

College and Career Readiness and the Every Student Succeeds Act

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Abstract

Purpose: This study addressed the current policy push to improve students' college and career readiness (CCR) as manifested within the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and examined CCR policy in the state of Illinois as a case study, noting ways in which provisions for CCR programs prepare all students, including those historically underserved by higher education, to be prepared for education and employment post-high school.

Research Methods: A critical analytic approach was undertaken, foregrounding equity. We conducted thematic content analysis of ESSA and Illinois policy, employing a CCR accountability paradigm.

Findings: CCR-related content was contained throughout ESSA. Although content varied, themes were identified. Dual enrollment provisions were prominent in ESSA but not the Illinois CCR laws; however, science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) was emphasized in both. ESSA introduced but did not fully clarify what constitutes a well-rounded education and did not identify particular reporting and accountability provisions, whereas two Illinois CCR bills focused on remedial education and the third evidenced a more comprehensive and integrated CCR approach. These findings suggest distinct federal and Illinois CCR visions. A more systematic equity focus was evident within ESSA.

Implications for Research, Policy, and Practice: ESSA provisions providing new flexibilities to states portend wide variation in emphasis toward, and accountability for, longstanding equity issues. District officials will also likely have substantial flexibility in their administration, design, and implementation of ESSA-funded CCR programming, which may impact educational equity in ways that advantage and disadvantage. We thus provide several cautions and recommendations.

Keywords: college readiness, career readiness, educational equity, education policy, Every Student Succeeds Act

College and Career Readiness and the Every Student Succeeds Act

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) greatly altered K-12 education in the U.S., signaling a federal-level commitment to students' equal opportunity and enhancing federal authority and funding. ESEA has shifted over more than 50 years and several reauthorizations, most recently with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015. ESSA is noted for shifting authority back to the states, in pronounced contrast to its predecessor, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001. Lengthy and complex, ESSA includes numerous policy mechanisms concerning state, intermediary, and local educators' activities. One component associated with ESSA is college and career readiness (CCR), reflecting what has become a broad policy drive toward improving the preparation of K-12 students to transition to college and employment (Darling-Hammond, Wilhoit, & Pittenger, 2014). Given ESEA's longstanding prominence in shaping state policy and school district practices (Jennings, 2015), it is important to understand the extent to which this new federal law will influence state and local education policy and practice on CCR, particularly as it relates to equitable student access and participation. Given longstanding inequities of opportunities and outcomes in relation to college and the workforce, scholars and school leaders should examine ESSA in depth and in context, in relation to its broad aims and values and also with respect to its specific focus relative to CCR.

In this article, we analyze to what extent, and in what ways, CCR is described within ESSA. We then review CCR developments in Illinois, which we have selected as a case to analyze state CCR policies, beginning with state legislation in 2007 and the implementation of CCR programs since that time. *Because ESSA provides states with greater authority, this state-level analysis can be informative to policymakers and school leaders in other states as they annually review and revise their ESSA plans.* We pay particular attention to how equity is

considered, both within ESSA and in Illinois. We conclude by considering how state agencies' and local districts' past experiences with CCR can position them to implement ESSA CCR provisions, including cautions and recommendations.

Defining College and Career Readiness and Explaining its Prominence in Education Policy

Economic data and arguments are frequently advanced to encourage CCR reforms in policy and practice. The path from high school graduation and into employment increasingly requires postsecondary credentials (Carnevale, Cheah, & Hanson, 2015). Secondary education, it follows, should prepare students to transition successfully to college and the workforce. The U.S. labor market demands more highly educated and trained workers (Carnevale, Jayasundera, & Gulish, 2016), and the nation's economy increasingly relies on the quality and versatility of its human capital to maintain its international strength (Alexander, Salmon, & Alexander, 2015).

Thus far, much of the drive for CCR appears to have favored college over career, with CCR extending an enduring debate over the fundamental role of public education as provider of a liberal versus a vocational education. As described by Bragg (2012, p. 188), "at one extreme, the core purpose is to provide liberal education to develop the whole person and, at the other extreme, the key goal is to develop specific skills for work." Looking at this debate historically, CCR conceived as essentialist in nature (e.g., geared entirely to meet labor needs, Rojewski, 2002) is vulnerable to criticisms from educators aligned with the philosophy of John Dewey (1938), who espoused a highly integrated liberal, vocational, and civically oriented approach to education. Adding to this perspective are historical concerns regarding placement of students in career and technical education (CTE) classes that may be perceived as less rigorous than academic courses and that may limit future college opportunities (see, for example, Dougherty &

Lombardi, 2016; Stone, 2013), lending support to the prioritization of college over careers in prior CCR policy and practice.

This vital debate notwithstanding, the Obama administration made CCR a primary education policy goal; President Obama noted that several countries evidence higher college completion rates than the U.S. and predicted “the countries that out-educate us today will out-compete us tomorrow” (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, p. 1). This administration set an ambitious college completion goal to “create and support opportunities for every American to complete one or more years of higher education or advanced training” so that 10 million more graduate by 2020 (Kanter, Ochoa, Nassif, & Chong, 2011, n.p.).

Widely advanced as a national policy imperative, *college readiness* has been defined as being academically prepared for postsecondary education, as measured through standardized test scores, course completion, and grade point average (ACT, 2012; An & Taylor, 2015); *career readiness* has been defined as possessing skills presumed necessary for workforce success. Policymakers recently have begun to embrace a combined *college and career readiness* definition (Mattern et al., 2014), noting students should not be required to choose between college *or* career but rather should graduate high school having satisfied both expectations. Foundational knowledge and skills that pertain to college success and employment competence overlap substantially (Conley, 2012); for instance, noncognitive factors such as motivation and work ethic are essential for both career and college readiness (An & Taylor, 2015).

Conley (2012) purports *college and career readiness* integrates cognitive and noncognitive domains into four broad dimensions, representing key cognitive strategies, content knowledge, learning skills and techniques, and transition knowledge and skills. Key *cognitive strategies* are intellectual behaviors important for college-level work (e.g., problem formulation,

research, interpretation, and communication). *Key content knowledge* includes core subjects' structure and fundamental content, **as well as technical knowledge and skills associated with specific career fields**. *Key learning skills and techniques* include ownership of learning (e.g., goal setting, self-efficacy) and learning techniques (e.g., study skills, strategic reading). Finally, *key transition knowledge and skills* include information students need to transition successfully (e.g., college costs, college majors, and career choices). Conley explains, "being college ready and being career ready are similar, but not necessarily the same" (p. 4) and notes both components are essential. For example, in order for students to be ready for the workforce, they also need technical and employability skills that may not be contained in state academic standards.

