



Remarks of Chris Hofmann

To the U.S. Department of Education on ESSA Implementation

January 19, 2016

Good afternoon. I'm Chris Hofmann and I'm a fourth grade teacher at a charter elementary school in East Los Angeles and a former Teach Plus Teaching Policy Fellow. I would like to start by expressing my appreciation for the opportunity to share my thoughts on the *Every Student Succeeds Act* with you today. The provisions of the law will have a profound effect on what school is like for my class of twenty-six fourth graders and will reverberate throughout the everyday educational experiences of our nation's fifty million K-12 students.

Right now my school serves 535 students. 96% of our students are Latino, and 90% of our students qualify for the federal free and reduced lunch program. For me, *ESSA* and Title I aren't just extra federal dollars. They are those extra "Weird School" books in my classroom library that got Joseph excited to read. They are the laptops and mathematical programs that made borrowing make sense for Samantha. They are the professional development opportunities that have shaped my practice as a teacher. And they are the state tests and the accountability provisions that we use to evaluate and reflect upon Joseph, Samantha and all my students' academic success.

In reference to the *Every Student Succeeds Act*, there are two things I want you to know. First, the new law moves us closer to an accountability system that truly measures what we value in a school. And secondly, the new law provides a critical opportunity for experimentation and research in what makes a great school, and, we, educators, parents, students and lawmakers, need to be ready to continuously learn from our efforts and make changes that improve outcomes for all students.

First, *ESSA* improves upon *No Child Left Behind* by recognizing that proficiency on state tests is only one dimension of a school's quality. When I think about my fourth graders, I realize that no single data point can truly capture who my students are or what they can do. Likewise, no single data point linked to a state test score can truly capture the educational experience of a school. I think *ESSA* rightly recognizes this and requires states to include at least four academic indicators: proficiency on state tests, English language proficiency, high school graduation rates, and a fourth state-determined factor of academic quality. I also think it is great that the law requires states to incorporate at least one other measure of an entirely different sort that aims to tap into the other factors that make a school great.

For the last six years, I've worked at a 2015 National Blue Ribbon school in East Los Angeles. What makes our school great is not just our high levels of student learning; it's the way we celebrate our students' growth. It's also the way we get to know our families with home visits and the way we encourage parental support with frequent communication. It's the way we continue to think about and evaluate how we nurture our students' confidence and character. All of these are critically important factors in making a school a vibrant and wonderful place for kids. And with the passage of *ESSA*, we now have

the opportunity to craft accountability systems that account for what teachers, students and parents value.

Of course, my school's north star is always student learning and ESSA strikes a balance between student learning and other factors in determining a school's quality. The final law requires states' accountability systems to count academic indicators "much more" than the other factors. This should prevent states and schools from using other data points to mask low academic performance. In this way, ESSA rightly keeps the focus on a school's central purpose, teaching knowledge and skills students need to be successful in a competitive world, while acknowledging that there is so much more to a great school.

Secondly, with fifty states developing their own accountability systems, this moment provides us with a unique opportunity to research and innovate. California and all states should experiment with creating measures that capture students' academic growth over time. We should experiment with different ways to gather and synthesize non-academic factors of school quality, and with how we would weigh all of these distinct factors to create an accountability system focused on what we value in a school. Most importantly, on a state and federal level, we need to closely study the effects of these systems, learn from each other's successes and failures and quickly make improvements. There will be a tremendous amount of learning to be done in the next few years and, like our students, we all need to be ready to learn and grow.

Thank you.