

ALA WASHINGTON OFFICE

P.L. 114-95, The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015

Conference Agreement to Reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

OPPORTUNITIES FOR SCHOOL LIBRARIANS

This document highlights library-related provisions in P.L. 114-95, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and provides an overview of initial next steps to help maximize opportunities for effective school library programming under the new law.

TITLE I, PART A – IMPROVING BASIC PROGRAMS OPERATED BY STATE AND LOCAL EDUCATIONAL AGENCIES

Background

- Under Title I, Part A of ESSA, States (referred to as State Educational Agencies) and school districts (referred to as Local Educational Agencies) must develop plans to implement federally-funded education activities.
- States and school districts must develop their plans with “timely and meaningful consultation with” teachers, principals and other stakeholders, including “specialized instructional support personnel” which is defined under ESSA as specifically including school librarians.

Library Provisions

- ESSA includes new provisions that authorize – but do not require – school districts to include in their local plans how they will assist schools in developing effective school library programs to provide students an opportunity to develop digital literacy skills and improve academic achievement.

Next Steps

- Because the local application provision related to effective school library programming is allowable (not required from the federal level), it is critical that school district personnel be made aware of their ability to develop and implement effective school library programming.
- Contact and work with the superintendent’s office in developing the local plan under Title I, Part A to ensure that the school district takes into consideration:
 - The importance of developing and maintaining effective school library programs; and
 - How effective school library programs can help with the development of digital literacy skills and improve academic achievement.
- Contact and work with State and school district officials regarding the ability of school librarians to participate in both the State and school district planning and application process (as part of “specialized instructional support personnel”).

TITLE II, PART A – SUPPORTING EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION

Background

- Title II, Part A of ESSA provides funds for States and school districts to increase academic achievement through professional development.

Library Provisions

- ESSA includes new provisions that authorize States, as well as school districts, to use grant and subgrant funds for “supporting the instructional services provided by effective school library programs.”

Next Steps

- Because States and school districts can now use their Title II, Part A funds specifically to support effective school library programming, it will be important to make sure that school district and school personnel that develop and implement professional development activities are aware of the new uses of funds related to libraries.
- Work with school district and school personnel to encourage the use of Title II, Part A funds specifically for effective school library programming, as well as part of other professional development efforts taking place with these funds.
 - Note that under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), Title II, Part A funds were primarily used for professional development for “teachers” which made it difficult for other instructional support personnel to participate in activities. ESSA rectifies this by specifically authorizing funds to be used to support instructional services provided by effective school library programs.

TITLE II, PART B, SUBPART 2 – LITERACY EDUCATION FOR ALL, RESULTS FOR THE NATION (LEARN)

Background

- ESSA includes a new literacy program that provides federal support to States to develop, revise, or update comprehensive literacy instruction plans. States award competitive subgrants to school districts for activities that focus on children in kindergarten through grade 5 as well as children in grades 6 through 12.

Library Provisions

- ESSA specifically authorizes school librarians to participate in required grant activities that focus on children in kindergarten through grade 5 as well as activities that focus on children in grades 6 through 12.
- In addition, ESSA allows all local subgrants (that serve children in kindergarten through grade 5 and/or children in grades 6 through 12) to be used to provide time for teachers and school librarians to meet, plan and collaborate on comprehensive literacy instruction.

Next Steps

- Since this is a new competitive program under ESSA, it will be important to work with individuals responsible for literacy instruction and development at the State, school district, and school level.
- Encourage/assist appropriate State, school district, and/or school personnel in developing and applying for grants or subgrants.
 - Note that subgrants awarded for local uses of funds must include professional development for school personnel that specifically includes school librarians. Therefore, any grants awarded at the school district level under this program must provide professional development for school librarians.

TITLE II, PART B, SUBPART 2, SECTION 2226 – INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO LITERACY (IAL)

Background

- ESSA includes a new authorization of the Innovative Approaches to Literacy (IAL) program (previously funded through appropriations legislation) that provides dedicated funding to promote literacy programs in low income communities.
 - Note that while IAL activities have been funded over the past several years through appropriations bills, the “codification” (or explicit authorization) of this program in ESSA provides a specific “line item” to help better secure funding in future years.

Library Provisions

- ESSA specifically authorizes funds to be used for developing and enhancing effective school library programs, which includes providing professional development for school librarians, books, and up-to-date materials to high need schools.

Next Steps

- Since IAL is a competitive grant program that has been funded in the past (through appropriations), but is newly authorized under ESSA, it will be important to focus advocacy efforts at the federal level to ensure enough funds are appropriated to continue and possibly expand the IAL program.
 - Note that while efforts to fund IAL in the past have been successful, the lack of an explicit authorization for these activities has hindered advocacy efforts related to expanding the program. The specific authorization of IAL under ESSA will help with future funding as Congress has expressed its support for these activities under the most recent authorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

TITLE IV, PART A – STUDENT SUPPORT AND ACADEMIC ENRICHMENT GRANTS (BLOCK GRANT)

Background

- ESSA authorizes a new program to provide Student Support and Academic Enrichment activities (commonly referred to as the “Block Grant” under ESSA) to help States and school districts target federal resources on locally-designed priorities.
 - Funds are allocated to States and then school districts based on their share of Title I, Part A funding (formula grant allocated on the basis of poverty).

Library Provisions

- ESSA authorizes (but does not require) States to use funds to assist school districts in providing programs and activities that increase access to personalized, rigorous learning experiences supported by technology, including adequate “access to school libraries.”
- ESSA also authorizes (but does not require) States to use funds to assist school districts in providing school librarians and other school personnel with the knowledge and skills to use technology effectively, including effective integration of technology, to improve instruction and student achievement.
- In developing their local applications, school districts must consult with teachers, principals and other stakeholders, including “specialized instructional support personnel” which is defined under ESSA as specifically including school librarians.
- In addition, ESSA requires that school districts conduct a “needs assessment” prior to receiving funds from the State (that must be conducted every 3 years). The needs assessment must include access to personalized learning experiences (which may include access to school libraries).

Next Steps

- Because States are authorized (and not required) to support school districts by providing programs and activities that increase access to personalized learning experiences (which may include professional development for school librarians and better access to school libraries for students), it will be important to contact and work with State Educational Agency officials to make them aware of their ability to use funds in support of personalized learning experiences.
- Since school districts are required to consult with stakeholders that may include school librarians on the development and implementation of their local activities, it is critical to work with technology leaders at the school and school district levels to ensure that school librarians can adequately participate in the planning process.