



President Obama signs the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) into law.

Dear AAG Members:

This morning, President Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) into law (the picture above was taken by John Wertman, the AAG's Senior Program Manager for Government Relations, who attended the event). The ESSA is the given name for the new version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the primary federal law dealing with K-12 education policy which had been known as No Child Left Behind.

The President was introduced at the signing ceremony by Antonio Martin, an 8th-grade student at Kenmore Middle School in Arlington, VA, who specifically mentioned his world geography class during his remarks. Martin also said after the event that he loves the cultural aspects of studying geography!

The ESSA takes effect immediately, but it will take several months for the U.S. Department of Education to fully implement the new programs established in the law. As you are well aware, we have been monitoring the Congressional reauthorization debate through 2015 and we are pleased with several programs in the law that advance K-12 geography:

- A new history/civics/geography grant program is created as part of a larger series of grant programs that includes teacher incentive grants and literacy education funding.
- States are authorized to use certain funds to support local education agencies (LEAs) in "well-rounded education" activities, which includes geography.
- LEAs, in turn, are required to use some grant funds to be used for "well-rounded educational opportunities," and geography is one of the subject specified for purposes of these expenditures.
- Grants to magnet schools must be related to a series of activities, including "improving student knowledge of" various subjects, one of which is geography.
- Grants to aid in the "educational needs of educationally-disadvantaged" Native American students are focused on raising achievement in various subjects, one of which is geography.
- A "well-rounded education" for K-12 students is defined and includes instruction in a number of subjects, one of which is geography. Our discipline is also again included as a "core academic subject" under the law.

Right before he signed the bill, President Obama said, "Now the hard work begins." As the federal government works to enact the law and states and localities adjust to the new flexibility they have been granted, it will be incumbent upon our community to engage with educational leaders across the nation to stress the importance of geography as a STEM discipline critical to job growth. The recent GAO report and the AAG Resolution Supporting K-12 Geography Education will help us 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.

Sincerely,
Douglas Richardson and John Wertman