College and Career Readiness in U.S. Education Policy

CCR initiatives can manifest in various ways in education policy at federal, state, and local levels. Understanding how CCR has been articulated and emphasized in ESSA policy is of importance, particularly since public education mandates the education of every student, including those from historically underserved student populations. We therefore seek to identify whether and how equity is integrated into this new iteration of federal policy. Our interest in this dimension of CCR is motivated by assertions that equity needs to be more prominently addressed in CCR policy (see, for example, Castro, 2013; Welton & Martinez, 2014). If college and career readiness is not recognized as important for all students, the nation risks perpetuating inequities among student groups that may have a lasting detrimental impact on society.

One aspect of CCR involves developing college-and-career standards, including the creation of standards-aligned assessments. Under the NCLB Act of 2001, each state was required to develop challenging academic standards and measure students' attainment of these standards,

in aggregate and by specified demographic subgroups, and school systems and states were held accountable for students' academic performance (Datnow & Park, 2009). Although NCLB took an important step by mandating academic standards, it did not require these standards to address students' preparation for college and careers; academic proficiency was narrowly defined as student performance in reading and math, and NCLB included no accountability mandate to ensure students' career readiness. Because states created varying standards and definitions of proficiency, comparing student learning across the 50 states has not been possible. Thus, policymakers have questioned the extent to which states' current standards adequately reflect the knowledge and skills needed for success post-high school and to compete in the global economy (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Nevertheless, as argued by Boykin and Noguera (2011), an education policy that prioritized the elimination of racial academic achievement gaps was "nothing short of remarkable" (p. 7) given the nation's historical biases on race and intelligence.

A desire to prepare all students to be successful in our global economy and society prompted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in 2009, which included a focus on CCR. Describing the impetus for CCSS development, Conley (2014) noted "one of the most important goals of the Common Core State Standards is that they provide the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in college, career, and life" (p. 4). The Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI, n.d.) initially developed CCR standards and then created K-12 standards in English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics; currently, 42 states and Washington, DC are using the CCSS. Some states have revised the ELA and math standards, although analysis indicates the majority of revisions have been minor, involving clarification to wording or formatting (Norton, Ballinger, & Ash, 2016). The design process has created some uniformity for assessing students' CCR, as well as shaping state curriculum standards and local instructional

practices. Yet, significant achievement disparities persist among diverse student groups, with national statistics showing a gap in college readiness (as proxied by postsecondary enrollment and completion rates) among students of color relative to White college matriculants (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016).

A related CCR policy issue flows from the notion the P-20 curriculum should adapt to evolving workforce demands (Jacobs & Dougherty, 2006). For example, efforts to expand STEM programming are motivated by perceived need, with STEM occupations projected to grow by 17% from 2008 to 2018 compared to 9.8% for non-STEM fields (Langdon, McKittrick, Beede, Khan, & Doms, 2011). Conversely, if labor market demands for particular jobs markedly decrease, related coursework may be expected to reduce. The implications of such actions are rarely articulated in terms of their effects on diverse learners but there are potential inequities in educational opportunities and outcomes for underserved students. Curriculum shifts can exacerbate inequities in outcomes for minority and low-income students who are underrepresented in STEM programming (Fletcher, 2012) and increase gender-based disparities across many fields (Fuller Hamilton, Malin, & Hackmann, 2015).

CCR also is addressed in federal legislation involving CTE. The 2006 reauthorization of the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act (Perkins IV) funds programs of study that provide enhanced career preparation and postsecondary access (see, for example, Bragg, 2012). Perkins IV requires that programs of study in high schools and community colleges include rigorous academic and CTE content, with course sequences involving secondary and postsecondary; lead to an industry-recognized credential, postsecondary certificate, and/or degree; and include dual credit/dual enrollment opportunities. Investigations of student participation in CTE programming have disclosed gender- and race-based disparities, with

females, Black, and Hispanic students under-enrolled in STEM career fields (Fuller Hamilton et al., 2015).

Partnerships involving secondary education, higher education, and business sectors are inherent to many CCR policies (Malin & Hackmann, in press). Typifying these partnerships, high school and community college educators collaborate to align curriculum, creating dual credit or dual enrollment opportunities that seek a smoother transition from high school to college. Dual enrollment is expanding across the nation, with 47 states having adopted dual enrollment policies as of 2012 (Thomas, Marken, Gray, & Lewis, 2013). Dual enrollment represents a CCR policy that requires alignment to be fully operational despite myriad differences across states in definitions, student access provisions, funding, program quality assurance, minimum grade requirements for credit, and transferability of credits (Education Commission of the States [ECS], 2016). CCR reforms such as dual enrollment should consider the effects of change at one level of education on the effects at other educational levels to meet transcendent goals and close equity gaps, a point made by the Obama administration as a driver for ESSA (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). If historically separate educational sectors (e.g., K-12 and higher education) become better aligned and coordinated, combined efforts can address shared outcomes like improved CCR and student equity (Henig, Riehl, Houston, Rebell, & Wolff, 2016).

An emphasis on facilitating effective transitions to college and careers is reflected in partnership approaches that have emerged in recent years. Parker and Posey (2015, p. 1) expressed on behalf of the National Governors Association and National Conference of State Legislatures, “students need a supportive, seamless progression from preschool through college to lifelong learning and successful employment.” Transitions can present challenges, and

partnerships combat fragmentation and increase outcomes through articulation agreements, P-20 curriculum alignment, and expanded access to CCR programs. Policy mechanisms, such as legislative mandates or targeted competitive grants for school districts and community colleges, may be used to support or stimulate local CCR activity and promote equity. Perkins IV, for instance, requires states to “provide students with strong experience in and understanding of all aspects of an industry, which may include work-based learning” facilitated through partnerships between education and business (Brustein, 2006, p. 86).

This review of CCR-related policy has described the impetus for CCR policy reforms, laying the foundation for the perspectives and methods that we use to understand how equity is situated in CCR policy and practice. We addressed the following questions:

1. How does ESSA incorporate CCR and promote equitable student access and outcomes?
2. How do Illinois’ recent CCR statutes and initiatives enable or constrain their ability to leverage CCR-related opportunities presented by ESSA?

