April 2017 marked not only a big milestone for the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) — the first deadline for states to choose to submit their education plans to the federal government for review — but also one year since the Collaborative for Student Success first launched the ESSA Advance weekly newsletter and UnderstandingESSA.org website.

One year and 50 issues later, these two resources have aggregated more than 820 important developments, news and commentary from the federal, state and local levels about the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), and distributed the coverage to policymakers, advocates and the general public.

This report considers both the information featured in the Advance and a larger scan of ESSA-related news items and social media coverage. We conducted a LexisNexis search and analyzed over 800 news articles and opinion pieces published from January 2016 to March 2017 for both topic and tone. A Crimson Hexagon search of more than 210,000 ESSA-related Twitter posts from November 2015 to February 2017 informed our social media analysis. Our analysis examines:

- Focus and tone of traditional media coverage;
- Volume of social media conversations;
- State activity so far; and
- Education advocates and experts’ interests.

ESSA in the Media

Education outlets like Education Week and The 74 have been the main drivers of ESSA media coverage. However, national news outlets have not covered ESSA to a large degree.

ESSA coverage peaked in December 2015 with the passing and signing of the legislation and then spiked at various moments since then. The timeline on the next page indicates that ESSA coverage increased around key deadlines and during times of heightened federal debate on education. While it was not included in our most recent analysis, we presume that there was a similar spike around the April 3 deadline for the first state submissions, and expect to see one again in September when the rest of the states submit their ESSA plans.
Our analysis found that more than a quarter of the stories focus on “accountability.” Stories on “stakeholder engagement” and “local control” were also prominent at 16 and 13 percent, respectively. The “other” category included a wide-range of topics and comprised pieces on academic standards and school choice, although each of those topics accounted for less than one percent of total news coverage.

Lastly, our analysis found that nearly two-thirds of the news pieces took a neutral tone in coverage, reporting the facts rather than sharing opinions on the law.

#ESSA on Social Media

When the Every Student Succeeds Act passed in December 2015, Twitter traffic was at an all-time high, with 60,000 mentions that month. Since then, the volume of discussions on Twitter have decreased dramatically and have remained limited and steady, largely unaffected by events that have triggered traditional media coverage (as referenced in the chart on the following page). Similarly, opposition tweets using “#StopESEA” or “#RepealESSA,” which represented seven percent of all tweets about the law in December 2015, declined dramatically to less than one percent in both July 2016 and January 2017.
#ESSA on Social Media continued

Federal and state policymakers are the single most active and viewed distributors of information through social media, followed closely by education publications. The general public has been far less engaged.

The influence and reach of tweets about ESSA has also declined since December 2015 when the top three most-shared tweets were retweeted a combined 5,230 times — whereas the top three most-shared tweets in July 2016 and January 2017, garnered only 280 and 210 retweets, respectively.

While overall traffic around ESSA remains minimal with very few overall spikes, topic-based discussions on ESSA, around “accountability,” “opt-out,” and “supplement, not supplant” have generated the most intense — yet still minimal — discussions at various points during this time frame. These spikes often coincided with federal announcements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACCOUNTABILITY</th>
<th>OPT-OUT</th>
<th>SUPPLEMENT NOT SUPPLANT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of topic-specific posts between 11/01/15 and 2/28/17 (national total: 212,918)</td>
<td>9,123</td>
<td>459</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Precipitating event</td>
<td>U.S. Dept of Ed releases of accountability regulations</td>
<td>U.S. Dept of Ed issues statement on states needing to plan for high opt-out rates even under ESSA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Crimson Hexagon

1Thanks to our friends at Redstone Strategy Group, LLC for contributing their time, resources and insights to this social media analysis.
States

States could submit ESSA accountability plans to the U.S. Department of Education on either April 3 or September 18, 2017. States submitting on April 3 included Connecticut, Delaware, D.C., Illinois, Massachusetts, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, Tennessee and Vermont. Based on our analysis of 273 publicly-available updates, the following 10 states received the most media coverage as they prepared their state plans: Alabama, California, Colorado, Illinois, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee and Washington. Of the states with the most media coverage, it is worth noting that only two — Illinois and Tennessee — submitted plans to the U.S. Department of Education by the April 3 deadline. Coverage in these states largely focused on public hearings, opportunities to comment on draft state plans, and other stakeholder engagement activities. To see coverage of a specific state, visit understandingessa.org/state-activity.

Advocates and Experts

More than 500 experts, organizations, educators and policymakers addressed six main topics around ESSA in the last year. Advocacy organizations and thought leaders were most active with nearly two-thirds of all published work focusing on accountability and funding.

ESSA provides an important moment for states to shape a system of education that advances opportunities for all students. Our analysis reveals how states can and have engaged media in the process to share information with the public — through both traditional and social media. We look forward to seeing whether year two brings about any shifts in the tone and focus of ESSA media coverage as more states submit their plans and as all states move forward with implementation.
To learn more about ESSA developments and to stay informed on the latest information and news related to implementation efforts, be sure to subscribe to the ESSA Advance and visit UnderstandingESSA.org