gaggle

EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT (ESSA)

OPPORTUNITIES TO ENHANCE
SAFE LEARNING SPACES

Written by Kecia Ray, Ed. D. and Susan Gentz

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The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) is a groundbreaking piece of legislation when it comes to looking forward to the future of education. Members of Congress talked to countless stakeholders, held thoughtful conversations and hearings, and passed a bill that gave more decision-making power to the states. The flexibility given under ESSA allows each state and district to more individually decide what is needed most in their schools and community.

Technically, ESSA eliminated 49 programs under No Child Left Behind (NCLB). These programs included Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities State Grants, National Center for School and Youth Safety, Elementary and Secondary School Counseling Programs, and Grants to Improve the Mental Health of Children. Instead of keeping these programs strongly

structured, the authors of ESSA created one large block grant with the intent of increasing the ways in which districts could use these designated funds. If there is helpful software or new learning models that don't quite fit under just one of those programs, districts can now use funds how they see fit- including ways to prevent school violence acts from happening.

Mental health issues are on the rise for students across the nation. According to the Center for Suicide Prevention, suicide has emerged as the second leading cause of death for children ages 10-19 in the United States. The Center for Suicide Prevention also finds that 50% of all lifetime illnesses start by age 14 and that 1 in 5 children have a significantly impairing mental disorder.[1] With statistics like these, educators can find themselves in many tough situations. The ways students communicate are now often unseen or heard by administrators or teachers in the building. It can feel impossible to identify threatening situations before they happen.

Wausau School District knows this first hand. Thanks to the prompt action of the Gaggle team, a student's life was saved. "Upon getting the call and reading the email, I contacted our administrator at the school where the student attends and asked that they check in the classroom," recalled an emotional Dr. Jeff Lindell, Director of Pupil Services at Wausau School District. "We found the student in the bathroom, and if we were 20 seconds later, we're pretty sure the student would have successfully committed suicide."

Not only do many students face a tough road with mental health on their own, but bullying has evolved with technology, too. Cyberbullying has become such a force that the United States Department of Education came together with the Center for Disease

Control to formally craft a definition of cyberbullying. The definition states that electronic bullying or cyberbullying involves primarily verbal aggression (e.g., threatening or harassing electronic communications) and relational aggression (e.g., spreading rumors electronically). Electronic bullying or cyberbullying can also involve property damage resulting from electronic attacks that lead to the modification, dissemination, damage, or destruction of a youth's privately stored electronic information.[2] According to stopbullying.gov 15 percent of high school students (grades 9–12) claimed they were electronically bullied in the past year.[3]

Schuyler Community Schools had no idea how much bullying was actually going on in their schools. Administrators assumed that content filters were sufficient for monitoring student email. This simply isn't true, and upon a embarking on a pilot program, the district found that they needed the extra help. "Gaggle opened our eyes to what was going on," said Mr. Droge. "We're now able to get our students the help they need and even stop bullying before it gets started . The list goes on and on."

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Tragic situations, often premeditated, are on the rise as well. In 2018, there were 24 school shootings where injuries or deaths occurred. School violence has increased by 19% in the 21st century.[4] A survey of 9,000 homes reveals that about half of all Americans

ALLOWABLE USES FOR TITLE IV FUNDS

✓ Promoting community and parent involvement in schools

✓ Providing school-based mental health services and counseling

✓ Promoting supportive school climates to reduce the use of exclusionary discipline and promoting supportive school discipline

✓ Establishing or improving dropout prevention

✓ Supporting re-entry programs and transition services for justice-involved youth

✓ Implementing programs that support a healthy, active lifestyle (nutritional and physical education)

✓ Implementing systems and practices to prevent bullying and harassment

✓ Developing relationship building skills to help improve safety through the recognition and prevention of coercion, violence, or abuse

✓ Establishing community partnerships

will meet some sort of diagnostic criteria for a mental disorder at some point in their lifetime, with the age of onset typically occurring during childhood or adolescence. Many of these incidents are preceded by social media postings warning the event is about to take place.

Mooresville Graded School District has also relied on Gaggle to inform them of mental health issues of which they were unaware. The district has been able to offer mental health intervention and get guidance counselors and administrators involved in instances of potential self-harm and other issues. "We would have never known about our students," said Dr. Smith. "And from our culture of caring and loving for our children, that's priceless. You can't put a dollar amount on that."

These statistics keep educators up at night, which is why it's important to understand where policy can help to address school violence issues- both by flexibility and funding opportunities.

Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants

Congress wrote Title IV, the Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants (SSAEG), to include flexible provisions that would allow educators to more fluidly address 21st century needs. They left definitions and uses broad so that educators could use the funds in ways that best support the needs of the district and community. The authors of ESSA understood that the ways in which students are bullied, and mental health issues that often lead to suicide or other tragedies, have changed since the era of No Child Left Behind. This is why Title IV dollars are so important when it comes to both the mental and physical safety of every student.

