



# EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT (ESSA) AND FARM TO SCHOOL

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### GROWING STRONGER TOGETHER

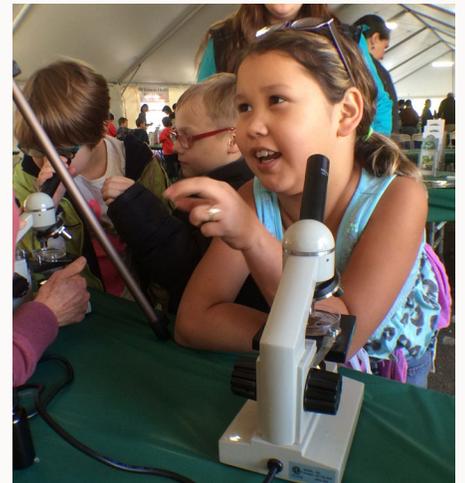
The National Farm to School Network is an information, advocacy and networking hub for communities working to bring local food sourcing, school gardens and food and agriculture education into school systems and early care and education settings.

In 2015, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was reauthorized as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). ESSA has taken a slightly different approach than its predecessor No Child Left Behind, shifting more decision making authority to the states. Under the new legislation, State Education Agencies (SEAs) and Local Education Agencies (LEAs) design their own education plans, providing them with the freedom to choose how their federal funding is being used. ESSA also has a heavier focus on non-academic factors that contribute to improving education than ever before. Some of these holistic themes include:

- A focus on the “whole child;”
- School climate;
- Health and wellness; and
- Parent and family engagement.

Through these themes, there are opportunities for the inclusion of farm to school and farm to early care and education (ECE) in the design and implementation of state and local plans for ESSA. Given that research shows how farm to school can improve educational outcomes, it is

important that farm to school and ECE stakeholders work towards inclusion in the state and local ESSA plans. This toolkit is designed for educators, advocates, parents, and farm to school and ECE stakeholders to understand and act upon the opportunities ESSA provides, and to continue to expand the reach of farm to school and ECE in our communities.



### Evidence-Based Interventions

Throughout ESSA, many programs and opportunities encourage or require evidence-based interventions. The legislation has a significant focus on research and evidence as a means for justifying, and even funding, various programs. There is a plethora of existing research and data that links farm to school to many themes within ESSA. Advocating for farm to school and ECE through any of the opportunities listed in this resource will be most effective when backed with research and evidence linking educational outcomes and student success (see page 4 of this resource for examples).

## Farm to School and the 5th Indicator

ESSA Title I funding is framed around the creation of an accountability system. These accountability systems are outlined in the state plans each SEA creates, which require the inclusion of four academic indicators for student success that must be addressed. However, for the first time, ESSA includes a fifth non-academic indicator as well. Though this indicator receives less weight than the other four indicators, it provides an opportunity for non-academic measures that affect student learning to be specifically accounted for in the state plan. States can include more than one non-academic indicator if they choose. Some examples for this fifth indicator include, but are not limited to:

- Student engagement
- Parent and family engagement
- Educator engagement
- Access to extracurricular and enrichment opportunities
- Chronic absenteeism
- School climate and safety
- Postsecondary readiness
- Social and emotional learning (SEL)

Farm to school and ECE can be included in the discussions of this fifth indicator. Though states will likely not use farm to school as the overall indicator, farm to school and ECE activities can certainly inform these measures. Farm to school practitioners use many of the indicators above as leverage points in advocating for the movement. Existing research and evidence ties farm to school and ECE to many of these non-academic indicators as well. Presenting farm to school and ECE language along with evidence linking these activities to various non-academic indicators can influence the accountability system around these types of measures.

*Example: Research shows that farm to school activities, specifically school gardens, provide students with unique opportunities for social and emotional learning as well as experiential learning. Presenting this research along with proposed garden-based activities will demonstrate to SEAs that farm to school can be used to inform these measures and therefore can contribute to accounting for these indicators.*

## Farm to School and Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants

Part A of Title VI in ESSA contains Student Support and Academic Enrichment (SSAE) grants. These grants are used to support well-rounded education for students, one of the key focus areas in this legislation. There are three categories of allowable activities for SSAE grants, and each category has the potential to be inclusive of farm to school and ECE approaches (see table below).

SSAE grants require LEAs to conduct a needs assessment for the program as well as consult with stakeholders before and during the program. Partnerships are encouraged as part of these grants, which is central to farm to school and ECE activities. LEAs can apply for these grants on their own, or in a consortium. If an SSAE grant is worth \$30,000 or more, then 20 percent of the funds must be dedicated to student health and safety, 20 percent for well-rounded education, and one or more activities promoting technology. This applies to the LEA or the consortium as a whole, and not the individual schools in the LEA.

