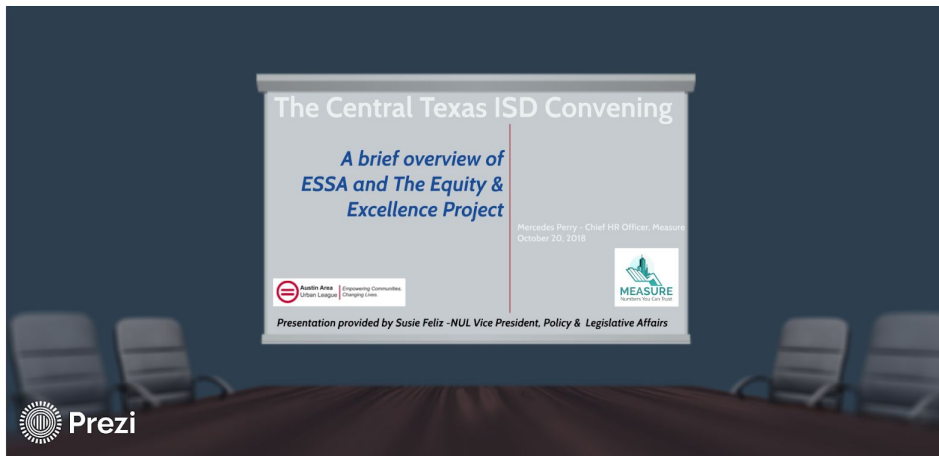


Figure 1. This presentation focused on ESSA legislation and how it impacts the way State and Local Education Agencies should be operating, since the signing of the federal education policy in 2015. The presentation was interactive and left room for attendees to ask questions and provide context

¹ (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2566051/>)

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from their own districts. **Source:** The National Urban League, MEASURE.

III. EQUITY & EXCELLENCE PROJECT

Our Areas of Focus.

The Equity and Excellence Project (EEP) targets seven areas that are highly and tightly related to the historic mission of the National Urban League. Improvements in any one of these seven areas would help some students across the P-16 education spectrum. However, we can help many more students by intentionally and meaningfully combining reform approaches in order to systematically address the complex problems that students, parents and communities continue to face.



- One.** FAIRNESS: Equity and excellence at scale
- Two.** INVESTMENT: Early childhood learning and education
- Three.** PROMISE: Equitable implementation of college and career-ready standards
- Four.** ADVANCEMENT: Expanded access to high-quality curricula, teachers and administrators
- Five.** MEASUREMENT: Comprehensive, transparent and aligned data systems for early learning through employment
- Six.** OPPORTUNITY: Out-of-school time learning with an emphasis on expanded day and summer learning
- Seven.** FULFILLMENT: College completion and attainment

Figure 2. This infographic outlines the National Urban League’s Equity & Excellence Project. This project provides a systemic approach to addressing public education reform. **Source:** The National Urban League.

IV. PANEL + RECOMMENDATION COLLECTION

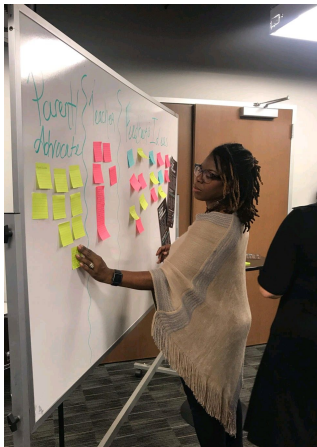


Figure 3. An attendee placing recommendations on the interactive feedback board. This board was available the entire convening. **Source:** Photo courtesy of MEASURE.

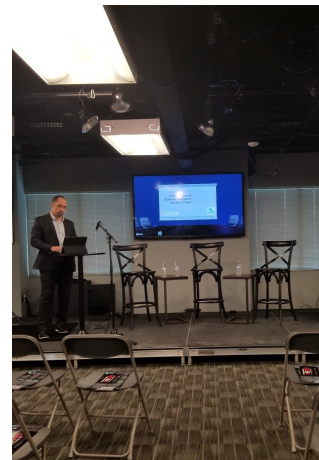


Figure 4. Panelist and audience seating for the convening. The panelists were able to answer questions and interact with all attendees. **Source:** Photo courtesy of MEASURE.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: Hold accountable state legislators, Texas Education Agency and the State Board Of Education leaders, the superintendent and your locally elected school board. Their decisions impact students of color the most.

- The community should expect legislators, board members and administrators to work on behalf of students and to put student needs first.
- The community should ask tough questions about how legislators, board members and administrators reach their decisions and what steps they took to ensure public input ahead of any decisions.
- Legislators, board members and administrators should provide answers to community questions in document form. The community should seek for clarifying answers when they are not satisfied with a response. All legislators, board members and administrators are subject to the Public Information Act.
- Ensure decision making leaders have a proper understanding of and enforcement of the Texas education code and/or local district policy. Request all timelines for new plans or initiatives are publically available and that parents have specific opportunities to provide input.
- On Election Day, choose candidates who show genuine care and concern for the most vulnerable populations served.

