SASA
Student Association for STEM Advocacy

Elementary and Secondary Education Act

Issue Brief

History

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) is the largest piece of federal education legislation and provides funding to K-12 schools across the United States. The act was initially passed by the 89th Congress and signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson in 1965 in an effort "to strengthen and improve educational quality and educational opportunities in the Nation's elementary and secondary schools" (Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 1965). Since its initial passage, the law has been reauthorized eight times in an effort to update its requirements and promote the intent of the original bill in ensuring equal access to a quality education for K-12 students.

The 1994 reauthorization, the Improving America's Schools Act, established standards and accountability measures for states and school districts that received funding under ESEA. In 2001, Congress passed the seventh reauthorization of ESEA, titled No Child Left Behind (NCLB), with overwhelming bipartisan support to reform America's education system. NCLB further developed and raised the previous reauthorization's accountability provisions, holding states and school districts accountable for student outcomes.

Historically, ESEA was reauthorized every 5 years to modernize the law, update provisions that were not working as intended, and extend the authorization of funding. ESEA was supposed to be reauthorized in 2007, but because of political differences and the upcoming presidential election, Congress missed that deadline. This delay resulted in the Department of Education (ED) creating ESEA Flexibility waivers in 2011 for states to bypass some of NCLB's requirements, including a statistically impossible Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) measure that required schools show 100% proficiency in reading and math by the 2013-14 school year. While necessary, the ED waivers replaced one set of unattainable standards with another set of burdensome requirements.

Finally on December 10, 2015, fourteen years after NCLB was signed into law and eight years overdue, Congress passed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) as the latest reauthorization of ESEA. ESSA was designed to give states and local school districts more control over education policy and accountability measures and increased opportunities for local input and flexible decision-making based on what communities and states need.

The Current Legislation

Compared to its predecessor, NCLB, the Every Student Succeeds Act marks a shift from major federal authority over education to increased flexibility for states and local school districts. With ESSA, states do not need to focus solely on state reading and math scores to evaluate schools, and they instead must take into consideration four more holistic academic factors and one school-quality factor. ESSA eliminates the troublesome Adequate Yearly Progress measure, as well as the Highly Qualified Teacher (HQT) requirement to allow states to come up with their own definitions of what it means to be an effective teacher. Further, the new authorization removes prescribed interventions and allows funds to be

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blended and transferable to meet a state and school district's needs.

ESSA contains nine titles, as outlined below. SASA's primary focus is on Title IV, so it is the first section listed. However, the other eight titles have been outlined, as well.

Title IV – 21st Century Schools

Title IV authorizes a range of activities including a block grant program, a program to support learning opportunities at community learning centers, programs to enhance and assist charter and magnet schools, a family engagement in education program, an Education Innovation and Research (EIR) program, and programs to provide community support for student success, among other activities.

Of particular interest to SASA is Title IV Part A: Student Support and Academic Enrichment (SSAE) Grants. These grants are distributed directly to state education agencies (SEAs), the departments of education that run the education systems of their states and distribute these grants to local education agencies (LEAs, school boards, school districts, etc.). These grants are distributed based on the same formula used by the Title I-A grant program, meaning that grants are targeted to schools with the highest numbers or proportions of low-income students. Title IV-A consolidates many previous federal programs from NCLB into a single program.

SSAE grants must be used for activities in three broad areas:

1. Providing students access to well-rounded educational opportunities (e.g. college and career counseling, STEM, music and arts, civics, IB/AP curriculum).
2. Supporting safe and healthy students (e.g. comprehensive school mental health, drug and violence prevention, training on trauma-informed practices, health and physical education).
3. Supporting the effective use of technology (e.g. professional development, blended and personalized learning, devices).

SEAs are required to make allocations of at least $10,000 to each school district, and LEAs that receive grants of $30,000 or more must use at least 20% of funds for a well-rounded education, 20% of funds to support safe and healthy students, and at least some funds to support the effective use of technology.

Title I – Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged

The purpose of this title is "to provide all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and to close educational achievement gaps."

According to the Education Department, Title I "provides financial assistance to LEAs and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards. Federal funds are currently allocated through four statutory formulas that are based primarily on census poverty estimates and the cost of education in each state." Title I funds made up 62% of all appropriations for ESEA programs in 2020. This title also outlines the standards, assessments,

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and accountability requirements SEAs must create to receive funding.

Title II: Preparing, Training, and Recruiting High-Quality Teachers, Principals, or Other School Leaders

This title supports professional development.

