



Council of Urban Boards of Education

# **The Opportunity to Increase Equity:**

## **A Guide to ESSA Title IV, Part A**

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# The Opportunity to Increase Equity: A Guide to ESSA Title IV, Part A

*After the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015, several changes were enacted into law. Changes included a new formula grant, Title IV, Part A, which allows for new opportunities and funding streams. Some of these funds are going unused. This paper from NSBA's Council of Urban Boards of Education (CUBE) is a guide for urban school board members on how to make best use of this federal grant program.*

## **ESEA Reauthorization**

The passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1965 dramatically expanded federal support of education from the government. The law was intended to provide more resources for the nation's most vulnerable students.

In December of 2015, in what President Obama called a "Christmas Miracle," the Republican-led Senate and U.S. House of Representatives sent a new version of ESEA to the Democratic President, who signed the bill. The reauthorization was way past due, but because of the bipartisan work of Congress, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) became law and replaced No Child Left Behind

(NCLB). Included in this bill was a new title, Title IV, Part A: The Student Support and Academic Enrichment (SSAE) grant, which is dedicated to supporting students in more equitable ways through a dedicated flexible funding source—with a spirit of innovation and empowerment.

## **How Title IV, Part A Came to Be**

Before the SSAE block grant, ESEA included the Enhancing Education through Technology (EETT) grant in Title II, Part D. At the time of NCLB, EETT was the only dedicated form of funding for education technology. The formula grant aimed to improve student achievement using technology in elementary and secondary schools. The stimulus

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bill infused a one-time allocation of \$650 million into EETT, but ultimately Congress was funding the program at only \$100 million annually.

SSAE expands its focus beyond technology by consolidating the Advanced Placement Exam fee program, safe and drug-free schools programming, school counseling and physical education into the block grant. The law lays out flexible uses, while also aiming to keep important guardrails in place to ensure the grants are used in ways that support districts' most vulnerable populations.

### **Title IV, Part A Funding**

While advocates of Title IV, Part A were pleased to see the block grant enacted, the next hurdle was securing adequate funding. When policy bills are enacted, there is a maximum dollar amount authorized, which allows, but does not require, Congress to appropriate funding up to that maximum threshold.

Title IV, Part A is authorized for \$1.6 billion. Districts receiving over \$30,000 from Title IV, Part A must comply with the following conditions: 20 percent must be used on safe and healthy school activities and 20 percent on activities to provide well-rounded education programs. The remaining 60 percent of the money can be spent on those two priorities, as well as technology. However, there is a 15 percent cap on spending for devices, equipment, software and digital content. Along with how the funds are spent, ESSA requires that a local educational agency (LEA) receiving an allocation of \$30,000 or more conduct a comprehensive needs assessment. A district does not have to follow any of these rules if it receives under \$30,000.

In FY 2017, in the first round of funding, Congress appropriated only \$400 million for Title IV, Part A. This was a great disappointment to advocates of Title IV, Part A since once the funds were sent to states and districts, the funding was hardly noticeable. Most districts did not even meet the \$30,000 threshold during the first round. In fact, according to the Title IV, Part A Coalition, "Many districts did not receive the statutory minimums under ESSA and

some received no funding at all due to the extremely low funding level."

FY 2018 and 2019 were a different story. Congress recognized the urgency of providing additional resources to districts for these focus areas and made appropriations of \$1.1 billion in FY18 and \$1.17 billion in FY19. This drastically changed funds districts received, and there is now an opportunity for districts to make meaningful change for all students, especially those who are underserved.

During FY17, state education agencies (SEAs) and LEAs were allowed to offer Title IV, Part A as a competitive grant due to the low funding level, but the boost in funds for FY19 has allowed Title IV, Part A to operate as Congress intended, as a formula grant that distributes funds in more equitable ways. The next fiscal year (FY20) starts Oct. 1, 2019, and Congress has not yet come to an agreement on the funding levels. Many Washington insiders predict funding will look similar (perhaps even slightly higher) when the final budget is passed.

### **Title IV, Part A Uses**

Title IV, Part A funds can be used in three ways: to support a well-rounded education; to support safe and healthy students; and, to support the effective use of technology. The following sections explain each use in detail.

#### *Supporting a Well-Rounded Education*

"Well-rounded" is defined in the law as courses, activities and programming in subjects such as English, reading or language arts, writing, science, technology, engineering, mathematics, foreign languages, civics and, government, economics, arts, history, geography, computer science, music, career and technical education, health, physical education, and any other subject, as determined by the state or local educational agency, with the purpose of providing all students access to an enriched curriculum and educational experience.

