

Fact Sheet: ESSA Title IV Part A

Understanding the Flexible Block Grant

Description of Grants

The newly enacted bipartisan Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) includes a flexible block grant program known as Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants (SSAEG) under Title IV Part A, which is authorized at \$1.65 billion until 2020. Title IV, Part A authorizes activities in three broad areas:

1. **Providing students with a well-rounded education** including programs such as college and career counseling, STEM, arts, civics and International Baccalaureate/Advanced Placement.
2. **Supporting safe and healthy students** with comprehensive school mental health, drug and violence prevention, training on trauma-informed practices, and health and physical education.
3. **Supporting the effective use of technology** that is backed by professional development, blended learning and edtech devices.

Distribution of Funds

Each state will receive an allocation from the flexible block grant based on the Title I funding formula. Using the same Title I formula, 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 must then spend 20 percent of its grant on safe and healthy school activities and 20 percent

on activities to provide a well-rounded education programs. The remaining 60 percent of the money can be spent on all three priorities, including technology. However, there is a 15 percent cap on spending for 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 students programs. However, the district must spend money on activities in at least one of the three categories. The 15 percent technology purchase cap would continue to apply.

Funding History

FY17 Appropriations

The SSAEG grant program only received \$400 million in FY 2017. 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 in order to give districts the opportunity to make meaningful investments in at least a handful of districts. Many districts will not receive the statutory minimums under ESSA and some will receive no funding at all due to this extremely low funding level.

FY18 Appropriations

Despite the President's request to eliminate the program and the recognition that FY17 funding levels were simply too low to allow the program to operate as intended under ESSA, Congress recognized the importance of this block grant and provided \$1.1 billion for Title IV-A in FY18. At this funding level, many districts will receive enough funds and have the flexibility to make meaningful investments in the program areas they need most based off of their needs assessments. Additionally, this funding level obviates the need for a competitive option and allows the flexible block grant to operate as Congress intended, as a formula grant that benefits all districts equitably.

Program Funding Need

In order to meet the increasing demands to effectively use educational technology in classrooms and the need for professional development, Title IV-A should receive maximum funding so that districts can adequately support the growth and expansion of digital learning in classrooms. Such an investment is necessary to create a competitive workforce, technology-proficient educators, well equipped classrooms, sufficiently supported administrative structures, and a curriculum optimized to take advantage of the benefits technology offers to students. It is crucial that the federal government continues to invest in these key components of digital teaching and learning as schools cannot afford to make these significant investments alone. Additionally, investments in technology professional development, hardware and software, and district capacity will leverage the WiFi and broadband infrastructure investments in schools and libraries made by the E-Rate program, which has an annual cap of \$3.9 billion.

The use of technology has opened a wide array of exciting learning avenues in classrooms—from streaming educational videos to 3D printing to hands-on-robotics. Teachers no longer stand statically in front of a chalkboard and lecture. Instead they cultivate digital resources and foster creativity by utilizing a plethora of learning devices that engage students in all aspects of learning. Rather than learning solely from their desks, students use technology to collaborate to solve

real-world problems, collectively analyze and use data to create advanced science models and sharpen their 21st Century workforce skills. Maximum funding of Title IV-A would ensure the federal government prioritizes support for the shift to modern classrooms and that all students, regardless of where they live, have the opportunity to engage in digital learning.