Recommendation 2: Amplify the Voice of Affected Families and Neighborhoods. Provide the tools, training and support to parents, business owners, and community leaders:

- Bring awareness to how students of color are affected by these decisions and what their parental rights are in regards to advocating for their child's academic success.
- Identify the families within communities that are most affected (students at risk of dropping out or going to alternative learning schools) and give them tools to effectively advocate on behalf of their child.

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- Identify barriers that prevent us from reaching families and/or students in need. Provide opportunities for parental reconciliation.
- Bring awareness to business and neighborhood leaders about how their involvement in planning and implementing public education reform is critical when thinking about students entering the workforce and the adverse impact that NOT providing a great education could have on the community.
- Teach parents, business and community leaders where to find district policy and Texas state law (Education Code) to research then hold leaders accountable to the law and policy
- Provide example letters, phone call scripts, example emails or public testimony guidelines to encourage parent, business leader and community leaders to effectively advocate on behalf education reform at the state capitol or local school board meeting. Training sessions or organized rallies are powerful.

Recommendation 3: Increase awareness about how public school funding works and what state legislators plan to do currently and in the future to address any financial challenges that the schools are facing, locally:

- Student funding formulas have not been updated since the 1980's even though the cost of providing services and programs, that reach a diverse population of students, has increased.
- Chapter 41 of the Texas Education code, also known as Robin Hood, must be addressed and revised to account for the high number of students who are considered economically disadvantaged that live and attend school in a property wealthy school district such as Austin Independent School District, while maintaining the integrity of the original intent of the Robin Hood law.
- Remind legislators, board members and administrators and educators that the vast majority of public education students are students of color who are the state's obligation to educate. Deviating from that obligation will cause additional harm to students and families of color.

Recommendation 4: Identify what students need to be successful in school:

Emphasis on individual and personalized learning over (and possibly eliminating all) standardized testing.

- Are students able to read, write and do math? Work with Central Texas Math Alignment Task-force to expand their organizational reach.
- Beyond college, are professional opportunities explored, such as vocations: plumbers, electricians, janitors, mechanics, etc., Are student talents given the opportunity to be explored?
- Have students been given an opportunity to provide input on what they need to be successful in school; what they need to be able to graduate; what they need to be ready for their futures

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whether college bound or entry into the workforce? Explore The Opportunity Myth to gather recommendations for addressing this obstacle.

- Inform parents, students, legislators, board members, administrators, educators, business and neighborhood leaders on the roles poor nutrition, high stress levels and racial trauma play in a child's brain development.
- Face the trauma that race in the United States has and continues to cause and the trauma that parents of color themselves may have with the public education system.
 - i. Teachers are gatekeepers and Independent School Districts must train and prepare their teachers. Adopting a district-wide training and practice like Reconstructing Curriculum®, by Dr. Omawale Akintunde out of University of Nebraska Omaha with Omaha Public Schools, should be attempted.
 - ii. Track, monitor and provide feedback to state, and local educators surrounding students of color overall success and performance to help ensure the elimination of the achievement gap.
 - iii. Highlight the disparities among students of color and white students when disciplinary actions are enforced that tend to have a criminally disparate impact on the future of a students success.

Recommendation 5: Promote and support the Texas PTA. The National PTA has already created so many reference guides and resources that provided roadmaps and keys to engaging with families around ESSA.

- Help increase the African American parent membership in the PTA by increasing the awareness and knowledge of the PTA, and the legislative power their membership holds. Collaborate with local PTA Presidents and chapters to plan, host and support education sessions and rallies around ESSA legislation and the Texas Education Code.
- Hold and conduct “un-conferences” to provide “train the trainer” experiences for parents, families and educators. Create a family lexicon or dictionary for mass production, explaining key education and policy words and phrases. Make engagement roadmaps, reference guides and resources published by the National PTA, readily available and accessible to typically hard to reach communities.

ANALYSIS I



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The Central Texas ISD Convening was a success, in that, it is the first session of its kind, to be held in this region, since the Texas Education Agency adopted the new ESSA Accountability plan for local school districts to follow. Most of the districts from the region reported passing grades on the Texas Education Agency's newly implemented statewide report cards, in 2017. Hosting a convening on ESSA allowed the community to understand what these grades meant and the role that the community is supposed to have in partnering in public education reform and the to improve the schools that did not perform well, since the implementation of ESSA in 2015. The panelists of local educators and parent activists, highlighted how the new legislation impacted their current roles in the public education system and discussed what tools and supports they need and expect from the state, to successfully reform public education in an equitable way.

We also reviewed The Equity and Excellence Project's seven Areas of Focus which helped the conversation stay grounded and organized, especially when discussing the complexities of federal education policy and how systemic and intersectional many of the barriers are that impede student success within public education settings. Each Area of Focus is accompanied by key questions, a key concern and a method of approach for addressing each respective concern. The seven Areas of Focus also provided the room with a common language to use while discussing ways to collaborate moving forward, as a community, after uncovering many opportunities for improvement across the region. Attendees were able to leave recommendations on the feedback board, ask questions, and take an infographic poster back to their respective institutions and learning communities, businesses and homes. This infographic generally overviews ESSA, so that they can continue this conversation with others.