Methods

We applied a critical analytic approach, foregrounding equity within our examination of ESSA and the Illinois CCR policy context. We relied upon the definition of equity advanced by Cook-Harvey, Darling-Hammond, Lam, Mercer, and Roc (2016): “the policies and practices that provide every student access to an education focused on meaningful learning—one that teaches the deeper learning skills contemporary society requires in ways that empower students to learn independently throughout their lives” (p. 1). This definition signals an understanding that students’ learning needs have expanded and also acknowledges the “long history of unequal

educational opportunity in the United States” (Cook-Harvey et al., p. 2) and implies the importance of learning relative to achieving economic and social mobility.

We employ a CCR accountability paradigm developed by Darling-Hammond et al. (2014), who assert state and federal policies and practices must extend beyond narrowly defined outputs to measure and rectify disparate learning conditions and inequitable outcomes for students. They proposed a broadened approach containing components of “meaningful learning, enabled by professionally skilled and committed educators, and supported by adequate and appropriate resources, so that all students regardless of background are prepared for both college and career when they graduate from high school” (p. 1). The approach centers CCR and incorporates Conley’s conceptualization. Our analysis applied the three principles of the Darling-Hammond et al. model: (a) accountability for meaningful learning, (b) accountability for adequate and intelligently used resources, and (c) professional capacity and accountability.

We engaged in content analysis (Patton, 2014) as we analyzed ESSA for CCR-related content. We identified text that directly referenced CCR or components of it; we also identified strategies or approaches within ESSA as CCR-related if we determined they served a larger goal to improve the K-12 students’ preparation to transition to college and/or employment (Darling-Hammond et al., 2014). ESSA was read and reviewed fully, line by line; we also applied search terms to the document, including: “college and career,” “labor,” “work,” “workforce,” “employment,” “gender,” “transitions,” “equity,” and “partnership/s.” We extracted CCR-related content and analyzed each instance in terms of (a) how CCR is represented, (b) when and how CCR approaches are presented (e.g., alongside competing approaches or exclusively highlighted), (c) what knowledge and skills it intends to address, (d) who is tasked with implementing and administering the provision(s) and which students (or students in which

levels/settings) are affected, (d) who is eligible to receive associated funds, including historically underserved groups; and (e) whether fund awards are competitive. Next, we conferred to identify patterns related to the most common CCR components. Finally, we directly considered CCR equity implications, using the Darling-Hammond et al. (2014) accountability model, including assessing ways in which changes associated with CCR policy and provisions within ESSA are aligned to accountability requirements and indicators, new provisions related to school funding, and professional capacity that have the potential to influence equitable access and outcomes.

We then conducted a related analysis of state statutes pertaining to CCR for Illinois, which we selected as a case to understand how states may build upon past CCR activities as they implement ESSA. The authors of this article have engaged in Illinois CCR activities through externally funded projects and participation in state committees and task forces; thus, we have shared insights into the state's CCR policy and political environment. Illinois is the nation's fifth most populous state and the racial/ethnic diversity of its public school population is nearly identical to U.S. averages (Snyder, de Brey, & Dillow, 2016). Illinois state officials have demonstrated a commitment to CCR through involvement in national initiatives and legislative actions. The state has a goal to increase the proportion of working-age adults with 2-year or 4-year degrees or industry-recognized credentials to 60% by 2025 (Illinois P-20 Council, 2014). It is projected that 64% of job vacancies will require such credentials by 2018, and the state's overall rate was 49.6% in 2014 (Lumina Foundation, 2016). We aspired to explore how Illinois' past experience with CCR may portend new CCR opportunities presented by ESSA, and we sought to identify ways equity considerations may evolve relative to CCR policy and practice under both ESSA and the state policy context. This required us to consider the alignment between ESSA and Illinois CCR policy and practice, noting how ESSA may complement or

contradict states' CCR work. We primarily reserve this topic for the discussion and recommendations sections of this article, where we also explain how the Illinois case can be instructive for other states.

Findings

Career and College Readiness in ESSA

Our ESSA analysis revealed 21 discrete areas in which CCR is evident. First, we highlight notable CCR provisions that are included in ESSA, presented by programs and sections. We then describe patterns and briefly analyze equity implications.

Title I. Title I (T1), the largest federal education program, distributes funds to high-poverty districts and schools ($\geq 40\%$ students free/reduced lunch). ESSA appropriations are authorized through fiscal year (FY) 2020; hereafter, we describe 2017 appropriation authority to provide a sense of scale. For T1, about \$15 billion (B) is authorized for Part A, \$0.38B for state assessments, \$0.37B for education of migratory children (Part C), and \$48 million for prevention/intervention programs for neglected, delinquent, or at-risk children (Part D). Funds flow to state education agencies (SEAs), then to local education agencies (LEAs) and schools. SEAs may reserve up to 3% of T1 funds for Direct Student Services. Eligible entities (including LEAs, postsecondary institutions, and community-based organizations) can competitively apply. Local fund use is prescribed, emphasizing CCR-focused approaches: Awards can fund participation in academic courses, including CTE coursework that “leads to industry-recognized credentials,” “activities that assist students in successfully completing postsecondary level instruction and examinations that are accepted for [college] credit,” and “components of a personalized learning approach” (S. 1177-17 and 18). SEAs must set aside 7% of T1 funds for school improvement activities, which can include schoolwide programs or targeted assistance to

schools, both requiring proposals by LEAs or other providers. Applicants must explain how students will be informed of and prepared for “opportunities for postsecondary education and the workforce, which may include [CTE] coursework and broadening...secondary students’ access to coursework to earn postsecondary credit” (S. 1177-63) (e.g., Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), dual enrollment¹). School improvement activity funds may be used for dual enrollment programs, including costs for training, tuition, fees, and transportation.

T1 Part A includes accountability provisions. It requires states to select at least one school quality or student success indicator (in addition to other required academic indicators), which can be disaggregated by subgroup, and which enable meaningful differentiation of school performance. Five examples are provided but states are flexible to select indicator/s of choice. Two of these are CCR-related: “student access to and completion of advanced coursework” and “postsecondary readiness” (S. 1177-35). Thus, states might or might not select a statewide, CCR-related accountability indicator. States and school districts are also annually required to publish report cards containing disaggregated results across numerous indicators, including access to advanced coursework and rates at which high school graduates enroll in higher education.

