

Local schools wait on instructions from state after Every Student Succeeds Act passed

BY TEVIN STINSON
THE CHRONICLE

It was a major moment in educational history last month when President Barack Obama signed into law the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). But what does the act mean for the schools in Winston-Salem and Forsyth County?

On Dec. 9 the Senate voted overwhelmingly, 85-12, to replace the No Child Left Behind Act, which was signed by President George W. Bush in 2002. Under ESSA, less emphasis will be placed on standardized testing.

Although public school students will still be required to take statewide reading and math exams, the new law encourages states to limit the time stu-

dents spend on testing and preparing for testing.

The act will also place the power of education into the hands of the individual states instead of the U.S. Department of Education, meaning the state will determine how to turn things around at low-performing schools.

According to numerous reports, the state will be required to intervene at elementary and middle schools that perform at the bottom five percent of all schools, and high schools that graduate less than 70 percent of their students.

Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools' spokesman Theo Helm said the local board is still waiting on instruction from the state to determine the impact of the law.

"We are not sure yet of many of the effects," said Helm. "We are waiting to see what North Carolina and the Department of Public Instruction do before we really know the impacts."

Helm mentioned the law wouldn't be implemented until mid-2017. While the school board is waiting to see how the new education law will affect the students, a number of parents don't believe giving individual states power is the best news for schools in North Carolina.

"The way our education system is run in this state, ESSA may be bad news for students in this area," said Mildred Brown, parent of two. "The local board has had their disagreements with the state

in the past, and I think the act will make that relationship worse."

Last year the State Board of Education changed the definition of a low-performing school which more than doubled the number of subpar schools in the state.

Superintendent Beverly Emory and the Board of Education showed their displeasure with the change by implementing their own grading scale that district leaders believed gave more accurate grades based on growth and student development.

"We developed our own grading scale because the state grades did not reflect what we thought was most important," said Emory. "The states grades

put too much emphasis on standardized tests and not growth."

A number of national civil rights organizations have voiced their opinions on the act in recent weeks.

According to the The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, although the ESSA is an improvement from No Child Left Behind, it falls short in some areas.

A letter submitted to members of congress reads, "There are several important areas in which the bill falls short. The Every Student Succeeds Act's language on resource equity requires states to consider longstanding resource disparities, but does not go far enough to address them in a meaningful way by holding states

accountable for these disparities."

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights is made up of more than 200 national organizations that promote and protect the rights of all persons in the United States. The letter sent to Congress can be read in its entirety on the organizations official website, civilrights.org.

While the local board awaits answers from the state, Helm mentioned no matter what changes may occur the goal of the local school board will not change.

"Regardless of who is making the decisions, our goal of providing the best education possible for our students will remain the same."

Obama signs the Every Student Succeeds Act; law overhauls 'No Child'

BY JENNIFER C. KERR
ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — Calling it a "Christmas miracle," President Barack Obama signed a sweeping overhaul of the No Child Left Behind education law, ushering in a new approach to accountability, teacher evaluations and the way the most poorly performing schools are pushed to improve.

Joined by lawmakers, students and teachers in a White House auditorium, Obama praised the George W. Bush-era No Child Left Behind for having the right goals. He said that in prac-

tice, it fell short or applied a cookie-cutter approach that failed to produce desired results.

Under the new law, the federal government will shift more decision-making powers back to states.

"With this bill, we reaffirm that fundamentally American ideal that every child — regardless of race, gender, background, ZIP code — deserves the chance to make out of their lives what they want," Obama said. "This is a big step in the right direction."

The overhaul ends more than a decade of what

critics have derided as one-size-fits-all federal policies dictating accountability and improvement for the nation's 100,000 or so public schools.

But one key feature remains: Students will still take federally required statewide reading and math exams.

Still, the new law encourages states to limit the time students spend on testing and diminishes the high stakes for underperforming schools.

The long-awaited bill to replace the 2002 law easily passed the Senate and the House, in a rare



President Barack Obama signs the Every Student Succeeds Act.

example of the Republican-controlled Congress and Obama finding common ground on major legislation. Obama held it up as an "example of how bipartisanship should work," noting that opposing sides had compromised to reach a deal.

"That's something that you don't always see here

in Washington," Obama said. "There wasn't a lot of grandstanding, a lot of posturing, just a lot of good, hard work."

Rep. John Kline, R-Minn., who chairs the House's education panel, said under the new approach, American classrooms will no longer be "micromanaged" by the

Education Department in Washington.

"Instead, parents, teachers, and state and local education leaders will regain control of their schools," said Kline, part of the bipartisan quartet that spearheaded the bill, which was signed on Thursday, Dec. 10.

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