

Title IV, Part A of the *Every Student Succeeds Act*: Student Support and Academic Enrichments Grants

Description

The bipartisan *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) includes a flexible block grant program under Title IV, Part A, which was authorized at \$1.65 billion. Title IV, Part A authorizes activities in three broad areas:

1. Providing students with a well-rounded education (e.g., counseling, STEM, music and arts, civics, IB/AP, health, physical education);
2. Supporting safe and healthy students (e.g., mental health, drug and violence prevention, training on trauma-informed practices, health and physical education) and;
3. Supporting the effective use of technology (e.g., professional development, blended learning, and purchase of devices).

Distribution of Funds

ESSA stipulates that each state will receive an allocation based on the Title I funding formula. Using the same Title I formula, the states will then allocate funds to school districts. Any school district that receives a formula allocation above \$30,000 must conduct a needs assessment and then must expend 20% of its funds on safe and healthy school activities and 20% on activities to provide a well-rounded education. The remaining 60% of the allocation may be spent on all three priorities, including technology. However, there is a 15% cap on devices, equipment, software, and digital content. If a district receives an allocation below \$30,000, the law does not require a needs assessment or setting aside percentages for well-rounded and safe and healthy student programs. The school district must still direct the funds it receives toward activities in at least one of the three categories and the 15% technology purchase cap would continue to apply.

FY 2017 Appropriations

Title IV, Part A was only funded at \$400 million in the FY 2017 appropriations legislation. Funding this program at less than 25% of its authorized level in its first year has presented serious implementation issues, including the need to allow states to allocate funds to districts competitively, contrary to what is authorized in ESSA. States electing to run a competition will incur significant burdens as they grapple with creating, initiating, and judging a competition. Altering the structure of the program in this manner also negates the Congressional intent of increasing access to these programs for all students and instead is likely to continue to benefit those districts already adept at winning competitive grants.

The President's FY18 Budget Request

The President's request to completely eliminate Title IV, Part A – before districts have even received their FY 2017 allocations or had a chance to implement the program – stands in stark contrast to both the will of Congress and the President's publicly stated intentions to provide states and districts enhanced flexibility over education. The proposed elimination of this program means that not a single district in the country will receive federal support for the critical education programs meant to be supported by Title IV, Part A funds which could include: 1) safe and healthy students activities, such as providing mental health services to students; 2) increasing student access to STEM, physical education, the arts, music, foreign languages and; 3) providing

students with access to technology and digital materials and educators with technology professional development opportunities. Further, given the limited amount of state and local dollars to support these programs, providing no supplemental funding will force school districts to choose between high-quality programs that positively impact students in different ways – trading off health and physical education for Advanced Placement programs, for instance, thereby jeopardizing the greater flexibility for districts and schools that Congress intended.

Program Funding Need

Strong evidence underscores the need for students to have access to programs that meet their comprehensive needs, including their mental and physical health and safety and providing a challenging learning environment that effectively uses technology.

Evidence supports a direct correlation between physical and mental health and learning that is essential to academic success, school completion, and the development of healthy, resilient, and productive citizens. Schools are uniquely positioned to promote student engagement and help them acquire life-long knowledge and skills through comprehensive health education, physical education, nutrition, comprehensive school mental and behavioral health services, and integration among all education and health programs. In order to prepare all students for success in school and in life, they need access to a well-rounded and challenging curriculum. Funds through the block grant will help schools expand music, art, STEM, computer science, accelerated learning, history, and civics courses, as well as expand access to college and career guidance and counseling.

Federal investments in education technology ensure schools have technology-proficient educators, well equipped classrooms, sufficiently supported administrative structures, and a curriculum optimized to take advantage of the benefits technology offers to all students – such as closing opportunity and learning gaps and providing students with essential modern workforce skills.

Given the elimination through ESSA of numerous programs that support the overall health and safety of students, the investments in education technology, as well as helping districts ensure access to a well-rounded education, a robust federal investment in support of these programs is essential through Title IV, Part A. Without a significant investment in Title IV, Part A, districts will be forced to choose among competing priorities, even though an ample investment in all identified areas is necessary to provide students with a comprehensive education.

For further information, please contact Carly Wright at cwright@shapeamerica.org.