



May 25, 2016

Honorable John King
Secretary of Education
US Department of Education
Washington, DC

Dear Secretary King:

NNSTOY is pleased to submit recommendations regarding guidance and technical assistance that the Department of Education may consider as it develops resources to assist in the implementation of Title II of ESSA.

As you know NNSTOY is the professional home for state and national teachers of the year and finalists for those recognitions. We represent a unique voice of teaching expertise that reflects the breadth, depth and diversity of the teaching profession. Our members are teachers of all grades and fields; teach in urban, rural and suburban areas; are racially and culturally diverse and are present in every state and territory in the country. All NNSTOY members have been elevated to the top of the teaching profession embodying the high level of expertise that exemplifies best practice.

Our nation is facing critical shortages in some teaching areas and challenging turnover in many of our highest need schools. Enrollment in preparation programs, both alternate routes and standard routes, is at a long time low. Title II provides multiple opportunities to address these challenges and build the profession so that it is appealing to future generations and holds promise for career advancement for accomplished teachers.

We recently surveyed our members ([NNSTOY 2016 Federal Policy Survey](#)) and determined our policy priorities and our legislative agenda. You will find that the theme from the results is to strengthen the profession of teaching – from the early years (clinical preparation and mentorship) to the years of developing expertise (actionable feedback and research) to the accomplished years (partnering in policy and career continuum advancement). We have organized our recommendations below for guidance around this developmental continuum for the profession and targeted our comments to Title II of ESSA, though some are certainly relevant to Title I requirements. Attached to this letter is a list of NNSTOY resources that we believe will be of great assistance to states and school districts as they engage in the decision making process. We hope that you will share these broadly.

We begin our recommendations with a focus on the critical components of the law that require the essential ingredient of stakeholder engagement.

1) Stakeholder Engagement {Sec. 2102(d) and Sec. 2102 (b) (3)}

Both states and local school districts are required by ESSA to consult “meaningfully” with a range of stakeholders in developing their Title II plans. They are specifically required to consult with teachers and organizations representing stakeholders such as teachers. Furthermore they are required to seek advice from those with relevant expertise in programs and activities designed to meet the purpose of the Title. Finally they are required to seek advice regarding how to best improve activities to meet the purpose of Title II.

a. Determine and broadly disseminate a federal timeline for Title II (or consolidated) plan submission.

Providing a sense of the opportunities and the timeline under which NNSTOY can engage its members and other stakeholders to contribute to ESSA decision making would greatly facilitate their active participation.

b. Develop and broadly disseminate model state and district timelines and processes for securing stakeholder input.

NNSTOY members are in every state and ready, willing and able to contribute to innovative solutions to the challenges states and districts face. Guidance on when and how to do this would be most useful.

c. Advise states and districts of the opportunity to create a “teacher-in-residence” program for teacher leaders to serve as advisors on ESSA plan development (for Title I and Title II). These teachers in residence would serve either in a full time role or a hybrid role offering not only input for plan development, but feedback and monitoring as plan implementation unfolds over the next few years. Engagement of teacher leaders must go beyond listening and deeper into analysis and decision making.

By virtue of being state teachers of the year, NNSTOY members have unique platforms for participation. NNSTOY members are active in every state. In fact, NNSTOY has active state chapters in several states which can be important resources for decision makers

2) The Beginning Years of Teaching: Recruitment, Clinical Preparation and Mentorship

Extensive clinical preparation during the pre-service years has been demonstrated to be essential in preparedness of new teachers. One year of pre-service preparation, in a residency model, has become the gold standard of clinical practice. Creation and expansion of residencies is authorized in Title II.

In the beginning years of teaching, induction and mentorship play an essential role in supporting new teachers in learning their craft and in staying in the profession. Too many new teachers are lost because they do not have the early support that is required. Our neediest students pay the

price through high teacher turnover, creating a revolving door of teachers for the students who need expertise and stability the most.

a. Promote deep partnerships between P-12 and higher education (Sec. 2103(a)(2))

Local applications to the state for Title II funds may be used to jointly carry out approved activities in conjunction with institutions of higher education. In our NNSTOY 2016 Federal Policy Survey, 57.7% of State and National Teachers of the Year reported that expanding partnerships between higher education and K-12 was an effective strategy for teacher recruitment. Programs such as teacher academies in high schools that begin early to partner high school students with teacher preparation programs offer promising partnerships. Partnerships exemplified in the Teacher Quality Partnership Grant program funded by the Department of Education should be used as a foundation and a model for K12-higher education partnerships. Guidance should provide examples of how such partnerships have addressed teacher shortages and improved the teacher pipeline.

