



## **EARLY EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN THE EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT (ESSA)**

### **BACKGROUND**

On Dec. 10, 2015, President Barack Obama signed S. 1177 into law as P.L. 114-95. Now known as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the legislation reauthorizes the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), known until recently as No Child Left Behind (NCLB). It is Congress's first legislative overhaul of federal education policy since 2002. NCLB was extensively criticized for setting unrealistic goals and placing too much authority over education policy in the hands of the federal government. ESSA shifts more of that authority back to states and school districts. Important provisions in the bill include the creation of state-designed accountability systems (and the elimination of the Adequate Yearly Progress metric), greater authority over how testing is used in evaluation of students, and “guardrail” policies to ensure the lowest-performing schools and groups of students are not ignored.

### **EARLY EDUCATION**

#### ***Preschool Development Grants***

The largest focus on early childhood education programs can be found in Title IX, Part B, Section 9212. This is the area that outlines the Preschool Development Grants program. This program, while carrying the same name as an existing program, carries a different set of purposes. While the old grants were used to create infrastructure for pre-K programs or expand access in existing programs, the new grant is focused on improved collaboration among providers and regulators in a “mixed delivery” system—including Head Start, public schools, private providers, and more—and effective transition from pre-K to elementary programs.

The grants, which are awarded on a competitive basis, can be used to:

- Conduct statewide needs assessments of the state's pre-K systems (quality, availability, etc.).
- Develop strategic plans for the collaboration and improvement described above.
- Provide better information on pre-K options to parents; share best practices.
- If the needs assessment and strategic plan have been completed, improve quality through improving professional development for providers.



ESSA authorizes these grants at \$250 million for each year, FYs 2017-2020. The initial grants are made for a one-year period, but can be renewed. The renewals can be used to implement activities identified by the needs assessment and strategic plan, expand access, and develop new programs.

### ***Other Measures***

State and local educational agencies (SEAs and LEAs, respectively) are to include in their Title I plans information on how they are using developing, improving, or collaborating with pre-K programs in their service areas. ESSA explicitly states that LEAs may reserve funds from subgrants to provide pre-K programs to their students.

Title II dollars are eligible to be used, under the umbrella of state activities, to provide training to early childhood program directors and providers on improving student transition from pre-K to elementary school.

Also included in Title II is a subpart (Subpart 2 in Part B) entitled “Literacy Education for All, Results for the Nation” which focuses on effective reading instruction. This section, which provides grant funding to enhance literacy programming, specifically breaks the subgrants into two groups—one of which is solely focused on early childhood programs. Eligible entities, as in earlier provisions of the bill, include LEAs and home-based literacy programs that serve low-income and disadvantaged students.

Title III also includes language specifying that federal dollars may be used for English language instruction in early childhood programs.

Finally, in Part C of Title IV, it is noted that funds used to establish, expand, and replicate high-quality charter school programs can indeed be used to fund early education in these schools. Until now, early childhood charter programs were not eligible to receive federal funding as elementary and secondary charters were.



### **Resources**

[Text of S. 1177, the Every Student Succeeds Act](#)

[NCSL Summary of the Every Student Succeeds Act](#)

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