**Authorized funding:** A statutory provision that obligates funding for a program or agency. An authorization may be effective for one year, a fixed number of years, or an indefinite period. An authorization may be for a definite amount of money or for “such sums as may be necessary.” The formal federal spending process consists of two sequential steps: authorization and then appropriation.

**Appropriation:** The provision of funds, through an annual appropriations act or a permanent law, for federal agencies to make payments out of the Treasury for specified purposes. The formal federal spending process consists of two sequential steps: authorization and then appropriation.

AASA, The School Superintendents Association conducted a survey of 622 participants in 40 states that found, “When asked to identify specific investments within the well-rounded education opportunities of Title IV, Part A, respondents reported: science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) (61 percent); social and emotional learning (SEL) (53 percent); along with college/career counseling (37 percent).”

STEM is the clear priority among districts for using these funds; however, SEL use isn’t far behind. What is important to note is the top two answers are focused on specific course options and innovative learning models that use multiple measures of accountability when determining academic achievement. ESSA was written with the idea that a summative assessment should no longer be the ultimate, or in some cases, the only indicator of a student’s success. Instead, the law provides for flexibility in the state’s and district’s ability to determine how to measure student achievement. This is another major shift away from the days of NCLB that states and districts appear to be embracing.

**Board members can increase accountability and transparency for district use of Title IV, Part A dollars in the well-rounded education category by thinking through innovative policies to increase access to rigorous and robust curriculum. As STEM and SEL gain traction, the board,**

**superintendent, educators, students, families and community stakeholders must be in the conversation together to provide an education that prepares students to excel in the changing workforce. Districts can use this funding to start new or bolster already existing efforts, including:**

- Hiring more educators certified in STEM subjects;
- Developing or expanding STEM program offerings to more students in more grade spans throughout the district;
- Providing increased access to industry certification programs in high-demand fields like computer science and coding;
- Assisting students with payment of fees for college, career and military readiness exams like Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, SAT, ACT, ACT WorkKeys or Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery; and,
- Providing professional development on integrating SEL into instruction.

*Supporting Safe and Healthy Students*

The second allowable use of Title IV, Part A is activities that support safe and healthy students. Under the law, supporting safe and healthy



students is defined as activities that foster safe, healthy, supportive and drug-free environments. Those activities should support student academic achievement; provide drug and violence prevention programs; educate students against the use of tobacco, marijuana and smokeless tobacco products; and provide mental health services.

The language again is intentionally broad to provide flexibility to districts that wish to use Title IV, Part A to fund customized solutions for the specific challenges their students are facing. The safe and healthy section of ESSA also speaks extensively to providing professional development for “school and specialized instructional support personnel and interested community members in prevention, education, early identification, intervention mentoring, recovery support services and, where appropriate, rehabilitation referral, as related to drug and violence prevention.”

Responding to mental and behavioral health issues requires a great deal of resources in every school. This can come in the form of interventions, crisis management, mental health services, and securing campuses through school safety equipment. The issues of safe and healthy schools are all connected, which is why this portion of the SSAE is so important. Academic achievement cannot be expected to increase if students don’t feel safe and are not focused on being healthy. Using Title IV, Part A for these issues allows for vulnerable students to attend a learning environment that encourages growth and security in an all-encompassing way.

**Board members can maximize the use of these funds by adopting comprehensive safe and healthy school policies, developed in collaboration with their district and community leaders, that focus on holistic approaches, rather than one-off pieces of equipment or software. Title IV, Part A funds can be used in a variety of ways to help create safe and healthy environments, including:**

- Providing professional development on proven strategies for improving school culture and support for students such as restorative justice

**practices or trauma-informed approaches;**

- Providing free breakfast and/or lunch for all students;
- Providing uniforms or washing machines for students and families to use; and
- Hiring additional school counselors and nurses.

### *The Supporting Effective Use of Technology*

The authors of ESSA understood that modern technology has become intertwined with learning. The law states that each LEA or consortium “shall use a portion of such funds to improve the use of technology to improve the academic achievement, academic growth, and digital literacy of all students, including by meeting the needs of such agency or consortium that are identified in the needs assessment.” This includes purchasing professional learning tools, content and resources that personalize learning, share high-quality educational resources, use technology effectively in the classroom, and implement and support school- and district-wide approaches for using technology to inform instruction, support teacher collaboration and personalize learning. A maximum of 15 percent can be used on purchasing devices and infrastructure.

In the life of Title IV, Part A so far, districts have reported using these funds most for development of educators and collaboration, the implementation of blended learning, buying digital services, and developing or providing personalized learning pathways for students. Even though this section of the law focuses on technology, it is truly about effective teaching and learning. Technology is necessary to meet students where they are and to provide engaging instruction that results in improved understanding and performance.