b. Promote Strong Pre-service Clinical Preparation (Sec. 2002 (5); Sec. 2002 c (iv) (xi) (xii))

NNSTOY believes that Title II offers an exciting opportunity to strengthen the clinical preparation of pre-service teachers. Examples of such effective practice (as noted in (a) above) should be provided to states with evidence of the pay off in terms of retention. (See the Teacher Quality Partnership Grant program.)

c. Promote Induction and Mentorship for New Teachers Mentorship (Sec. 2101 (c)(4)(B)(xi); Sec. 2103 (b)(3)(B)(iv))

Induction and mentoring pay off for new teachers in terms of developing expertise and retaining new teachers in the profession. State Teachers of the Year are perfectly positioned to serve as mentors to new teachers, offering support in the early years. Districts should be encouraged to utilize their most accomplished teachers as mentors and provide support for those mentors through training, release time and appropriate compensation. In its NNSTOY 2016 Federal Policy Survey, 64% of respondents indicated that stronger induction was a promising practice to increase retention of new teachers while almost 70% thought policy should support structures and mechanisms to develop mentorship roles for expert teachers.

3) The Middle Years of Teaching: Developing Expertise

Teachers hone their craft over years of experience. The provision of individualized professional development that is teacher-led, just-in-time and job-embedded makes a tremendous difference for the development of expertise. Likewise, actionable feedback provided by knowledgeable experts is critical to progress in the profession.

a. Promote job-embedded teacher led professional development that responds to the articulated needs of teachers{ (Sec. 2101 (c) (4) (B)(v); Sec. 2103 (b)(9)(E); Sec. 2103 (b)(3)(M); Sec. 2103 (b)(3)(O)}

The NNSTOY 2016 Federal Policy Survey revealed that 73% of respondents think that individualized professional development that aligns with teachers' needs is most likely to increase the professionalization of teaching. Guidance should:

- 1) Promote opportunities where current teachers teach other teachers across the career continuum, with teacher leaders contributing through preparation coursework and clinical experiences, mentorship programs, and ongoing professional learning activities;
- 2) Emphasize the importance of preservice clinical experience, mentors and placement aligned with licensure and expertise, collaboration with colleagues, strong school leadership, opportunities for reflection, self-selection of professional development that is grounded in day-to-day practice, and leadership opportunities. Policymakers should consider how to support and incentivize school districts, teacher and principal preparation programs, and other stakeholders to develop partnerships that put these critical supports in place for every teacher;
- 3) Promote the consideration of the particular aspects of ongoing formal education and professional development that are most important and then determine how best practice in continuing education and training can be brought to scale to benefit all teachers;
- 4) Encourage the improvement of teacher development on many fronts simultaneously rather than encouraging a myopic, linear or narrowly focused approach.

b. Promote teacher evaluation systems that rely on multiple measures with actionable feedback and that do not rely significantly on the results of student standardized test scores. (Sec. 2101 (C)(4)(ii))

In the NNSTOY 2016 Federal Policy Survey, 81% of respondents noted that they strongly disagreed that federal policy should support teacher evaluation systems that significantly rely on the results of student standardized test scores. States now have the opportunity, under Title II of ESSA, to revisit and revise their teacher evaluation policies. Guidance should be provided that illuminates multiple measure methodologies that have expert teacher input and involvement. Furthermore, any teacher evaluation systems should provide “actionable feedback” – in other words feedback that is useful to the teacher so that she/he can take action to strengthen practice. Evaluation results should be directly tied to professional development.

c. Promote career continuums for teachers, which are aligned with certification, and provide examples of districts which have effectively implemented them and witnessed positive results (Sec. 2101 ©(4)(B)(v))

Career continuums can be effective in addressing many of the key challenges faced by school districts: teacher recruitment, retention and job satisfaction. Career continuums offer trajectories for teachers so that they can aspire to increasing levels of expertise and

growth. They can set pathways toward teacher leadership, an important feature of building collaboration, growing the profession and improving practice and policy.

4) The Accomplished Years: Teacher Leadership (Sec. 2101 (c)(4)(B)(vii))

NNSTOY is a leader in the development and support of teacher leadership. With multiple national education organizations as partners, NNSTOY developed the Teacher Leader Model Standards which have been used by a number of states to support the design of positions and structures for teacher leaders. NNSTOY now offers professional development on the 7 domains of the standards.

