

Congress Approves Every Student Succeeds Act

In a bipartisan vote, the U.S. Senate voted overwhelmingly to approve the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which would reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act/No Child Left Behind (ESEA/NCLB). This bipartisan legislation brings comprehensive changes to education for every child, making this the most sweeping education legislation signed into law since 2002. The legislation reduces the federal role, restores local control and empowers parents in the education of their children. The legislation has been sent to the President's desk for his signature.

The Every Student Succeeds Act provides a hallmark opportunity to ensure parents and families are empowered to support their children's learning and is designed to ensure that all students receive a high-quality, well-rounded education that prepares them for long-term success.

The Every Student Succeeds Act retains a feature of ESEA/NCLB, the federally mandated statewide reading and math assessments in

grades three to eight and in high school. The only change is that it encourages states to set caps on the time students spend on testing and it will diminish the high stakes associated with these exams for underperforming schools.

The ESSA also substantially limits the federal government's role by barring the Education Department from telling states and local districts how to determine school and teacher performance. Instead, states and districts will determine their own goals for schools; design their own measures of achievement and progress, and decide independently how to turn around struggling schools. Under the ESSA, testing will be just one measure of success; other measures could include graduation rate, etc.

States will still be expected to intervene in the lowest performing five percent of schools; in high schools with the high dropout rates, and in schools with achievement gaps. The ESSA brings to an end the waivers given to a majority of the states struggling to meet the math and reading requirements of

the No Child Left Behind law.

The ESSA will give back to classroom teachers and administrators the power to determine which tests are essential. The legislation will still hold underperforming schools responsible to ensure that all students receive a quality education, including minority children and Free and Reduced Lunch (FARMs), etc. The legislation also recognizes the importance of early childhood education by giving states grants to fund improve quality and access to preschool. The ESSA contained Academic Enrichment programs that authorize over \$3 billion for academic enrichment grants to fund education program in STEM fields, music and arts, foreign languages, the environment and accelerated learning. It supports the mental and physical health and well-being of students and authorizes over \$2 billion for learning centers for academic enrichment during non-school hours. Special grants also support programs that address the needs of schools that serve military families.