School board members can be instrumental when it comes to this portion of Title IV, Part A by using it to ensure that classrooms are on the cutting edge of technology. Early exposure to technology





helps students understand the modern world and prepares them to thrive in a rapidly evolving economy. Funding allocated for activities to support use of technology include:

- Providing portable devices for every student and/or making the newest devices available at schools;
- Professional development on the use of technology for effective instruction; and,
- Creating hubs where the internet can be accessed on a personal or school-issued device.

### **Getting Creative with Title IV, Part A**

As technology is increasingly intertwined with teaching and learning, the lines connecting well-rounded, safe and healthy schools with technology get more blurred. For example, STEM falls within the well-rounded education category, but a large part of STEM requires devices and infrastructure. This is where flexibility truly comes into play. When applying for Title IV, Part A funds, don't be afraid to think creatively. Remember the spirit of ESSA and feel empowered to apply for the grant with bold ideas. It exists to spur innovation for new and emerging challenges, with the goal of

better preparing the next generation workforce and offering opportunity to every student.

School boards are in the unique position to develop strategic plans that harness the potential of these funds to address the challenges within their districts in each of the three categories. By intentionally allocating these funds to schools, boards can ensure they implement practices that are beneficial to the specific needs of their students.

The U.S. Department of Education is prepared for questions of validity with new and bold ideas, establishing the Title IV, Part A technical assistance center (<https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov>). The center was created to ensure any questions of uses would be easily answered. There is also a wealth of information listed on the website.

Those serving vulnerable populations know what it means to get creative in order to find equitable opportunities and solutions. Title IV, Part A is no different, and often, out-of-the-box thinking is what spurs higher engagement and achievement. Now is the time to work as district leaders with key community stakeholders to think through how to use those dollars for systemic, equitable and student good. Our future depends on it.

# ABOUT NSBA

The National School Boards Association (NSBA) is the leading advocate for public education. For almost 80 years, we have been leading the effort to support and enhance public education. We are succeeding in creating the best possible environment in which students can realize their dreams.

NSBA is a federation of 49 state associations and the U.S. territory of the Virgin Islands, representing their more than 90,000 school board officials. These local officials govern more than 13,600 local school districts serving more than 50 million public school students. Working with and through our state associations, and serving as their Washington, D.C., office, NSBA advocates for equity and excellence in public education through school board governance.

We believe public education is America's most vital institution. It is a civil right necessary to the dignity and freedom of the American people, and all children deserve equal access to an education that allows them to reach their potential.

In pursuit of these beliefs, NSBA and our members will continue to lead the national conversation about public education, advocate for public policies that ensure all students everywhere have access to a great public education where they live, create a better understanding of the importance of school boards and the benefits of local governance, and enhance the effectiveness of school boards.

NSBA and our members utilize our resources including the Council of School Attorneys (COSA), the Council of Urban Boards of Education (CUBE), the National Black Council of School Board Members (NBC), the National Hispanic Council of School Board Members (NHC), the National American Indian/Alaska Native Council of School Board Members (AIAN), the Conference of State Association Legislative Staff (CSALS), the Federal Relations Network (FRN), Network (FPE), the National School Boards Action Center (NSBAC), the Center for Public Education (CPE), and a robust and continuous media program to fulfill our mission.

NSBA is a not-for-profit organization. The public policy agenda is determined by a 150-member Delegate Assembly made up of local school board members who represent their state associations of school boards. The Board of Directors translates this policy into action. Programs and services are administered by the NSBA Executive Director and CEO and by professional staff. NSBA is headquartered in Alexandria, Virginia, in the metropolitan Washington, D.C., area.