Parts C and D also contain CCR elements. In Part C, funded programs/projects can provide to the extent feasible “programs to facilitate the transition of secondary school students to postsecondary education or employment” (S. 1177-96). Part D requires SEAs to assure opportunities for secondary students to participate in credit-bearing and CTE coursework. Expenditures for advanced coursework, including dual enrollment and CTE, are permitted.

Title II. Title II (T2) concerns the preparation, training, and recruitment of high quality teachers, principals, or other school leaders, through grants to SEAs and subgrants to LEAs; 95%

¹ Dual or concurrent enrollment and early college high schools (ECHS) are emphasized in several ESSA sections and are defined in general provisions.

of funds reach LEAs. About \$2.3B and \$0.75B are authorized for FY 2017 to carry out parts A and B. The CCR focus is indirect. STEM and dual enrollment are emphasized via professional development (PD). Acceptable PD activities include “effective strategies to integrate rigorous academic content, career and technical education, and work-based learning (if appropriate)...to help prepare students for postsecondary education and the workforce” (S. 1177-126). Section 2242 of T2 is a competitive program to support effective instruction; eligible providers include higher education entities and nonprofits. Acceptable purposes include providing PD to augment the provision of dual enrollment or ECHS programming. SEAs or non-profits (with SEAs) may also apply for grants to create a “STEM Master Teacher Corps” and/or “to support the implementation, replication, or expansion of effective [STEM PD] programs” (S. 1177-151).

Title III. Title III (T3) concerns language instruction for English learners and immigrant students, with \$0.75B authorized for FY 2017. T3 funds flow from SEAs to LEAs (subgrantees). Acceptable activities include “offering early college high school or [dual enrollment] programs or courses designed...achieve success in postsecondary education” (S. 1177-159).

Title IV. Title IV—21st Century Schools (T4) aims to increase students’ achievement through technology and other reforms, with \$3.2B authorized for FY 2017. Part A provides states with funding that LEAs can use on programs relating to the new term “well-rounded education,” which is used 16 times throughout ESSA and is defined to expand beyond core subjects emphasized in NCLB accountability provisions (e.g., including CTE, engineering, health, and technology). LEAs can use T4 funds for activities undertaken in partnership with higher education and other entities. Allowable activities include college and career guidance/counseling programs, including training of counselors in how to use labor market information or provide financial literacy activities. A STEM emphasis is clear in this subpart,

and accelerated learning programs are prominent. One activity eligible for funding focuses on “increasing the availability of, and enrollment in, accelerated learning courses [and] examinations, [dual enrollment] programs, and [ECHS] courses” (S. 1177-177).

Part B calls for competitive applications to form or expand 21st Century Community Learning Centers (\$1B authorized for FY 2017) provided by LEAs and others, or in partnership. Acceptable services include “career and technical programs, internship or apprenticeship programs, and other ties to an in-demand industry sector or occupation for high school students that are designed to reinforce and complement [participating students’] regular academic program” (S. 1177-182). The required state needs assessment may include indicators such as “career competencies, successful completion of internships or apprenticeships, or work-based learning opportunities” (S. 1177-187). Eligible entities must demonstrate they will provide activities that “complement and enhance [students’] academic performance, achievement, postsecondary and workforce preparation, and...youth development” (S. 1177-189). Among authorized activities are “programs that build [STEM] skills” and “that partner with in-demand fields of the local workforce or build career competencies and career readiness” (S. 1177-191).

Within Community Support for School Success (\$70 million) are opportunities to apply for matching funds to create full service community schools or promise neighborhoods. The term “pipeline services” is defined as “a continuum of coordinated supports, services, and opportunities for children from birth through entry into and success in postsecondary education, and career attainment” (S. 1177-223). Elements of the services are further defined; several focus on high school to postsecondary and/or workforce transitions. The promise neighborhoods subsection clarifies that funds may support transitions-focused strategies, including “expanding access to postsecondary education courses and...enrollment aid or guidance, and other supports

for at-risk youth” or collaborating “with institutions of higher education, workforce development centers, and employers to align expectations and programming” (S. 1177-227).

CCR in ESSA: Identified themes. Examining ESSA CCR content holistically, we discerned four themes. These themes are presented and briefly elaborated below.

Advanced coursework, including dual enrollment programming. Dual enrollment provisions are prominent. Also evident are opportunities for SEAs, LEAs, and higher education partners to develop and fund advanced coursework (e.g., AP, IB, dual credit/enrollment).

Cross-sector partnerships. Numerous provisions required or encouraged cross-sector partnerships. Related to the above, for instance, dual enrollment programs are offered in partnership with higher education institution(s). ECHS represent another example. This partnership focus relates to a concomitant push to smooth student transitions.

STEM programming and teaching. An increased emphasis on STEM programming and teaching is also evident. For instance, T2 includes the opportunity for SEAs to create a STEM Master Teacher Corps, and T4 evidenced a consistent STEM emphasis.

Tailoring of programming to workforce needs. Several ESSA provisions encouraged tailoring programs to workforce needs. For instance, T4 funds counselor training regarding the use of labor market information, and T4 Part B grants encourage activities that tie to in-demand industry sectors/occupations.

CCR in ESSA: Equity analysis. We conclude with an equity analysis, organized and supported by the Darling-Hammond et al. (2014) accountability principles.

Meaningful learning. ESSA contains a provision requiring states to employ assessments measuring higher-order skills, thereby shaping the concept of meaningful learning. States must also select from multiple accountability measures, extending beyond individual student and

aggregate achievement to also include student resource access and experiential data. Such measures may promote learning on educators' and other actors' parts; for instance, enabling deeper, more equity-centered analysis and decision making. Concerning students, ESSA conceptualizations of meaningful learning closely align with Conley's CCR definition.

ESSA aims to support and promote rigorous programming for *all* students, which would especially benefit students whose programming has tended to emphasize rote learning over meaningful higher order skills. For example, a major thrust to increase students' access to advanced coursework is evident. We detect within ESSA an expansive concept of meaningful learning that extends outside the school (e.g., internships, on the job training, job shadowing) and that is often preparatory in nature (e.g., career exploration, financial literacy). ESSA's meaningful learning conceptualization appears to serve particular CCR goals, including (a) to successfully move more students to and through postsecondary institutions, (b) to more responsively meet workforce and societal needs, and (c) to prepare students who have versatile skill sets. To accomplish these goals, meaningful learning opportunities must be better aligned (e.g., via strengthened cross-sector partnerships) and more relevant and responsive to real-world contexts (e.g., via internships, work-based learning, local labor market needs).