- a. Explicate the benefits of teacher leadership and provide states with guidance on utilizing existing expert resources, such as the Teacher Leader Model Standards, as they develop teacher leadership structures and systems in their states.**

When teachers are actively engaged in leadership roles, the results are measurable and impressive. Providing input to policy makers and feedback on the implementation of new policy is a critical component of teacher leadership – one that can prevent unintended side effects and help to assure that policy goals are met. Hybrid roles that allow teachers to continue to be in the classroom and also serve as mentors, curriculum specialists and professional development leaders generate professional growth at the school, district and state levels.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide recommendations to the Department of Education regarding guidance for ESSA. We urge you to utilize our members, resources and recommendations as you work to develop Title II guidance and Technical assistance. Do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of further assistance.

With warm regards,



Katherine Bassett
Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer

Attachment

NNSTOY has invested in a range of research efforts with multiple partners to share the knowledge base of our members in critical areas of professional practice. Below are several of those resources which we believe would be useful resources for states and districts as they move forward to implement ESSA. All these resources may be found at <http://www.nnstoy.org/blogs/publications/>.

1. GENERAL RESOURCES

[Re-Imagining Teaching: Five Structures to Transform the Profession](#)

Teacher preparation, evaluation, and the characteristics of effective teaching are at the center of contemporary education research and policymaking. NNSTOY believes that five key structures— (professional career continuums, distributed leadership models, guiding principles for the profession, collaborative practice, actionable feedback) found in almost every other field—have the potential to transform teaching into a profession that fosters continuous improvement, high expectations, and shared accountability.

[Model Code of Educator Ethics](#)

Four organizations worked together and closely with teachers, administrators, paraprofessionals and diverse education partners to create the MCEE and spur national focus of examining, understanding and informing best practices in educator decision-making. The MCEE is now available to help ensure states, educator preparation providers (EPPs), individual schools and school districts are effectively equipping educators in ethical understanding and decision-making.

2. THE EARLY YEARS OF TEACHING

[Creating Sustainable Teacher Career Trajectories: A 21st Century Imperative](#)

With half of the nation's teachers planning to retire over the next decade, this research focuses on identifying practices that make teaching attractive for a new generation of educators. This document summarizes how lessons learned from recent initiatives can be applied more systematically across the teaching profession to meet 21st century career expectations.

[From Good to Great: Exemplary Teachers Share Perspectives on Increasing Teacher Effectiveness across the Career Continuum](#)

Over 300 National and State Teachers of the Year share insights into the professional experiences and supports that they believe most contributed to their growth and eventual excellence as a teacher.

3) THE DEVELOPING YEARS OF TEACHING: DEVELOPING EXPERTISE

[The Right Trajectory: State Teachers of the Year Compare Former and New State Assessments](#)

A study demonstrating the power of teacher leaders; the study convened two panels to examine six assessment instruments regarding range of skills in the assessments, range of

cognitive complexity, alignment with the strong instructional practices, rigor and grade-level appropriateness.

Teacher Career Advancement Initiatives: Lessons Learned from Eight Case Studies

A study of eight teacher career advancement initiatives implemented across a variety of contexts, including urban, suburban, and rural districts; high poverty and affluent districts; and in schools/districts both with and without strong union presence describing key principles for developing successful, sustainable teacher career advancement initiatives.

3. ACCOMPLISHED YEARS: TEACHER LEADERSHIP

Teacher Leader Model Standards

A consortia of organizations created these standards which are designed to encourage professional discussion about what constitutes the full range of competencies that teacher leaders possess and how this form of leadership can be distinguished from, but work in tandem with, formal administrative leadership roles to support good teaching and promote student learning. NNSTOY provides professional development on the 7 domains of the standards, currently with 4 domains and with all domains fully developed by 2017.

Great to Influential

A deep dive focus groups with State and National Teachers and of the Year and Finalists serving as teacher leaders to discover the characteristics, roles, challenges and barriers regarding teacher leadership. This report concludes with specific policy recommendations for supporting teacher leadership in state and local contexts.

Engaged Educators and the Policy Process

Through the individual voices of ten outstanding educators, the report provides real-life examples of ways in which these practitioners have successfully engaged in the policy process in local, state and national contexts.