The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA)

Summary of legislation from Congress.gov: https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/senate-bill/1177

The Texas State Library and Archives Commission (TSLAC), the Texas Education Agency (TEA), The Texas Library Association and related units, and local school librarians should work together to ensure all students benefit from recent changes to federal education law (ESSA) that provides for effective school library programs as essential to the education of Texas school children.

Summary of ESSA and Potential Implications for Texas

Title I, Part A – TEA and districts develop plans to implement federally-funded educational activities.

TEA and districts "develop their plans with "timely and meaningful consultation with" teachers, principals and other stakeholders, including "specialized instructional support personnel" which is defined under ESSA as specifically including school librarians.

ESSA authorizes – but does not require - school districts to include in their plans how they will develop effective school library programs to provide students an opportunity to improve digital literacy skills and improve academic achievement.

- ★ TSLAC and TLA should work with TEA to ensure school librarians have a place in statewide planning sessions dedicated to implementing federally-funded activities.
- ★ School librarians should make school district officials aware that they can develop and implement school library programming Under Title I by ensuring districts consider: (1)The importance of developing, maintaining, and supporting effective school library programs, and (2)How effective school library programs empower the development of digital literacy skills and academic achievement
- ★ TSLAC staff and school librarians should volunteer to serve in both State and district planning and application processes for Title I.

Title II, Part A – Supporting Effective Instruction

ESSA includes new provisions that authorize states and districts to use grant and subgrant funds to support instructional services provided by school library programs.

- ★ TSLAC will work with TLA and TEA to ensure districts are aware that Title II funds may now be used for professional development for school librarians.
- ★ Under No Child Left Behind, Title II funds were to be used primarily for classroom teachers to participate in professional development activities.
- ★ School librarians should volunteer to attend professional development and bring their learning back to staff.

Title II, Part B, Subpart 2 – Literacy Education for All, Results for the Nation (LEARN)

This is a NEW PROGRAM under ESSA that provides support to states to develop, revise, or update comprehensive literacy instruction plans. States award competitive subgrants to districts for activities that focus on K-5 and 6-12.

ESSA specifically authorizes school librarians to participate in required grant activities for both K-5 and 6-12.

ESSA allows all local subgrants to be used to provide teachers and school librarians time to meet, plan, and collaborate on comprehensive literacy instruction.

★ TSLAC will work with TLA and TEA to ensure librarians, administrators, instructional support professionals, and teachers are aware of these grants for comprehensive literacy instruction. TSLAC, TLA, and TEA should support, encourage, and assist State, district, and school personnel in applying for grants and subgrants.
Note: Any grant awarded to a school district under this program should provide professional development for school librarians.

★ School librarians should volunteer to investigate grant opportunities, serve on grant writing committees, and assist in implementing grant programs for their districts and campuses.

Title II, Part B, Subpart 2, Section 2226 – Innovative Approaches to Literacy (IAL)

This is a **new authorization** of the Innovative Approaches to Literacy (IAL) Program, which was previously funded through appropriations, that provides dedicated funding to promote literacy programs in low income communities.
Note: This now provides a specific "line item" to help better secure funding in future years.

ESSA Specifically authorizes funds to be used for developing and enhancing effective school library programs, to include funding for professional development, books, and up-to-date materials for high needs students.

★ TSLAC will work with TLA and TEA to identify potential high needs districts and campuses that may be eligible for this program, and support efforts to communicate the positive effects of this funding.

★ School librarians who work in high needs districts or schools should reach out to TEA, TLA, and TSLAC to receive information and training.

Title IV, Part A – Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants (Block Grant)

ESSA authorizes a **new program** to provide Student Support and Academic Enrichment activities (commonly referred to as the "Block Grant" under ESSA) to help States and school districts target federal resources on locally-designed priorities.

Funds are allocated to States then districts based on their share of Title I, Part A funding (a formula based on poverty).

ESSA authorizes - but does not require - States to use funds to assist school districts in providing programs and activities that increase access to personalized, rigorous learning experiences supported by technology, including **adequate "access to school libraries**."

ESSA also authorizes - but does not require - States to use funds to **assist school districts in providing school librarians** and other school personnel with the knowledge and skills to use technology effectively, including effective integration of technology, to improve instruction and student achievement.

In developing their local applications, school districts should consult with teachers, principals and other stakeholders, including "specialized instructional support personnel" which is defined under ESSA as **specifically including** school librarians.