ESSA maintains a focus on student subgroups (e.g., racial/ethnic minorities, special education, low-socioeconomic status, English-language learners) and these demographic factors are associated with students' selection of career fields. Yet, when considering access to and enrollment in advanced coursework (CTE, AP, and IB), these subgroups should be expanded to also include gender and aspiring first-generation college students (neither are included in ESSA accountability provisions), as these subgroups may be underrepresented, particularly when it relates to students' selections of career fields that may not provide access to high-wage, high-

demand occupations. ESSA also does not specifically encourage culturally relevant or assets-based CCR programming, an omission given accumulating research supporting its efficacy (see Castro, 2012). *In the discussion section, we return to these points of critique, considering their implications for leaders and policymakers.*

Adequate and intelligently used resources. Several ESSA features address resource gaps among districts and schools. States are required to report schools' per-pupil spending and must describe in their plans how they will ensure high-quality education for all and eliminate achievement gaps (see Cook-Harvey et al., 2016). ESSA also contains a new pilot provision enabling some districts to flexibly use federal funds and apply weighted funding models.

Professional capacity. Particularly within T2, efforts to enhance educators' skills through targeted PD (some of which relates to CCR) are evident. T2 also aims to address the undersupply of high quality STEM teachers. More broadly, under ESSA the states will be able to include on their report cards indicators of students' access to teachers exhibiting certain characteristics (e.g., certifications; experience). Next, we turn our attention to the Illinois CCR policy context.

CCR Policy and Programming in Illinois

Illinois legislators and state education officials have engaged in numerous CCR activities to improve curriculum rigor and increase student access over the past two decades, including efforts to better align secondary and postsecondary curriculum and assessments to state standards (Durham, 2015). Illinois is one of 20 member states participating in the Partnership for 21st Century Learning; this group developed a learning framework that focuses on 21st century skills (P21, n.d.). Illinois also is one of 35 states involved in the American Diploma Project Network that launched in 2005, which has a goal to “align high school standards and assessments with the knowledge and skills required for the demands of college and careers” (ADP Network, n.d.). In

2005, Illinois enacted legislation increasing minimum high school graduation requirements to three years of mathematics and two years of science, although these increases have not yet had positive effects on student achievement or college enrollments (Buddin & Croft, 2014). Illinois adopted the Common Core State Standards in 2010 and is one of 26 states that has collaborated to develop the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), which is administered to Illinois students in grades K-8 (ISBE, n.d.).

Illinois legislators have passed three bills that focus on CCR policies and programming. Two laws directly address CCR, with a stated goal of improving curriculum rigor and increasing student readiness for college; the third bill, the Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness Act (PWRA, 2016) has a strong emphasis on CCR. This section provides an analysis of these three laws in terms of their foci, major emergent themes, and emphasis on equity for underserved students.

The first of the CCR laws was enacted in 2007 under Illinois' College and Career Readiness Pilot Program, an amendment to the Public Community College Act. This law was intended to provide "a direct and significant link between students being academically prepared for college and success in postsecondary education" (PL 095-0694, Section 5 of the Public Community College Act, Sec. 2.24). It was primarily administered by the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) and initially focused on funding four community college grants, with two additional community colleges and high school partners added in the third year.

A major purpose was to fund pilot projects, with varied resource-sharing approaches to administer the high school component of the work. The central purpose was to support alignment of K-12 mathematics and English (reading and writing) curriculum with college-level coursework. The target population was the "many students who enter college unprepared for the

academic rigors of college” (Public Act, 095-0694, Section 2.24), with specific reference to high school juniors who fall short of the math or English ACT cutoff scores needed to place students into college-level coursework. Four other elements of this pilot legislation were:

- To diagnose college readiness by developing a system to align ACT scores to specific community college courses in developmental and freshman curriculums.
- To decrease incoming college students’ need for remedial coursework in math, reading, and writing by increasing the number of students enrolled in a college-prep core curriculum, assisting students enrolled in improving college readiness skills, and increasing successful student transitions into postsecondary education.
- To provide resources and academic support to students to enrich the senior year of high school through remedial or advanced coursework and other interventions.
- To develop an appropriate evaluation process to measure the effectiveness of readiness intervention strategies.

Following three years of implementation, the Illinois legislature passed an Amendatory Act extending the pilot program from 2010 to 2013. Due to difficulties with sharing student-level ACT scores between high schools and community colleges, as well as challenges reaching consensus on a common process for ACT assessment including cut-off scores, this law expanded forms of assessment that could be used to declare a student eligible for CCR, as is reflected in the following statement: “Diagnosis of college readiness by developing a system to align ACT scores *or alternative college placement examination scores* to specific community college courses in developmental and freshman curriculums” (Amendatory Act to Public Act 095-0694).

With the 2010 legislation came the selection of seven new community college and high school partners for program implementation grants, with a wider array of strategies possible than

the 2007 bill. These sites were further supported by Illinois' selection in 2011 as a recipient of a federal Race to the Top (RttT) grant (State of Illinois, 2011). Under RttT, the state continued the seven grants begun in 2010 and expanded the CCR program to support participating high schools as they implemented STEM programs of study in grades 9-14, drawing upon the statewide longitudinal data system that was designed to facilitate data sharing across levels of the education system. These grants extended remedial education models that were pilot tested in the early years of CCR grant funding, including experimentation with high school-to-college bridge programs that offered accelerated remedial mathematics education (Zamani-Gallaher, Lang, Graham, & Baber, 2016). The three state agencies for education (Illinois State Board of Education, ICCB, Illinois Board of Higher Education), and three other state agencies also signed an intergovernmental agreement to establish the Illinois Pathways Interagency Committee to provide oversight to high school-to-college transition projects.

The Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness Act (PWRA) was enacted in 2016; the introduction to this act asserted that approximately half of Illinois' graduates enrolling full-time in community colleges required remedial education and that Illinois employers report that high school and postsecondary graduates often lack critical workforce skills. This legislation requires the state to develop model postsecondary and career expectations, establish a competency-based high school graduation requirements pilot program, design transitional mathematics instructional systems for high school seniors who do not yet demonstrate readiness for college-level math courses, and create College and Career Pathway Endorsements on high school diplomas.

