Malcolm X once stated, “Sitting at the table doesn’t make you a diner, unless you eat some of what’s on that plate” (1965). The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), a federal law overseeing K–12 education in the United States, was passed in December 2015, replacing No Child Left Behind.

After 10 years of lobbying Congress, the American Library Association (ALA) and library supporters across the nation were able to embed language about school libraries into this federal legislation and thus enable school librarians and library programs to be eligible for federal funds. Now it is up to school librarians to work locally to make sure that money filters into library resources and programs that benefit students. Initially, it is important to understand what needs to occur to make this happen.

LANGUAGE IS IMPORTANT

School librarians need to understand and use the language from ESSA legislation. The law finally includes school librarians as “specialized instructional support personnel” eligible (but not required) for participation in grant programs, professional development (PD), and input into the school’s needs assessment updated every 3 years. ESSA, however, does not define an effective school library program nor mandate school librarians in schools. It does, however, refer to equitable access to school libraries for students.

The American Association of School Librarians (AASL) has since established new position statements defining an effective school library program, appropriate staffing, and the role of the library program and its instructional program (AASL, 2016b). These documents should be used to guide conversations with principals and district school administrators.

The legislation repeatedly uses some key phrases that librarians need to practice and fold into conversations. “Personalized learning experiences” are to be supported by technology and PD for the effective use of data and technology (AASL, 2017). Another priority is creating equitable “access to and opportunities for a well-rounded education for all students” (AASL, 2017). Such concepts should already be evidenced in the mission of a school library program.
offering a wide range of resources and one-on-one as well as group instruction and access, allowing students to explore and create.

- Use computer-based assessments such as TRAILS to chart student attainment of information literacy skills.
- Provide space for group work and encourage collaboration with peers.
- Create blended learning opportunities through web pages curated with instruction and e-resources to support student projects and assignments.
- Provide 24/7 access to resources and learning experiences for all students.
- Manage equitable access to computing devices for all students, developing bring your own device and loan policies.
- Develop the whole child by providing individualized resources, bibliotherapy, and a safe space for all students (Celluci & Gardner, 2017).
- Provide a wide array of reading materials offering diverse perspectives that meet the needs of reading and developmental levels within and beyond the school.
- Encourage student motivation to read and write through personalized and curriculum-based resources and guided learning opportunities.

ESSA frequently refers to increased collaboration, joint planning time, and PD for teachers and “specialized instructional support personnel,” including school librarians. It is important to explain to administrators that librarians can provide in-house and targeted PD to teachers, which highlights the school librarian’s unique contribution to implementing ESSA priorities.

**POTENTIAL FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES**

When the federal budget for 2017 is finalized, it will be clear how much funding is available and how it will be distributed. Some ESSA funds will be allocated by formula directly to school districts, such as Title I; others may be available as competitive federal grants. Some funding will be passed through to states and distributed, some by formula and some by competitive grants. Most state funds will be allocated to school districts based on a stated percentage of children from low-income families.

ESSA authorizes but does not mandate or require that school libraries receive funding. School librarians will need to request to be on Title I and other grant-writing committees to provide input and evidence on how and why school library programs need to be part of solutions to improve student achievement.

**HOW TO GET STARTED**

First, organize a meeting of all the district school librarians. Grants are generally available at the district level, not the school level. Meetings can be at the end of the day or in the evening over coffee if a district doesn’t have a library department or coordinator/supervisor. Review the ESSA using a global search on key words to learn about priorities and potential grants. AASL’s website (2016a) “ESSA and School Libraries” has excellent resources, talking points, and elevator speeches. Check Ed.gov to see if grants have been posted and to check due dates and eligibility. Reuse, create, or personalize all according to local district needs, and use talking points to justify why school libraries need to be involved.