Because of ESSA's focus on evidence-based interventions and programming, presenting research on how proposed farm to school and ECE activities contribute to the goal of each category will be helpful. *Example: A proposal for a garden-based language program would be well accompanied by curriculum for these lessons as well as research on the role of experiential learning in cognitive language acquisition.*

| SSAE Category               | Allowable Activities Satisfied by Farm to School and ECE   |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Well-Rounded Education      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interdisciplinary programming</li> <li>• Social and emotional learning</li> <li>• Environmental education</li> <li>• Foreign language learning</li> </ul>   |
| Safe and Healthy Schools    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting a safe and healthy learning environment</li> <li>• Physical and mental health education, including nutrition education</li> <li>• Establishing community partnerships</li> <li>• Promoting community and parent involvement</li> </ul> |
| Effective Use of Technology | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blended learning projects</li> <li>• Experiential learning</li> <li>• Building technological capacity and infrastructure in existing programs (e.g., aquaponics)</li> </ul>   |

## Farm to Early Care and Education in ESSA

Early childhood education plays a key role in the development and growth of children, and providing high quality early learning environments is necessary to facilitate this critical period. Farm to early care and education is an excellent addition to these learning environments, adding community partnerships, experiential learning, and wellness promotion to early childhood education centers. ESSA expands on previous efforts of providing high quality early learning environments in various ways.

One ECE focus in the legislation supports the transition from early care centers to primary education centers. LEAs must increase coordination with early learning centers, and their communication plans need to reflect how they will support early learning centers in transitioning their preschoolers into kindergarten. Farm to ECE can be a strong approach to preparing children for the food environment and farm to school activities in the primary setting, and can act as a bridge between early care and primary educational settings.

*Example: If an ECE program is partnering with a neighboring K-12 school to share responsibility and maintenance in a garden, as young children transition into the K-12 setting, they may find a touchpoint of familiarity and consistency in the garden. Further, any opportunity to enhance communication and connectivity between LEAs and ECE settings can contribute to the opportunity to capitalize on LEA infrastructure to promote farm to ECE opportunities, such as leveraging LEA purchasing power to decrease the cost of local food for ECE settings.*

Another leverage point in ESSA for farm to ECE is through family engagement, a focus of the legislation and a high priority for the ECE community. Many farm to ECE activities create robust opportunities to engage families, furthering the impact of food and nutrition education by promoting changes in family food purchasing and eating habits. The updated parent and family engagement section in Title I also allows for funds to be used for professional development that include parents, providing a creative opportunity for farm to ECE activities to include students, parents, and educators.



Literacy Education for All, Results for the Nation (LEARN) are competitive grants for comprehensive state literacy plans. For these grants, 15% of the funding is specifically set-aside for early childhood education. Other than specific literacy programs, these grants can also support activities encompassed by farm to ECE such as:

- Coordinating family engagement
- Before and after school programs
- Opportunities to link birth-age 5 with elementary school

Preschool Development Grants are one more way farm to ECE can be integrated into ECE settings through ESSA. These grants support the development of state preschool programs in many ways, including enrichment educational opportunities, professional development, student health and wellness, and school readiness. As access to and demand for high quality state preschools increased, farm to ECE can increasingly be used as a means of increasing quality and engagement.

## Additional Resources

[Every Student Succeeds Act](#)

[State ESSA Plans to Support Student Health and Wellness: A Framework for Action](#)

[Non-Regulatory Guidance Early Learning in the Every Student Succeeds Act: Expanding Opportunities to Support our Youngest Learners](#)

[Non-Regulatory Guidance: Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants](#)

## Useful Research

[Benefits of Farm to School](#)

[2015 Farm to School Census](#)

[Student Growth within the School Garden: Addressing Personal/Social, Academic, and Career Development](#)

[School Gardens in the City: Does Environmental Equity Help Close the Achievement Gap?](#)

[Farm to School and Nutrition Education: Positively Affecting Elementary School-Aged Children's Nutrition Knowledge and Consumption Behavior](#)

[Growing Minds' Farm to School Lesson Plans](#)

This resource was created in March 2017 by Ariel Bernstein, National Farm to School Network Farm to School and Education Fellow, with support from Newman's Own Foundation.

## What can you do?

**1. Create a team:** Gather farm to school and ECE stakeholders across multiple sectors in and share this toolkit. It is first important for farm to school advocates to understand the opportunities ESSA provides and to evaluate farm to school in relation to their own school or LEA with regard to ESSA.

*Note: Many states have already created drafts of their ESSA plans. Find your state's draft plan and see where farm to school has the ability to fit into what has already been outlined. Many state ESSA plans are publicly available online, or you can also request a copy through your state educational agency.*

**2. Collect the evidence:** Research and evidence are key focuses throughout ESSA. The best way to advocate for farm to school and ECE throughout the development and implementation of the state and local plans is by presenting evidence of student benefits. (Some examples of data and research are included below.)

**3. Add your voice:** Reach out to your LEA and SEA and advocate for the inclusion of farm to school and ECE in the state and local plans. Start with your school district or LEA, and move up from there. Some states continue to have stakeholder engagement opportunities for gathering input on priorities under ESSA. Use this toolkit for language, examples, and research, and present a united front in proposing these opportunities.

*Note: The following states are aiming to submit their state plans for the early bird deadline in April 2017: Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, Tennessee, and Vermont, plus the District of Columbia. All states who do not submit for this deadline have until September 2017.*

**4. Stay engaged:** As the new administration unfolds, more information about the implementation of ESSA will be released, specifically regarding certain regulations and the amount of money authorized for the legislation. It is important for farm to school educators and stakeholders to stay informed about these updates.