The transitional math component is intended to increase access to higher education for students who historically have been required to complete remedial math coursework prior to enrolling in credit-bearing college math courses, through targeted interventions during high

school. Each school district is required to create the following three transitional math course pathways for high school seniors who do not demonstrate college readiness: (a) STEM, which guarantees students' placement in calculus-based math course sequences in community colleges; (b) Technical pathway, guaranteeing student placement in mathematics courses required for community college CTE programs; and (c) Quantitative Literacy and Statistics pathway, guaranteeing student placement into a community college General Education Core Curriculum math course rather than a calculus-based course sequence. In addition, the State Superintendent is charged with developing a competency-based high school graduation requirements pilot program, providing grants to districts who participate. In selecting these pilot sites, the superintendent shall "consider the diversity of school district types and sizes, the diversity of geographic representation from across the state, and the diversity of plan approaches."

The PWRA requires state agencies to develop model postsecondary and career expectations for public school students in grades 8-12 that contain: (a) career exploration and development; (b) postsecondary institution exploration, preparation, and selection; and (c) financial aid and financial literacy. To earn a College and Career Pathway Endorsement, students must satisfy several requirements, including (a) maintain an individualized plan (spanning grades 9-12) for postsecondary education or training, careers, and financial aid; (b) complete a career-focused instructional sequence, including at least 2 years of coursework or equivalent competencies within an endorsement area; (c) complete at least 2 career exploration activities or 1 intensive career exploration experience, at least 2 team-based challenges, and at least 60 hours in 1 or more supervised career development experiences; and (d) demonstrate readiness for non-remedial coursework in reading and mathematics. In Illinois' most recent ESSA plan draft

(Illinois State Board of Education [ISBE], 2016), the state proposes to develop 4 distinct pathways by which high school graduates could obtain a college and career ready designation.

The legislative language of Illinois PWRA statute appears to strengthen the state's commitment to improving public high school students' readiness for college and careers. Yet, analysis of the PWRA through an equity lens discloses some concerns. For example, the need for remediation is considered only within the context of mathematics proficiency, with college readiness standards in language arts or science not receiving similar supports during the senior year of high school. Although PWRA requires the development of model postsecondary and career expectations, it does not require school districts to adopt and implement them. Thus, these expectations merely serve as a guide, and local school district officials are free to disregard them.

The act's voluntary nature, as it relates to school districts' implementation of model postsecondary and career expectations and College and Career Pathway Endorsements, leaves open the likelihood that districts will opt out of these activities, resulting in the exclusion of underrepresented Illinois students from these experiences. The only reference to equity relates to the selection of districts for pilot sites on competency-based high school graduation requirements, in which "the diversity of school district types and sizes" is to be considered. Although the PWRA offers a potential opportunity for school districts to increase the numbers of graduates who are prepared for college and careers, it may have missed an opportunity to address equity gaps for historically underserved students.

CCR in Illinois' CCR legislation: Identified themes. Examining Illinois' CCR legislation holistically, three themes emerged.

College readiness, then career readiness. The focus of CCR legislation followed by implementation was primarily focused on college readiness in mathematics, and to lesser extent,

reading and writing. It was not until the third law was passed in Illinois in 2016 that the focus on career readiness emerged and was tied to workforce development as an extension of P-20 education in the PWRA bill.

Alignment and misalignment. Due to the way Illinois' CCR bill was crafted, grant administration was led by community colleges that contributed to aligned but also misaligned relationships with high schools. Varied funding mechanisms were used to support remedial education in both settings, with no clear evidence of funding approaches that advantage underserved student groups. As noted by Zamani-Gallaher et al. (2016), while the focus on community college leadership may have facilitated college credit conferral on some level, the predominance of postsecondary education administration in the CCR efforts may have limited deeper change at the high school level.

STEM (mathematics) remediation. Illinois' CCR efforts align well with the new ESSA legislation in that STEM programming was evident throughout by focusing on mathematics education, though there was no discernable focus on other STEM fields despite their emphasis in the state's RttT plan. However, some preliminary efforts were made to link STEM to CTE as a part of the 2010 CCR bill and RttT, and these efforts may eventually lead to a strengthened emphasis on STEM programming in PWRA.

CCR in Illinois: Equity analysis. In this section, we provide an equity analysis of Illinois legislation, using the Darling-Hammond (2014) accountability principles.

Meaningful learning. In Illinois' implementation of CCR, ICCB and local practitioners were mindful of the importance of reaching students enrolled in failing schools, according to NCLB performance standards, and they were encouraged to align their programs to Conley's CCR models (Baber, Bragg, & Castro, 2010; Bragg, Baber, Cullen, Reese & Linick, 2011).

However, Illinois' CCR investment produced mixed results, especially pertaining to closing equity gaps for historically underserved student groups. Results suggested that diversity in student background, educational needs, and numerous aspects of academic preparation cannot be fully ameliorated with one-size-fits-all solutions that do not take the local context into consideration (Bragg & Taylor, 2014).

Adequate and intelligently used resources. The Illinois case demonstrates that CCR concerns linked to equity gaps are not likely to be rectified without systemic changes that extend beyond adding remedial courses, after-school tutorials, and summer bridge programs (Durham, 2015). These larger changes may require resources of far greater magnitude than the relatively small grants that flowed from community colleges to high schools through a diversity of funding mechanisms. Rather than being supplementary, the focus of reform needs to be integral to the K-12 education curriculum.

Professional capacity. Illinois' CCR bills were devoid of requirements for professional development; however, from the beginning, evaluation studies pointed to the importance of engaging professionals in collective inquiry and learning to help them engage in comprehensive CCR reform (Bragg, Baber, & Castro, 2011). Results pointed to the importance of comprehensive models that integrate academic instruction with student-focused support services but educators involved in implementation had little knowledge of CCR reforms outside their own sites, including among other sites in the state. Recognition of this need was what drove the introduction of Conley's model, as well as other theory and practice designed to raise high school student academic achievement to transition to college without remediation.

Discussion

This study included the identification and analysis of CCR-related provisions within ESSA, and analysis of CCR policy in the state of Illinois. It was generally aimed to: 1) provide additional perspective and clarity to scholars, policymakers, and educational leaders regarding the heightened focus on CCR and how CCR is now manifested in a keystone federal education law; and 2) provide a state case from which others, including those newer to CCR reforms, might learn from Illinois' experiences and consider how to embed CCR into their policies, practices, and ESSA plans. We believe we have accomplished the former intention, whereas our achievement of the latter is somewhat tempered by issues of timing—specifically, some states will have nearly finalized their ESSA plans before this article is published. Nevertheless, states will continue to evolve in their approaches to CCR and will make annual adjustments to their ESSA plans. This discussion therefore includes consideration of how the Illinois case may be instructive. First, however, we focus upon CCR relative to ESSA and consider implications.

