



Environmental Education in the Every Student Succeeds Act

Background

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) is the law that governs K-12 education in the United States. Passed at the end of 2015, ESSA reauthorizes the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which was previously authorized under No Child Left Behind.

Thanks in large part to many years of advocacy and outreach on the part of NAAEE, its Affiliates, and numerous partners (including environmental education providers, conservation organizations, businesses, sportsman’s groups, health care workers, school administrators and others) **ESSA includes language making environmental education explicitly eligible for federal education funding for the first time.**

EE Language

The key language sits in **Title IV of the Every Student Succeeds Act—21st Century Schools:**

- Title IV, Part A: Environmental education is an enrichment activity called out as eligible for funding under a new grants program that supports “a well-rounded education” and student health and safety programs.
 - Under the law, these funds are block granted to the states using the Title I formula; 95% of the state funds are then block granted to Local Education Agencies (LEA), also according to formula.
 - LEAs receiving more than \$30,000 must use at least 20% of the grant to support one or more enrichment activities and at least 20% on one or more of the student safety programs (eg. bullying prevention, mental health, etc).

- Title IV, Part B: Environmental literacy programs are now eligible for funding as part of the existing 21st Century Community Learning Centers program
 - These funds are also block granted to the states according to the Title I formula; states award competitive grants to LEAs, schools, and/or community partners for after-school and out of school time activities.

- The prioritization of STEM activities including “hands-on learning” and “field-based or service learning” to enhance understanding of STEM subjects may provide additional opportunities for environmental science education programs.
- Title II of ESSA provides funding for teacher professional development. Among other things, funds may be used to support professional development that supports a teacher’s ability to provide a well-rounded education, including environmental education.
- ESSA funds are meant to supplement, not supplant, state and local education funding. In other words, LEAs must use their federal allocations for *additional* resources and programs to help students succeed rather than making up for funding shortfalls or to replace state or local spending on resources.

2018 Update

In the FY2018 budget, Titles IVA and IVB were allocated \$1.1B and \$1.2B, respectively. For Title IVA, this is an increase of \$700M over the FY2017 budget. This significant increase makes the 2018-19 school year the first truly meaningful opportunity to leverage these funds for environmental education for most school districts.

NAAEE urges Affiliates, partners, and other stakeholders to talk to school district leaders about using Title IVA dollars to support environmental education as part of their efforts to provide students with a well-rounded education. NAAEE is a partner in the Superintendent’s EE Collaborative, which provides direct outreach to school administrators about how to integrate EE in K-12 schools, including accessing funding through ESSA.