

Every Student Succeeds Act Primer: Literacy



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The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 outlines a direct and sustained approach to improving literacy achievement by supporting states in developing high-quality literacy instruction and a continuum of interventions and support for students at risk for reading and writing failure.

Funding to Support Literacy

Title II of ESSA incorporates the “[Literacy Education for All, Results for a Nation](#)” (LEARN) Act, which provides competitive grants to states to help local school districts develop comprehensive birth-through-grade-twelve literacy instruction plans. A state must distribute at least 95 percent of funds it receives to local school districts with priority given to entities serving the greatest number/percentage of disadvantaged students in low-performing schools. The remaining 5 percent of funds may be used for state activities, including technical assistance, administration, and evaluation activities.

ESSA requires schools and educators to provide high-quality instruction and evidence-based intervention strategies to teach reading and writing within subject areas and across grade levels. Under ESSA, comprehensive literacy instruction includes the use of a variety of assessments—screening, diagnostic, formative, and summative—to identify students’ literacy needs and inform literacy instruction from early childhood through grade twelve.

Professional Development to Support Effective Literacy Instruction

The LEARN Act within ESSA connects policy and practice directly by investing in the knowledge and skills of educators. Local education agencies (LEAs) must use any grant funds they receive under the LEARN Act to support high-quality professional development for teachers, teacher leaders, principals, and specialized instructional support personnel to improve literacy instruction for struggling readers and writers in early childhood, elementary, and adolescent literacy programs. They must build educators’ expertise in literacy instruction appropriate to grade levels and in using data to improve students’ reading and writing skills. Effective literacy instruction depends on the collaboration of teachers, principals, and other school leaders in planning, instructing, and assessing students’ progress in attaining grade-level literacy skills.

Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy Program

Federal funding to support literacy also is available through the Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy (SRCL) program, a predecessor to the funding now available under the LEARN Act. SRCL program funds are provided through Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 appropriations but will be distributed in FY 2017. The [priorities, requirements, definitions, and selection criteria](#) for the 2017 cohort of SRCL grant recipients align with those under the LEARN Act. States that receive funding through the SRCL program will award subgrants to LEAs serving high-need students. These subgrants will target the learning needs of traditionally underserved students, including students with disabilities, students with limited English proficiency, students from low-income families, and other students at elevated risk for reading and writing failure.

To improve literacy at every level, states receiving grants must allocate 15 percent of the funds to children from birth through age five; 40 percent to students in kindergarten through grade five; and 40 percent to students in grades six through twelve. States may use the remaining 5 percent of funds for leadership activities, including technical assistance and training, data collection, reporting, and program administration. To receive subgrant funding, LEAs must conduct needs assessments as part of their application to identify how they will use the funds to inform and improve comprehensive literacy instruction for struggling students. LEAs' plans must include strategies to identify struggling students, diagnose skills gaps, implement evidence-based teaching practices for reading and writing, and adopt an ongoing review process to evaluate the efficacy of the program.

State literacy plans, meanwhile, must connect to the state's challenging academic standards, including focusing on students' abilities to navigate, understand, and write about complex print and digital subject matter. Funding under the SRCL program supports states in implementing additional innovative strategies to help students meet state English language arts standards.

For additional fact sheets and videos about ESSA, visit www.all4ed.org/essa/.



Photos by Allison Shelley/The Verbatim Agency for **American Education: Images of Teachers and Students in Action**

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