



Dear AAG Members:

As you are likely aware, Congress has been working throughout 2015 to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA; currently known as No Child Left Behind) - the primary federal law dealing with K-12 education policy. We have been monitoring the process throughout the year and have engaged with Congressional leaders to stress the importance of federal funding opportunities for K-12 geography. We have also written to you multiple times to share key updates.

In recent months, the House and Senate each approved separate versions of ESEA reauthorization legislation, and two weeks ago, senior members from the two houses met to reconcile differences between the bills. The resulting "[conference report](#)" was released this week. Here's our initial analysis:

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) is the name given to the House/Senate conference report for the current reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The conference report will be voted upon by the House this week (possibly as soon as late this afternoon) and the Senate next week. If both houses approve it, the bill will go to President Obama for signature or veto.

Overall, we view the conference report as a positive for geography. While there is no stand-alone grant program for our discipline, there are several grant programs (detailed below) that specifically mention geography as an eligible subject for grant proposals. Given the all-encompassing focus by Congressional Republicans on returning control to the states and localities, we frankly think this is about the best we could have hoped for.

Additionally, geography is specifically included as both a core academic subject and as part of "well-rounded education" as defined in the law.

Here are the specific mentions of geography in the bill:

Page 391 - Part of Title II of the legislation - this is a history/civics/geography grant program that we had been aware of and have written to you about previously. It's no longer broken down into three sections as it had been in the Senate bill, and it's now authorized as part of a larger series of grant programs that includes teacher incentive grants and literacy education funding.

Nonprofit entities and higher-ed institutions are eligible grant recipients under the program and there's a specified requirement to focus on underserved student populations in grant activities. We are pleased with the way this section is written as compared to how it had appeared in the Senate bill.

Page 460 - Part of Title IV of the legislation - this specifies that states may use certain funds to support local education agencies (LEAs) in "well-rounded education" activities, which includes geography.

Page 477 - Part of Title IV of the legislation - this section spells out various requirements for grants to LEAs and requires some funds to be used for "well-rounded educational opportunities." Geography is one of the subjects specified as being part of a well-rounded education for purposes of these expenditures. The bill also says that LEAs can conduct these activities in partnership with a nonprofit entity or higher-ed institution.

Page 579 - Part of Title IV of the legislation - this section deals with grants to magnet schools and specifies that expenditures must be related to a series of activities, including "improving student knowledge of" various subjects, one of which is geography.

Page 683 - Part of Title VI of the legislation - this deals with grants to aid in the "educational needs of educationally-disadvantaged" Native American students and is focused on raising achievement in various subjects, one of which is geography.

Page 807 - In this section, a "well-rounded education" is defined and includes instruction in a number of subjects, one of which is geography. We don't recall previous versions of the ESEA having specified a definition of this term - and it's good that geography is included.

Page 1019 - This section defines the "core academic subjects" for the ESEA and geography is again included.

Looking forward, we might focus on: 1) Working directly with states and localities to encourage them to use their flexibility to apply funds to geography-related activities; and 2) Continue to make the case that geography is a STEM discipline critical to job growth and that there needs to be a dedicated federal grant program to improve the teaching of our discipline. We think the recent GAO report and the AAG Resolution on Geography Education can help in conveying this message.

As always, please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or concerns. John Wertman, the AAG's Senior Program Manager for Government Relations, can be reached at jwertman@aag.org, and Doug Richardson, AAG Executive Director, at drichardson@aag.org. And our very best for the holiday season!

Sincerely,
Douglas Richardson
John Wertman