

# ISTE Advocacy Update

Dear ISTE members:

Thank you for the hard work you put into helping secure \$1.1 billion for the Student Support and Academic Enrichment (SSAE) grant program under Title IV-A of ESSA. Your advocacy efforts paid off for our students!

But now is not the time to step back from our efforts. Your states and school districts are getting ready to make those dollars available for the next school year and a significant portion of the funds will be available for edtech spending. However, local decision-makers will ultimately determine if a lot or a little goes to edtech. To be sure that funds are directed to edtech priorities in your district, we urge you to:

- Familiarize yourself with the rules and regulations that govern the program.
- Consider how you should make the case in your schools and districts that Title IV-A money needs to be allocated to edtech-related professional development priorities.
- Determine the most appropriate edtech-related activities on which to spend this money.

**[Register today](#) to attend a free webinar on ESSA implementation on May 11 at 1 p.m. ET (10 a.m. PT). All subscribers to the ISTE Advocacy Network are invited to attend.**

ISTE is also providing a brief primer (below) that addresses these issues and links to other resources. In order for us to continue our advocacy efforts at the federal level, we urge you to stay in touch with us and [let us know how your schools and districts invest their Title IV-A dollars](#).

## How Title IV-A Funding Works

ESSA authorizes Title IV-A funds to be distributed by formula with the requirement that every district receives an allocation of at least \$10,000. Districts can invest their dollars in programs that fall under three buckets: health and safety programs, well-rounded academic programs and educational technology.

Districts receiving \$30,000 or more are required to:

- Perform needs assessments.
- Spend 20% of their funds on well-rounded academic programs.
- Spend 20% on health and safety programs.
- Spend at least some of the remaining 60% available on educational technology (or possibly all of the remaining 60% on educational technology).

- Spend no more than 15% of their technology money on technology infrastructure, which includes devices, software applications, platforms, digital instructional resources, equipment and/or other one-time IT purchases. However, there is no cap on spending this money on professional development activities related to educational technology.

Districts receiving less than \$30,000 are not required to do any of the above, but must adhere to the 15% technology infrastructure cap. In other words, all of their money can go toward edtech if the district chooses to use the funds that way.

**Needs Assessments:** Districts receiving allocations of \$30,000 or more must conduct needs assessments. [U.S. Department of Education \(USDE\) guidance](#) issued in October 2016 states that the needs assessment “must be **comprehensive and examine areas for improvement** related to students’ access to well-rounded educational opportunities, learning conditions that cultivate a safe and healthy environment for students and effective use of technology.” Additionally, the needs assessment must be conducted after “**timely and meaningful consultation with a broad range of stakeholders** and should **examine relevant data** to understand students’ and schools’ most pressing needs.” See page 16 of [this guidance](#) for specific questions to consider.

### **How to Make the Case for Edtech**

While \$660 million of total Title IV-A funding for this coming year is available for edtech, you will have to convince your school or district to spend some of its funds in this area. Title IV-A has essentially been set up as an informal competition within and between the programs found in the three buckets. In order to get a fair share of this money for edtech, you will have to persuade the decision-makers in your school or district that the need is great, that the digital products or professional development experiences are of high quality and that you have buy-in from key constituencies. Here are a few strategies for you to consider:

- **Build your case for investment need:** Gather the facts and data, including looking at the results of the needs assessment, to develop the argument that your district truly needs to invest in some element of edtech. For example, you could use equity as your central theme, marshal data that shows that too many students in your school or district lack access to the technological tools and devices they need as well as to teachers well-trained in using technology, and incorporate the fact that one of ESSA’s overarching themes is the need to ensure that all students – regardless of their race, their families’ socio-economic status and where they reside – are served appropriately by the educational system.
- **Become part of the process:** ESSA gives significant latitude to states and districts in developing and implementing needs assessments. One useful strategy is to become part of these processes and ensure that edtech is incorporated via useful metrics and considered fairly in the needs assessment’s final analysis. You could also gather other edtech supporters for any input sessions that occur during the needs assessment stakeholder engagement phase to make sure that you are not the sole voice speaking up for edtech’s importance. In fact, if the needs assessment process has not begun yet, consider volunteering to spearhead it to make sure you have a seat at the table.

- **Collaborate with colleagues in other Title IV-A areas:** While 60% of all funds flowing to larger school districts can go for edtech, you can work with colleagues representing the other two buckets of Title IV-A to identify areas where technology and professional development for teachers in digital tools can help them achieve their goals. In other words, ensure that educational technology is part of the request from those representing safe and healthy schools and those representing a well-rounded education. For example, spending money on digital citizenship training for teachers can contribute significantly to a safe and healthy school and combat cyberbullying. Additionally, spending Title IV-A money on technology professional learning for STEM teachers, Spanish teachers, Civics instructors, etc., is most certainly allowed and could lead to better use of technology by educators in those disciplines as part of a well-rounded education.

## How to Spend the Money

Another key element of making the case for Title IV-A dollars is ensuring that you plan to spend those dollars on appropriate items. [The USDE guidance](#) states clearly that the central goal of Title IV-A's edtech bucket is **“increasing the effective use of technology to improve academic achievement, academic growth and digital literacy for all students.”** With the law's 15% cap on technology infrastructure spending and the E-Rate program taking care of school connectivity needs, it is clear that the bulk of the Title IV-A edtech money is intended for technology professional development activities. The reason for this, according to the USDE guidance, is that “for technology to be truly transformative, educators need to have the knowledge and skills to take full advantage of technology-rich learning environments.” Here are a few options for spending Title IV-A money of professional development activities drawn from the USDE guidance:

- **Provide professional development courses:** ESSA's definition of professional development contains a number of elements to which schools and districts must adhere when using Title IV-A dollars for professional learning courses. These professional learning activities:
  - Must be part of school and district strategies, activities and for capacity-building, and other activities directly related to edtech
  - Should be sustained (not short-term programs or workshops), intensive collaborative, job embedded, data-driven and classroom focused.
- **Mentors or coaches.**
- **Professional development content.**
- **Provide personalized learning.**
- **Discover, adapt and share high-quality resources,** including openly licensed resources and content and open resources.
- **Implement blended learning strategies,** which the law defines as leveraging both technology-based and face-to-face instructional approaches that include an element of online or digital learning, combined with supervised learning time and student-led learning, in which the elements are connected to provide an integrated learning experience, and in which students are provided some control over time, path and pace.
- **Implement school- and district-wide approaches to inform instruction, support teacher collaboration and personalize learning.**

Congratulations again on this year's Title IV-A funding victory. Now, we encourage you to advocate in your school or district that a good share of those dollars should flow to edtech. Good luck!

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**ISTE**

**Connected learning. Connected world.®**

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