In addition, ESSA requires that school districts conduct a "needs assessment" prior to receiving funds from the State (conducted every 3 years). The needs assessment should include access to personalized learning experiences (which **may include** access to school libraries).

★ TSLAC will consult with TEA officials to make them aware of their ability to use funds in support of personalized learning experiences.

★ Because districts are required to consult with stakeholders that may include school librarians on the development and implementation of their local activities, school librarians should collaborate with technology leaders at the school and district levels to ensure that librarians actively participate in the planning process.

Source: "School Librarians and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)." American Library Association, 12 Jan. 2016. http://www.ala.org/aasl/advocacy/legislation/essa

Adapted from the Colorado State Library:

What ESSA Does Not Include:
  1. Does not define an effective school library program.*
  2. Does not require or mandate school librarian staffing, whether certified or not.

TSLAC recommended goals for the Texas State Library, TEA, TLA, or a combination of these:

1. Develop a definition* of an effective school library program:
   ★ This effort is ongoing with our TSLAC and TEA's cooperative revision of School Libraries: Standards and Guidelines for Texas.
   ★ In addition to defining effective school library programs, provide an online tool with which schools and districts can objectively assess their library programs and access recommendations for program improvements based upon this assessment.
2. Prepare talking points, and suggest solutions for ESSA implementation as implementation work begins:
   ★ Title I – Including librarians in the planning process for Title I funding ensures every student has access to effective school library programs, which have been proven to have positive impacts on student achievement, digital literacy skills, and campus climate and culture.
   ★ Title II, Part A – School Librarians are especially suited to attend conferences and workshops off campus and bring their learning back to other professionals. When properly scheduled, students do not miss instruction and teachers stay in the classroom. School librarians are also experienced professional development providers for their campuses, and are best equipped to see the benefits of new techniques, strategies, and technologies potentially applied to entire campuses, versus one department, grade level, or classroom.
   ★ Title II, Part B, Subpart 2 – Librarians are key to developing, implementing, or revising comprehensive literacy instruction plans. They are teachers, they have access to a large collection of literacy materials, and they have long experience in connecting students with literacy, both print and digital.
   ★ Title II, Part B, Subpart 1 – Many Texas school librarians have grant writing expertise, and are uniquely suited to lead the effort in applying for competitive grants for their campuses. In addition, we have a strong professional learning network of fellow Texas librarians and school librarians from all over the US who can help by sharing their experiences and best practices.
   ★ Title IV, Part A - School Librarians, with intimate knowledge of the entire campus, are uniquely positioned to assist in determining local needs for block grants, and for seeing where department, grade levels, and other divisions within a school or district can leverage partnerships to have an increased impact on instruction and student achievement.
3. Support local schools and districts in applying federal funds toward improving school library programs:
   ★ Provide training sessions for librarians with information on federal funding and its potential uses.
   ★ Highlight district and campus success stories from all over the state that demonstrate the benefits of highly effective school library programs.
4. Enhance technology access and professional development for effective use of technologies in classrooms:
   ★ Conduct a statewide "speed test" to accurately gauge broadband access in schools and public libraries. Using the results, create a comprehensive plan to expand connection speeds statewide.

- ★ Partner with professional associations and Education Service Centers to expand access to highly effective technology-based professional development.
- ★ Continue to expand existing partnerships to promote the TexQuest program and other statewide resource-sharing initiatives that bring high-quality resources to local school districts in an extremely cost-effective manner.
5. Emphasize that through the specific inclusion of libraries and librarians in various sections, ESSA recognizes that school library programs and staff are essential and integral components of a student's education, and as such, are eligible for support from federal education dollars:
   - ★ Professional associations can encourage librarians and library supporters all over Texas to communicate the importance of ensuring similar provisions are included in future Texas statutes, Administrative Codes, and Agency rules.

* An "effective school library program" was defined in S.312 (The SKILLS Act): https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/senate-bill/312 incorporated in part in the ESSA law, as one that: *(1) is staffed by a state sanctioned school librarian; (2) has up-to-date materials and technology, including broadband; (3) includes regular collaboration between teachers and school librarians concerning school reform efforts; and (4) supports the development of digital literacy skills*. This definition is not included in ESSA.

American Library Association. "Opportunities for School Librarians". ALA. PDF File. 1/5/16. http://www.ala.org/aasl/sites/ala.org.aasl/files/content/aaslissues/esea/ALA-ESSA_Library_Opportunities.pdf

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