The purpose of Title II is "to provide grants to State educational agencies and subgrants to local educational agencies to:

1. Increase student achievement consistent with the challenging State academic standards.
2. Improve the quality and effectiveness of teachers, principals, and other school leaders.
3. Increase the number of teachers, principals, and other school leaders who are effective in improving student academic achievement in schools.
4. Provide low-income and minority students greater access to effective teachers, principals, and other school leaders."

Title III: Language Instruction for English Learners and Immigrant Students

This title supports English language learners. The purpose of Title III is to provide grants to SEAs to develop high levels of academic achievement for English language learners, including immigrant students.

Title V: State Innovation and Local Flexibility

This title supports state and local flexibility. The purpose of Title V is to allow SEAs and LEAs the flexibility to direct federal funds to the programs that most effectively address their unique needs. Part B of this Title is titled the Rural Education Initiative and provides funds for schools with small populations in lower-density areas to be used toward any allowable use of funds under ESSA Title I Part A, Title II Part A, Title III, **Title IV Part A**, or Title IV Part B.

Title VI: Indian, Native Hawaiian, Alaska Native Education

This title targets the needs of American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian students. The purpose of Title VI is to support the efforts of local educational agencies, Indian tribes and organizations, postsecondary institutions, and other entities.

Title VII: Impact Aid

This title provides extra funds for school districts that incur lower tax revenue or increased costs due to their location on or near federal property or activities.

Title VIII: General Provisions

This title contains seven unrelated parts.

- Part A: Provides definitions of a variety of terms used frequently throughout the law.
- Part B: Authorizes SEAs and LEAs to consolidate and jointly use funds available for administration under multiple ESEA programs.
- Part C: Authorizes SEAs and LEAs to consolidate plans and reports for ESEA formula grant programs.

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- Part D: Enables the Secretary of Education to waive requirements if they choose to and it is requested by a SEA.
- Part E: Includes provisions related to secretarial approval of state ESEA plans and SEA approval of LEA plans.
- Part F: Authorizes private schools to participate in ESEA programs where allowable.
- Part G: Authorizes ED to reserve funds for program evaluations.

Title IX: Education for the Homeless and Other Laws

This title reauthorized the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act.

The purpose of Title IX is to provide grants to help SEAs ensure that homeless children, including preschoolers and youths, have equal access to free and appropriate public education (FAPE). The program also supports an office for coordination of the education of homeless children and youths in each state, which gathers comprehensive information about homeless children and youths and the impediments they must overcome to regularly attend school.

Key Issues

SASA calls on states, Congress, and the Administration to meaningfully incorporate policies that ensure every student has equitable access to STEM engagement programs. Legislation and regulations must increase funding for grants used for STEM engagement activities at every level, including raising funding for the Student Support and Academic Enrichment (SSAE) Grants in ESSA Title IV-A to its most recently authorized level of $1.6 billion included in the 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act.

Programs like the Department of Education's Title IV, Part A Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants have been instrumental in equipping teachers with the tools to inspire the next generation of scientists and engineers. More than 90% of afterschool programs funded by Title IV, Part B 21st Century Community Learning Centers grants now offer STEM learning that excite and engage young people in these fields in ways that complement school-day learning. These programs foster inclusive, high-quality STEM education for all students, particularly those from underserved communities who are critical to diversifying the STEM workforce.

SASA's top priority is preserving targeted STEM education grants. We urge Congress to maintain funding for Department of Education programs like Title IV, Part A Student Support and Academic Enrichment grants to support teacher training and student engagement in STEM and Title IV, Part B, 21st Century Community Learning Centers, which is critical to supporting the growth in STEM programming offered to low-income youth across the nation outside of schools.

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Relevant Funding Levels

Relevant ESEA Program Appropriations, FY2019-26

Program	Most Recent Authorization (2015-2019)	FY20 Appropriation	FY21 Appropriation	FY22 Appropriation	FY23 Appropriation	FY24 Appropriation	FY25 Appropriation	FY26 Appropriation
Grants to LEAs (Title I-A)	$16.18 billion	$16.31 billion	$16.54 billion	$17.54 billion	$18.39 billion	$18.41 billion	$18.41 billion	$18.41 billion
SSAE Grants (Title IV-A)	$1.60 billion	$1.21 billion	$1.22 billion	$1.28 billion	$1.38 billion	$1.38 billion	$1.38 billion	$1.38 billion

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