Locally, figure out which district administrators are in charge of grant applications. This might be the current Title I coordinator or perhaps the curriculum coordinator. Request a meeting, taking a few or all of the librarians, to show a united front and well-thought-out approach. Highlight leadership and organizational skills. Be cognizant of when grants are due, giving the district plenty of time to form a grant concept, articulate it fol-
POTENTIAL FEDERAL GRANT OPPORTUNITIES FOR SCHOOL LIBRARY PROGRAMS (Depending on the final federal budget for fiscal year 2018)

Title I—Improving Basic Programs Operated by State and Local Education Agencies funds must be based on plans that include input from teachers, principals, and other stakeholders, including “specialized instructional support personnel” (school librarians). New provisions authorize local plans to include how schools will develop effective library programs that specifically develop student digital literacy skills and improve academic achievement. See an overview of Title I and school libraries at https://vimeo.com/183388920.

Literacy Education for All, Results for the Nation (LEARN) is a new, competitive federal program. If funded, school librarians could be included to collaborate with teachers on literacy instruction, including planning time and PD. A short overview of LEARN is provided through a video clip at https://vimeo.com/183392270.

Innovative Approaches to Literacy (IAL), which previously existed in NCLB, is now a line item in the ESSA. Designed to aid in literacy among students in low-income, high-need communities, IAL permits funds to be used for developing and enhancing effective school libraries, which may include new library resources and PD for school librarians. A short overview of IAL is available at https://vimeo.com/183392270.

Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants (block grant) is a new grant distributed through state agencies based on poverty. Its priorities include programs and activities that increase access to personalized, rigorous learning experiences supported by technology, including adequate “access to school libraries.” For example, in a qualifying school, tablets and e-readers could be purchased for libraries to loan to students, enabling them to participate in online lessons and instruction developed among teachers and librarians and to access curated library and web resources. See a video clip on IAL at https://vimeo.com/183394913.

School librarians and all supporters of quality K–12 education need to be vigilant and persistent with federal and state lawmakers to ensure that adequate funding is allocated to ESSA initiatives. With a new administration in Washington, DC, Congress needs to constantly hear from constituents that students need resources to learn and receive an equitable and well-rounded education. School librarians should respond to calls to action from state library associations, ALA, and AASL. If available, use the local state association action centers and the ALA Washington Office legislative alert site (http://cqrcengage.com/ala/) to locate and contact both state and federal legislators.

MAKE SURE TO “EAT AT THE TABLE”

Unless school librarians organize and educate themselves about ESSA funding opportunities and actively represent library interests at the grant-writing planning table, library programs will likely gain nothing from ESSA funds. ESSA’s definition of “comprehensive literacy instruction” clearly addresses the mission of a school library program: it “makes available and uses...
TEN QUESTIONS TO ASK LOCALLY

1. Which state and federal ESSA grants are districts eligible for, and when are the grants due?
2. What are the connections between the grant’s stated priorities and the school library program?
3. Who handles grant applications in the school district?
4. How can a school librarian get on the grant writing committee?
5. Is there an ESSA planning or needs assessment committee, and can a librarian serve on it?
6. How is input from stakeholders being gathered? For needs assessment? For grant writing?
7. What format/where/when can librarians show how school library programs are a part of ESSA programs (e.g., presentation, handout)?
8. Who are the stakeholders that will support using ESSA funds for libraries (e.g., reading teachers, tech teachers, public librarian, PTA leaders)?
9. What local data and evidence can be accumulated and used to persuade decision makers to use ESSA funds for school libraries?
10. How can the role of the school library program in literacy be incorporated into the LEARN and IAL grants, if a district is eligible to apply and the programs are funded?

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diverse, high-quality print materials that reflect the reading and development levels, and interests, of children” and “uses strategies to enhance children’s motivation to read and write and children’s engagement in self-directed learning” (S.1177, 2015). The library and librarian’s role in digital learning is also clear. These connections need to be made to school administrators now so that library programs are integral components of ESSA opportunities since these grants will be funded for the 2017-2018 school year.

School librarians must inform district administrators that they and their programs are a solution to equitable access to resources, technology, and instruction and that they provide “personalized learning experiences” and “blended learning projects” that are components of a “well-rounded education for all students,” as is described in ESSA (S.1177, 2015).

REFERENCES


ADDITIONAL RESOURCES


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