

## **ESSA in Your Backyard**

**Where:** Mesa County Valley School District 51, Colorado

**Who:** Heather O'Brien, president, Mesa Valley Education Association (MVEA)

**Why ESSA is so Important in Mesa Valley:** The new education law raises questions about how its policy provisions will become classroom practice.

**Main Issue:** How to bring student assessment under local control.

**Recent Training:** Heather attended a workshop at the Montgomery Institute in Maryland. The institute is a partnership between the Montgomery Education Association and NEA's Center for Organizing, which hosts national training on education topics. The Montgomery Institute on September 22-25 hosted 15 educator teams from affiliates in 10 states: CO, UT, NM, MI, TN, VA, NC, WI, NJ, and MD. In attendance were 71 education leaders, Association staff, school board trustees, school district administrators, superintendents and other community members. The training focused on ESSA implementation, finding opportunities to impact policy development, and the development of union leaders as they take the lead on teaching and learning issues most relevant to them. Teams utilized Great Public Schools Toolkit, ESSA Local Action Guide, and NEA Messaging resources to identify issues, draft public narratives, and develop their theory of change. For course offerings, see:

<http://mceanea.org/publications/montgomeryinstitute/the-montgomery-institute-course-offerings/>

**Key Takeaway From Montgomery Institute Training:** Act now! Heather returned to Mesa Valley and convened meetings between MVEA, ESSA team members, and school district officials. The joint team immediately produced a draft document outlining a plan of action, particularly since Colorado's general session and ESSA debates start in January.

**Heather Quote:** “We’re the professionals, so let’s decide not to let legislators tell us how ESSA is going to go. In the end, the legislature may design something else, but if we don’t have a proposal, they’re going to make up their own story. Things could get so much worse for public education if we don’t organize!”

**MVEA Objective:** Provide legislators with specific proposals so they have something tangible to look at during the policymaking phase of the process.

**Three Things MVEA will Consider in Their Plan:**

- Start with a student-centered learning model.
- Define student assessments so they will be aligned with the curriculum and a teaching and learning framework.
- Find ways to create locally designed assessments that give parents, students, and educators information about learning that’s both timely and relevant.

**Three questions for Heather O’Brien:**

**NEA:** What do local Associations and members have to lose if they are inactive or otherwise complacent about ESSA implementation?

**HO:** Anyone who has taught for the last 10 to 15 years knows the ramifications of not paying attention to education policy. We have policymakers who define our profession for us. If you want more of the same, then just do the same. If you want something to change, you have to change your behavior too. Especially in light of who may become the next Secretary of Education.

**NEA:** What can state and local Associations do to assure their place at the ESSA policymaking table?

**HO:** In essence, get representation at the table however you can! I don’t know what it looks like in other states, but in Colorado we have formed a hub committee and various spoke subcommittees with CEA members on them.

**NEA:** How can states and members drive policy changes to help students?

**HO:** Again, you have to get involved. You have to be at the table or at least contact the people who are at the table.