Originally, Title IV was authorized for $1.65 billion but received an allocation of only $400 million. Most recently Congress allocated $1.1 billion for Title IV, due in large part, to the concern over student safety and well-being. Congress did stipulate that if a district receives $30,000 or more from Title IV, a needs assessment must be conducted to determine how funds will be spent.[4]

Congress also wanted to place an emphasis on school health and safety, so they required that at least 20% of a district's Title IV funds must go to safe and healthy schools. 20% is required to go toward well-rounded education, but the remaining 60% is free to be used on any priorities that fall within the three categories of the SSAEG. This means if a district is looking to implement solutions for school violence, up to 80% of Title IV funds could be used for identifying and preventing violent acts in schools.

The Department of Education provided a chart (left) of allowable uses for Title IV funds under the umbrella of "safe and healthy students." These are all excellent examples of ways to use the funds, but not an exhaustive list. Districts have the option to get creative when it comes to Title IV. In fact, the Department of Education opened up a Title IV technical assistance center in order to assist districts with questions on how the funds can or cannot be used.

School Violence Prevention

Students are increasingly using technology for more aspects of their lives. Technology is undoubtedly playing a large role in forming students as they grow, which is why it must be a recognized priority for districts. It can be unfathomable to learn the

heartbreaking statistics and to think about all the students currently in the school system that need help. Educators are stretched thin, and counselors split their time between schools.

Fortunately, there are solutions to flag any potential violence before an incident takes place. Systems exist that identify suspicious items and allows control and transparency for teachers and administrators. Too often districts are not prepared for school violence events and spend resources for after-the-fact assistance. It is time for districts to take preemptive measures to fully understand the extent to which they might be in danger.[5]

Technology can transform learning and create incredible opportunities, but without strong accountability, it can open up pathways for students to disrupt safe learning environments. It is up to district decision-makers to show that student health and safety is the number one priority, and one way to show that is to use Title IV dollars to enhance safe learning spaces.

Summary It is important to recognize Title IV is a newly enacted title and a combination of several previous titles. Title IV or the Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants (SSAEG) can be used specifically for the health and safety of all students, but in ways that make the most sense for every individual district. The more integrated these programs are with other programs, provided they are supported by sufficient evidence, the more likely the funding is to be allowable for the district. The combination of social emotional learning initiatives with a more intentional focus on safety and security makes Title IV funding much more justifiable in a district, especially when technology is the underpinning. ■

ABOUT THE **AUTHORS**

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Dr. Ray's career includes designing technology within the Frist Center for the Visual Arts and directing technology research through Vanderbilt University School of Medicine Science Outreach programs. As a district administrator for Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools, she led the award-winning design, implementation, and evaluation of instructional technology programs including instructional design for online and blended learning environments, redesigning physical learning environments, establishing the virtual high school, and redefining school libraries. Dr. Ray is published and recognized internationally for her work in online and blended learning as well as flexible learning environments. She is an instructor at Johns Hopkins University in the Graduate School of Education and after leading the Center for Digital4 Education for three years, she now leads a leadership community forum, K20Connect, and other passion projects.

Susan Gentz
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Susan Gentz is the founder and owner of BSG Strategies, LLC, a consulting business focused specifically on education leadership and technology through practice and policy. Gentz comes from a strong policy background as a former staffer in the United States Senate and Legislative Aide in the Iowa House of Representatives. Along with experience at both federal and state levels, she served as the Deputy Executive Director for the Center for Digital Education, worked for a government relations firm in Arlington, VA and worked on the Every Student Succeeds Act along with state education policy at iNACOL, where she wrote published reports to move the field forward with innovative learning models, best practices, and policy recommendations.

WHO IS GAGGLE?

Gaggle's safety management solution monitors student activity on school-provided G Suite, Office 365, and Canvas accounts. We analyze content for inappropriate behavior through machine-learning technology, our proprietary *Anti-Pornography Scanner*, and an in-house team of trained safety professionals.

Our violation protocol builds digitally-responsible students by sending warnings for minor incidents, and only involving administration or authorities when a serious situation arises. We inform schools immediately of students struggling with self-harm, substance abuse, cyberbullying, and other credible threats, even after standard school and business hours. With Gaggle's proactive solution to student safety, districts can offer mediation to students before a threat is acted upon.

Learn more about our safety solutions and the districts who rely on Gaggle to keep their students safe.

CASE STUDY
Victor Valley USD: Developing Responsible Digital Citizens while Providing a Safe Digital Environment
www.gaggle.net/success-stories

PRESS RELEASE
A Growing Number of Districts Are Selecting Gaggle's School Safety Solutions to Protect Their Students
www.gaggle.net/press-room

BLOG POST
Students Experiencing Distress Need Early Intervention: Secret Service Report on Reducing School Violence
www.gaggle.net/speaks

RESOURCES

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