Broadly, we discern within ESSA a prominent focus and shift toward CCR as a policy goal. Importantly, this law—which historically focused solely upon K-12 education—in many ways now connects K-12 to the higher education sector, including to community colleges. This shift is historically significant and has been under-emphasized in the scholarly literature and the media. Furthermore, we contend, it is precisely the CCR policy focus that has driven this expansion. Numerous strategies are noted in the legislation as a means of bridging educational levels, with some approaches focused extensively on academic and career preparation, including interventions that address fundamental academic knowledge and skills, and others encouraging and easing college entry for already academically prepared students.

We analyzed CCR in ESSA through an equity lens. Applying Darling-Hammond and colleagues' (2014) accountability principles, we examined CCR-relevant changes in the

conceptualization of meaningful learning, resource adequacy and use, and efforts to enhance professional capacity. We then employed a similar analysis with respect to CCR policy and programming in Illinois, considering how well positioned the state may be to leverage the potential opportunities that ESSA presents. State-level analysis is timely because ESSA lessens the role of federal policy, returning considerable educational policymaking authority to the state level (McGuinn, 2016). Indeed, as Anagnostopoulos, Rutledge, and Bali (2013) assert, a probable legacy of the Obama administration is an invigorated state role in education.

Ultimately, given new state-level flexibilities within ESSA, states' individual decisions regarding ESSA provisions will chiefly determine the extent to which ESSA fulfills its goals. Some (e.g., Cohen, 2016; Lake, 2017) have raised concerns about this feature, particularly questioning the vigor and efficacy with which states will hold local districts and schools accountable for students' performance, including closing achievement and resource gaps. Others (e.g., Cook-Harvey et al., 2016; Council of Chief State School Officers, 2016) are more optimistic, pointing out promising aspects of ESSA and highlighting its leveraging potential. Our analysis produces encouraging as well as cautionary perspectives, although we do question whether ESSA will help state policymakers and local educators to address CCR for all learners. The extent to which this goal will be achieved may hinge on the extent to which SEAs and LEAs envision and pursue ESSA-compatible strategies that focused on equity, including whether state and local leadership of ESSA and CCR focuses on equity in practice.

ESSA components that we support encompass both general and CCR-specific policy. First, ESSA's conceptualization of meaningful learning is promising and aligns with CCR goals. The thrust within ESSA to increase students' access to advanced and/or college-credit bearing coursework, for example, relates to the goal of assisting more students to and through

postsecondary institutions. The extent to which this goal is realized, of course, will depend upon specific state and local policies and practices, which we further explore later in this discussion. The related concept of a *well-rounded education*, introduced and defined in ESSA, is also encouraging, as NCLB narrowly focused on reading and mathematics; the ESSA definition is expansive, including courses, activities, and programming spanning all academic disciplines. Again, though, how states and local school districts will conceive of and measure this aspect of the policy is uncertain. A truly well-rounded education, in our view, would serve the goal of producing reflective and participative citizens who are equipped to perform a variety of functions in a changing world—students well prepared for college *and* careers. A strong commitment to well-rounded education, we further expect, would be momentous, stimulating the reversal of post-NCLB curriculum narrowing (a trend that has most deeply impacted ethnically/racially diverse and high-poverty communities; Cook-Harvey et al., 2016) and helping educators to transcend historic academic-CTE tracking issues (Dougherty & Lombardi, 2016; Stone, 2013). ESSA now presents an opportunity for school district educators to develop a shared vision of a “well-rounded education” for their graduates, incorporating school leaders’ and faculty members’ understanding of essential components involved in students’ preparation for college and careers, as well as a commitment to ensuring that each student graduates from high school college-and-career ready. School leaders will need to guide their faculties in critical conversations centered on the essential, integrated role of both core academic and CTE courses in supporting students’ academic development.

Related, and of fundamental concern, states vary regarding their understandings of what it means to be college and/or career ready, the actionability of their definitions, and the extent to which their definition and associated policy approaches skew toward college or career

(Dougherty & Lombardi, 2016). CCR definitions can guide states' efforts in achieving their visions (Mishkind, 2014), and as an initial step, policymakers should adopt a statewide CCR definition that encompasses both college *and* career readiness. As of 2014, 36 states and the District of Columbia had developed definitions of CCR; in 33, CCR is described via a single definition, a feature that may help to break down traditional siloes (Mishkind). Regarding Illinois, we are concerned by language within the state's draft ESSA plan (ISBE, 2016) suggesting a focus on graduating students who are either college *or* career ready. For example, one ISBE goal is that "ninety percent or more of students graduate from high school ready for college or career" (p. 37). State officials have developed four pathways within which students may graduate with a CCR designation, and our analysis suggests some pathways are more college (and/or career) focused. One pathway, in fact, only contains college-ready benchmarks. Although an argument for differentiated pathways may be made, we conclude—particularly when also noting Illinois' current under-emphasis on "adequate and intelligently used resources"—Illinois' CCR definition and approaches are unlikely to interrupt persistent, systematic inequities that the State Superintendent of Education acknowledges in the plan's opening pages. State CCR policy holds the potential to assist educators to develop programs and practices that prepare students for a well-rounded education that integrates postsecondary education and workforce success, but curricular differentiation between college and career preparation may contribute to local educators becoming entangled in historic tensions between academic and CTE instruction.

States are charged with operationalizing, measuring, and supporting their unique visions of meaningful learning, anchored by district report card systems and accountability structures. Per ESSA, states can choose one or more school quality or student accountability indicator(s),

plus other required academic measures, including test scores and graduation rates, that research shows to positively relate to student learning. The possibilities are therefore many and—given that only one such measure is required—might omit a CCR focus. We suspect states that adopt CCR indicators that exceed required minimums may demonstrate improvement in equitable opportunities to learn, promote equitable access, and make progress in closing equity gaps in outcomes (Learning Policy Institute, 2016). The extent to which states construct such improvement-facilitating systems, versus systems that enable them to “check the box on federal requirements” (Lake, 2017, n.p.), may determine the ESSA’s effects, particularly upon the historically underserved. Implementation of dual credit, CTE programs of study, and access to and performance in other advanced classes may contribute to more equitable achievement for diverse student groups.