**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**  
**Student Support and Academic Enrichment State Grants**

State or Other Area	2017 Actual	2018 Estimate	2019 Estimate	Amount Change FY 2018 and 2019	Percent Change FY 2018 and 2019
Alabama	6,221,159	17,324,309	0	(17,324,309)	-100.0%
Alaska	1,940,000	5,307,500	0	(5,307,500)	-100.0%
Arizona	8,615,662	24,033,203	0	(24,033,203)	-100.0%
Arkansas	4,039,717	11,147,806	0	(11,147,806)	-100.0%
California	46,418,059	127,272,035	0	(127,272,035)	-100.0%
Colorado	3,953,594	10,456,405	0	(10,456,405)	-100.0%
Connecticut	3,250,250	9,030,810	0	(9,030,810)	-100.0%
Delaware	1,940,000	5,307,500	0	(5,307,500)	-100.0%
District of Columbia	1,940,000	5,307,500	0	(5,307,500)	-100.0%
Florida	21,571,781	59,982,232	0	(59,982,232)	-100.0%
Georgia	13,710,824	37,413,302	0	(37,413,302)	-100.0%
Hawaii	1,940,000	5,307,500	0	(5,307,500)	-100.0%
Idaho	1,940,000	5,307,500	0	(5,307,500)	-100.0%
Illinois	17,602,696	47,058,736	0	(47,058,736)	-100.0%
Indiana	6,717,606	18,341,726	0	(18,341,726)	-100.0%
Iowa	2,494,075	6,674,391	0	(6,674,391)	-100.0%
Kansas	2,905,493	7,324,520	0	(7,324,520)	-100.0%
Kentucky	5,596,325	16,097,852	0	(16,097,852)	-100.0%
Louisiana	7,611,415	21,936,293	0	(21,936,293)	-100.0%
Maine	1,940,000	5,307,500	0	(5,307,500)	-100.0%
Maryland	5,844,449	16,156,683	0	(16,156,683)	-100.0%
Massachusetts	6,085,972	16,939,528	0	(16,939,528)	-100.0%
Michigan	12,328,249	34,650,722	0	(34,650,722)	-100.0%
Minnesota	4,342,608	11,270,380	0	(11,270,380)	-100.0%
Mississippi	4,641,520	13,778,307	0	(13,778,307)	-100.0%
Missouri	6,241,680	17,348,502	0	(17,348,502)	-100.0%
Montana	1,940,000	5,307,500	0	(5,307,500)	-100.0%
Nebraska	1,940,000	5,307,500	0	(5,307,500)	-100.0%
Nevada	3,188,413	9,139,458	0	(9,139,458)	-100.0%
New Hampshire	1,940,000	5,307,500	0	(5,307,500)	-100.0%
New Jersey	9,054,632	25,293,861	0	(25,293,861)	-100.0%
New Mexico	2,918,199	8,189,805	0	(8,189,805)	-100.0%
New York	30,064,446	84,054,579	0	(84,054,579)	-100.0%
North Carolina	11,287,280	31,319,663	0	(31,319,663)	-100.0%
North Dakota	1,940,000	5,307,500	0	(5,307,500)	-100.0%
Ohio	15,074,220	37,636,869	0	(37,636,869)	-100.0%
Oklahoma	4,209,568	11,671,528	0	(11,671,528)	-100.0%
Oregon	3,819,272	10,487,474	0	(10,487,474)	-100.0%
Pennsylvania	15,128,493	43,148,678	0	(43,148,678)	-100.0%
Rhode Island	1,940,000	5,307,500	0	(5,307,500)	-100.0%
South Carolina	6,359,788	16,849,883	0	(16,849,883)	-100.0%
South Dakota	1,940,000	5,307,500	0	(5,307,500)	-100.0%
Tennessee	7,994,688	20,891,219	0	(20,891,219)	-100.0%
Texas	36,272,206	98,374,680	0	(98,374,680)	-100.0%
Utah	2,331,194	5,997,773	0	(5,997,773)	-100.0%
Vermont	1,940,000	5,307,500	0	(5,307,500)	-100.0%
Virginia	6,969,326	18,024,728	0	(18,024,728)	-100.0%
Washington	6,004,278	15,576,934	0	(15,576,934)	-100.0%
West Virginia	2,315,991	6,722,717	0	(6,722,717)	-100.0%
Wisconsin	5,714,872	14,269,909	0	(14,269,909)	-100.0%
Wyoming	1,940,000	5,307,500	0	(5,307,500)	-100.0%
American Samoa	527,257	1,713,582	0	(1,713,582)	-100.0%
Guam	741,441	1,856,675	0	(1,856,675)	-100.0%
Northern Mariana Islands	318,701	1,035,777	0	(1,035,777)	-100.0%
Puerto Rico	1,940,000	5,307,500	0	(5,307,500)	-100.0%
Virgin Islands	412,601	893,966	0	(893,966)	-100.0%
Freely Associated States	0	0	0	0	---
Indian set-aside	2,000,000	5,500,000	0	(5,500,000)	-100.0%
Other	8,000,000	27,500,000	0	(27,500,000)	-100.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>400,000,000</b>	<b>1,100,000,000</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>(1,100,000,000)</b>	<b>-100.0%</b>

NOTES: State allocations for fiscal years 2018 and 2019 programs are preliminary estimates based on currently available data. Allocations based on new data may result in significant changes from these preliminary estimates.



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