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Federal Funding for Geography Education?

While attending the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) annual meeting in Philadelphia last month, I had occasion to witness the celebrations of the historians as they tallied their multiple legislative gains in education funding on numerous fronts over the past few years. Bruce Cole, Director of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), announced at the meeting a proposed \$25 million increase in NEH funding, all of which is to be earmarked for teaching history. The massive "No Child Left Behind" Act (NCLB), now in its second year of implementation, provides federal funding for history education in "such sums as necessary" (the FY 2004 budget request is for \$100 million as a necessary sum). New legislation (S. 504) is pending and gaining momentum, which would authorize an additional \$25 million appropriation to establish and fund "a national alliance of teachers of American history and civics and other purposes."



Richardson

The point of this isn't that I am opposed to funding for history. It is that geography is almost completely neglected in the funding for these major federal education programs.

For example, the No Child Left Behind Act identifies nine "core academic subjects" (English, reading or language arts, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, and geography). While we can be grateful that geography is included as a core subject in the NCLB, it is the only discipline identified in the Act with no specific

program provisions or funding associated with it. The compilation below, drawn from an excellent report by NGS intern Ryan Daley for GENIP (the report, entitled "No Geographer Left Behind," is available on the AAG website at www.aag.org/nclb.pdf), summarizes all of the disciplines for which the NCLB has established programs and the amount of funding authorized by the Act.

This chart dramatically illustrates the need to establish for geography an effective, sustained, on-going public policy

NCLB Program Name	Legislation Reference	Authorized Appropriations
Reading First	Title I, Part B, subpart 1	\$900,000,000
Early Reading First	Title I, Part B, subpart 2	\$75,000,000
Even Start	Title I, Part B, subpart 3	\$260,000,000
Improving Literacy Through School Libraries	Title I, Part B, subpart 4	\$250,000,000
Science and Mathematics Partnerships	Title II, Part B	\$450,000,000
Writing (National Writing Project)	Title II, Part C, subpart 2	\$15,000,000
Civic Education	Title II, Part C, subpart 3	\$30,000,000
Teaching of Traditional American History	Title II, Part C, subpart 4	"Such Sums as Necessary"
Foreign Language Assistance Program	Title II, Part C, subpart 9	\$28,750,000
Physical Education (Not a "core academic subject")	Title II, Part C, subpart 10	Feds. pay 90% for 1st yr, 75% for 2nd, 3rd, etc.
Excellence in Economic Education	Title II, Part C, subpart 13	Feds. pay 50% of grants
Arts in Education	Title II, Part C, subpart 15	Decided on per grant basis
Geography	N/A	N/A

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and legislative presence, to not only monitor, but to shape federal policy which impacts geography.

The historians have not achieved their substantial gains by simply hoping that legislators would see the value of history education; they have carried that message to them, over and over, every step of the way through the legislative process. They have mobilized constituent support in legislative districts across the country. They have formed coalitions and leveraged the support of multiple professional associations, related interest groups, universities and schools, and a concerned public.

The case for geography education has never been stronger, more persuasive, or easier to make. In almost all other arenas, including research, higher education, geographic technologies, and societal applications, we are experiencing a rising tide for geography. We must find a way to translate this rising tide and the clear and compelling need for geography education at all levels into concrete and substantial federal and state funding opportunities.

To be successful in this and other related policy activities will require developing institutional capabilities within the AAG and other geography organizations to sustain a focused effort over time. It will require dedicated staff resources in Washington, DC, and the help and support of geographers and member institutions across the country.

Developing a professional capability to represent geography's interests in federal policy and legislation will not happen overnight; it will take time and a great deal of effort, but the stakes are very high and the time is right. And, of course, if we don't learn from history, we may well be doomed to repeat it.

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