Although the session was moderately attended, due to the positive feedback garnered from attendees, we plan to continue to host several convenings over ESSA that highlight key ways to engage families in the federal education policy, and to monitor any progress that is being made by Central Texas Independent School Districts. The recommendations garnered from this convening will be utilized to lead the AAUL + MEASURE's collaborative efforts toward expanding educational access and opportunity through innovative reform, moving forward.



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CONCLUSION I

In 2016, the Texas Education Agency released an ESSA Public Input Survey to gather input from the community because the act legally required state education agencies to gather public input, when forming their individual statewide ESSA accountability plan, in which local school districts would be governed by. Furthermore, the Texas Education Code also specifies that community (students, parents, business leaders and neighborhoods) should be partners in developing and implementing educational policy reform decisions or initiatives. However, research also shows that families of color are typically left out of educational policy reform decisions which, in turn, affects the overall achievement of their students. Students of color, who in the state of Texas, make up more than 70% of the states public education total enrollment.

The AAUL and MEASURE values the voice of the community in guiding the way we engage around increasing educational equity. We understand the shifting tides of funding in the education system from school attendance formulas, to testing and taxes, that make implementing new systems with fidelity and integrity, challenging. We believe in uniting the community and their school districts to have meaningful and productive discussions centered around data and research. Despite the removal of the No Child Left Behind Act, and official implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act in 2015, educators and families are still vastly unaware of this new legislation and how effective the state education agency is currently, at holding local districts accountable to the new legislation. We believe, the only way to ensure that equitable education is implemented by states, is through effective, knowledgeable, and ongoing advocacy from the community level.

The AAUL + MEASURE partnership offers its services as an advocacy and as a research organization to meet the needs of the Independent School Districts in the Central Texas Region, its respective agencies, and the citizens and residents that it serves as it pertains to the fair and equitable practice of education. **Our mission is to increase stakeholder awareness, knowledge and engagement with the Every Student Succeeds Act federal education policy in the Central Texas Region to impact education reform in an effective, equitable and sustainable way.**

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WHO IS 'AAUL®'?

The National Urban League is a historic civil rights organization dedicated to economic empowerment in order to elevate the standard of living in historically underserved urban communities. Founded in 1910 and headquartered in New York City, the National Urban League spearheads the efforts of its local affiliates through the development of programs, public policy research and advocacy. Today, there are more than 100 local affiliates in 36 states and the District of Columbia, providing direct services that impact and improve the lives of more than 2 million people nationwide. The mission of the Austin Area Urban League is to provide tools to African Americans and under-served populations to build a foundation for social and economic equality.

WHO IS 'MEASURE©'?

MEASURE© is an Austin-based, not-for-profit public education and research organization which seeks to improve community agency functionality and ability to address community needs through groundbreaking research and advocacy. Founded in 2015 by President, Jameila "Meme" Styles, we've established a data driven culture embedded with our motto "Numbers You Can Trust." Our mission is to bridge divisions through research and public education in active partnership with local communities to address complex social problems.





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APPENDICES I

Appendix A: Definition of Family Engagement

The following definition of family engagement was developed by National PTA and the National Family, School, and Community Engagement Working Group (FSCE Working Group) comprised of National PTA and leading family engagement researchers, expert practitioners, and advocates.

Family Engagement in Education.—The term “family engagement in education” means a shared responsibility of families and schools for student success, in which schools and community-based organizations are committed to reaching out to engage families in meaningful ways and families are committed to actively supporting their children’s learning and development. This shared responsibility is continuous from birth through young adulthood and reinforces learning that takes place in the home, school and community.

Appendix B: ESSA Infographic

The following infographic was created by MEASURE and printed in mass for distribution to the community. The original size of the infographic is a medium sized poster.

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AUSTIN AREA URBAN LEAGUE IN PARTNERSHIP WITH MEASURE

THE EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT

A high-level overview

Legislative passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) represents a historic moment for the nation's public schools, the first time in over 30 years that federal education policy has been updated to reflect the needs of the 21st century.

BACKGROUND

In December 2015, President Barack Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act, which replaces the No Child Left Behind Act. This new law gives states and school districts an opportunity to exercise more control over their own education systems, while still ensuring that all students have the opportunity to succeed in school and in life.

WITH FREEDOM COMES RESPONSIBILITY...

1965	2005	2015
Elementary and secondary schools were required to meet specific federal standards to receive federal funding.	States were required to set specific benchmarks and goals for student achievement, based on a set of federal tests for reading and math.	States are required to set their own standards and benchmarks, and to report on the progress of their students to the federal government.

KEY COMPONENTS OF ESSA

- ESSA gives states a greater role in setting education policy for the majority of all students.
- ESSA allows states to tailor their approach to meet the needs of their students.
- ESSA gives all students, regardless of their background, the opportunity to succeed in school and in life.

50%

ESSA of the federal budget is allocated to states, school districts, and students in need.