With respect to ESSA provisions, we note minimal attention paid to CCR participation by subgroups, especially including gender and first-generation college-going student groups. Thus, because ESSA in key ways does not explicitly address equity concerns in relation to these dimensions that associate with CCR, we urge state officials and school district leaders to go beyond minimum requirements. Whereas CCR for all students is a worthy goal, it demands a continuing review and analysis of factors that may restrict or facilitate access to or participation in pertinent coursework for historically underserved students. Given the lack of reference to racial and ethnical groups within Illinois’ CCR policy, CCR appears to reflect a color-blind (Bonilla-Silva, 2006) approach that does not identify or rectify racialized, gender-based, or SES-based equity gaps. The Illinois PWRA, Illinois’ most recent CCR law, neither mentions underserved students nor targets mechanisms to support student groups that are historically unprepared for college and careers or students (both male and female) who are underrepresented

in high-wage, high-skill career fields. African American, Hispanic, American Indian, and Pacific Islander student subgroups are significantly less likely to attain ACT College Readiness Benchmarks than their White and Asian peers (ACT, 2016), and there are significant gender- and racial/ethnic-based disparities in high school student enrollments across career pathways, both within the state of Illinois and nationally (Fuller Hamilton et al., 2015) and in postsecondary career fields (Domenico & Jones, 2006). SEAs should create accountability structures that address underserved students' progress toward meeting CCR goals. Finally, state-administered ESSA programs should prioritize equity. ESSA allows SEAs to set aside up to 3% of T1 funds for direct student services, with funds being awarded to applicant districts intending to expand access to advanced and CTE courses or to provide reimbursements to low-income students for postsecondary examination costs. Up to 7% of Title I funds also can be allocated for school improvement activities, to include costs for expanding access to dual enrollment courses.

A prominent ESSA focus on advanced coursework, including CTE, AP, IB, and dual enrollment, warrants discussion. Dual enrollment is particularly prominent in ESSA: For the first time, it can be funded by grants in Titles I, II, III, and IV (Malter, 2016). It is also a required component of local and state report cards, and states may include dual enrollment indicators within accountability systems (Malter, 2016), which makes this strategy one of the most compelling aspects of CCR as ESSA unfolds. Dual enrollment, by nature, requires partnerships between K-12 and postsecondary institutions, with community colleges serving as partners by either supplying instructors or approving high school teachers with the necessary credentials to teach these courses in their schools (Marken, Gray, & Lewis, 2013; Pretlow & Patteson, 2015). In Illinois, while the programming is widespread (Marken et al., 2013), dual enrollment policy is not integrated within CCR laws. Implementation is a local decision, resulting in differing access

and participation across the state of Illinois, typically advantaging students in more affluent districts more than poorer ones (Taylor & Lichtenberger, 2013). It is also directed to students who are already prepared to advance to the postsecondary level; therefore, it is not part of a strategy to improve readiness for students who are unprepared for college-level studies.

Generally, state and local dual enrollment policies, which differ along several dimensions (ECS, 2016), significantly affect equity. Dual enrollment expansion and improvement opportunities within ESSA could be leveraged to great effect.

Additional reflection on the Illinois case affords more insights into the challenges and opportunities that SEAs and LEAs may face as they address ESSA provisions. Illinois has been highly active with CCR policy and initiatives in recent years and therefore may be well positioned for a heightened CCR focus within ESSA. Also, Illinois' recent PWRA, which includes transitional mathematics instruction for students and college and career pathway endorsements on high school diplomas, may represent a promising practice to improve CCR that is aligned to districts' ESSA funding. Yet, several evaluation studies of Illinois CCR policy noted challenges along this line; for example, the Illinois CCR pilot identified issues in enrolling historically underserved student populations and supporting outcomes pertaining to closing equity gaps. Details related to program design and implementation explained much variance across sites, and the evaluators cautioned against one-size-fits-all solutions and recommended the pursuit of systemic changes. Limitations to data collection that could show results on outcomes by student subgroup further complicate the state's capacity to implement CCR in ways that reveal whether or not equity gaps are indeed closing. In addition, the voluntary nature of some Illinois CCR law (e.g., PWRA) virtually guarantees uneven implementation. Because other states

may experience similar issues, it is important for SEA and LEA leaders to keep equity at the forefront while pursuing CCR reforms.

As was noted by Darling-Hammond et al. (2014), developing professional capacity is essential for promoting students' CCR. Thus, school leaders need to engage in extensive professional development—for themselves and their faculties—so local district educators have a comprehensive understanding of how CCR is defined, including Conley's (2012) descriptions of key cognitive strategies, content knowledge, learning skills and techniques, and transition knowledge and skills, but also how culturally responsive pedagogy goes beyond the conceptualization of CCR by Conley (Castro, 2012). School leadership should ensure that teachers incorporate CCR activities into their daily instruction and keep equity at the center of their work. LEA leadership can provide professional development on data analysis, guiding their faculties in examining policies and practices that may restrict underserved students' access to advanced coursework, as well as collecting and analyzing data related to student successful participation in courses and attaining CCR goals.

Conclusion

In summary, ESSA includes numerous state- and local-level opportunities related to CCR (and beyond), but there are also disconnects in the ways CCR programs are reaching and benefiting historically underserved populations, at least in the state case that we include in our analysis. Whether this same scenario plays out in other states is unknown, but it is within reason to assume other states may have developed their own policies and processes separate from ESSA, given the timing of the federal legislation relative to state efforts at CCR that have been evolving for a decade or more. Regardless of the level of education, if equity gaps are going to be closed, it will be necessary for SEA leadership to make wise decisions about CCR

implementation using data about how student populations are accessing and benefiting from CCR programs. ESSA is extensive and imperfect, and accordingly our conclusions have taken on substantial nuance. State legislation on CCR is similarly complex. Whether states will demonstrate the determination and capacity to lead meaningful CCR reform within this new policy environment is currently unknown (McGuinn, 2016), but what is clear is that leadership is crucial at all levels. Looming in the background, also, is the question of how federal leadership of ESSA and related policies will shift with the incoming Trump administration. In the midst of such uncertainty, it is beneficial to understand, through a policy analysis such as has been conducted here, how past experience with federal and state policy on CCR has addressed (or not) equity gaps.

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