

ESSA Title IV and School Health Frequently Asked Questions

1. How are school health programs treated in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)?

ESSA eliminated 49 programs, including many that support the comprehensive needs of students:

- Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities State Grants (Title IV, Part A, Subpart 1)
- National Center for School and Youth Safety (Title IV, Part A, Subpart 2, Sec. 4128)
- Elementary and Secondary School Counseling Programs (Title V, Part D, Subpart 2)
- Partnerships in Character Education (Title V, Part D, Subpart 3)
- Physical Education (Title V, Part D, Subpart 10)
- Grants to Improve the Mental Health of Children (Title V, Part D, Subpart 14)

2. Are these programs consolidated in ESSA?

Sort of. It is now a block grant – called the Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants program (SSAEG) – that authorizes activities in three areas:

- Providing students with a well-rounded education (e.g., college and career counseling, STEM, arts, civics, IB/AP)
- Supporting safe and healthy students (e.g., comprehensive school mental health, drug and violence prevention, health and physical education)
- Supporting the effective use of technology (e.g., professional development, blended learning, devices)

3. How is funding provided to districts for these purposes?

Funds are allocated to states based on the Title I formula. States then allocate funding to each district, also based on the Title I formula. Any district that receives a formula allocation above \$30,000 must conduct a needs assessment and then expend 20 percent of its grant on safe and healthy school activities and 20 percent to provide a well-rounded education. The remaining 60 percent of the money can be spent on all three priorities, including technology. However, there is a 15 percent technology spending cap for devices, equipment, software, and digital content.

If a district receives an allocation below \$30,000, the law does not require a needs assessment or specific allocations safe and healthy students or well-rounded education. However, it must spend the money on activities in at least one of the three categories, and the 15 percent technology spending cap still applies.

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ESSA authorizes \$1.65 billion for SSAEG, although Congress is not obligated to actually appropriate the full amount. In fact, the president's proposed budget only allocates \$500 million to this program for FY17. The total FY16 funding for the programs that were consolidated into this new block grant is \$275 million.

4. How are districts supposed to make these decisions?

Districts that receive at least \$30,000 under this allocation must conduct a needs assessment to determine how funds will be spent. Here are some examples of activities that districts can choose to fund under the law.

- Safe and healthy activities: mental health awareness training, school-based counseling, student safety and violence prevention, professional development for specialized instructional support personnel, nutrition education, physical education, bullying and harassment prevention, and integrated systems of student and family supports.
- Well-rounded activities: college and career guidance programs, using music and the arts to promote student engagement, STEM and computer science programs, increasing access to accelerated coursework, foreign languages, environmental education, and almost anything else that supports a well-rounded educational experience.
- Technology activities: educator professional development in the use of technology, building technology infrastructure, using blended learning projects, and providing students in rural communities with resources for digital learning experiences.

5. Are there other parts of ESSA that can support school health besides Title IV?

Yes, particularly through the new flexibility in Title I. This is the main part of ESSA that has historically directed funds to districts and schools to support socioeconomically disadvantaged students. ESSA expands the allowable uses of Title I funds for schoolwide purposes – regardless of whether a school has a large proportion of disadvantaged students – if the school can show how a program will best serve the needs of its students. And these uses were expanded to include things like integrated services, counseling, school-based mental health programs, mentoring, and any other strategies that can help improve students' skills outside of academics. But here again, a district must conduct a needs assessment and include these activities in its schoolwide plans. In addition, Title II's professional development resources can be used to support school health professionals, school nurses, paraprofessionals, and other school staff.

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6. What is the needs assessment in Title IV?

Under ESSA, before a district can receive any allocation of Title IV funds, it must conduct an assessment to examine the need for improvement with regard to a safe and healthy learning environment, access to a well-rounded education, and personalized learning experiences supported by technology. The needs assessment must be conducted every three years. This language is very broad and seems to provide a lot of leeway in the assessments districts choose to use. Components that could be identified in the assessment include specific subjects, activities, or programs that are necessary to ensure students have access to a well-rounded education and a safe and healthy learning environment (see examples listed in question 4).

7. Are there any currently existing tools I can use for this assessment?

Yes, ASCD's [School Improvement Tool](#) is a free online survey accessible to anyone (parents, teachers, principals, superintendents, etc.) that provides a comprehensive assessment of how well a school is meeting the needs of the whole child. It guides users with questions around each of the whole child tenets, provides an easy-to-understand analysis, and offers suggestions for improvement.

CDC's [School Health Index](#) is another free online assessment anyone can use to analyze how well schools are addressing student health and well-being.