

## MAKING ESSA WORK FOR YOU

How Title II can Lead to Better Professional  
Development in Your District



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## ++++++ ESSA AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ++++++

For too long, professional development (PD) has been something done TO teachers. When you think of the professional development you've experienced, you may have flashbacks to strategies or speakers not relevant to your content or grade level. Even when PD is pertinent to the classroom, teachers are often handed a packet of information and sent to figure out how to implement it on their own. We've all spent hours sitting in meetings, wondering who decided that teachers needed this PD, and we all have stacks of handouts collecting dust. Fortunately, the new federal education law offers the opportunity to make professional development something that is done BY teachers and FOR teachers — if we take advantage of it.

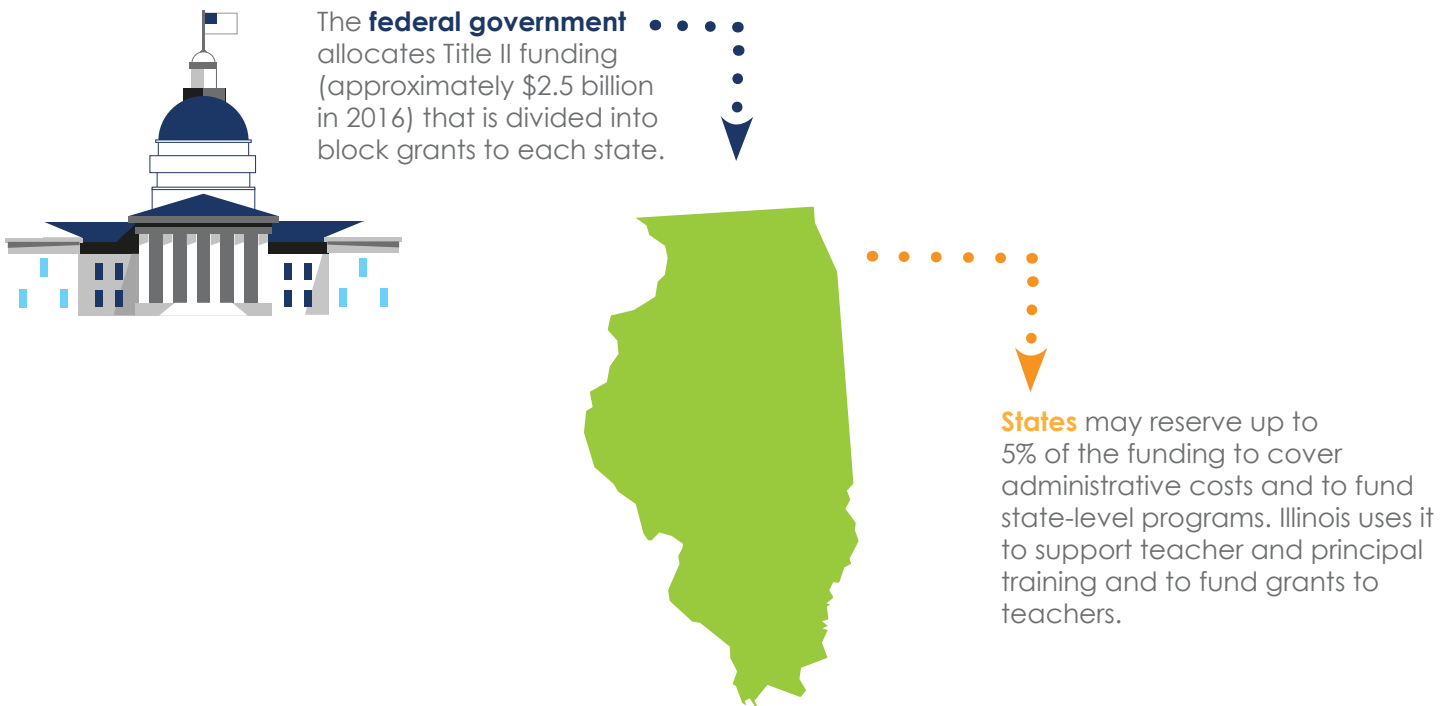
Title II of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which replaced No Child Left Behind (NCLB), offers new options for how PD funding can be used, including investing in teacher leadership and teacher-led professional development. Under the new law, districts are also required to “meaningfully consult with teachers” and other stakeholders and “seek advice...regarding how best to improve the local educational agency's activities.”<sup>1</sup> As part of the application for Title II funding, districts must explain how they involve teachers in the decision-making process — which means that teachers now get a seat at the table.

This presents an opportunity for teachers to have a voice in their own professional learning at the district level: local unions and teacher leaders like you can guide your district in making the best decisions for you and your students. This toolkit outlines how ESSA — and Title II in particular — works and how you can get informed and involved in your district's decision-making process. We have also reviewed and researched the allowable uses for PD dollars and provided our recommendations, which are supported by research and represent the best ways to revitalize professional development for teachers.

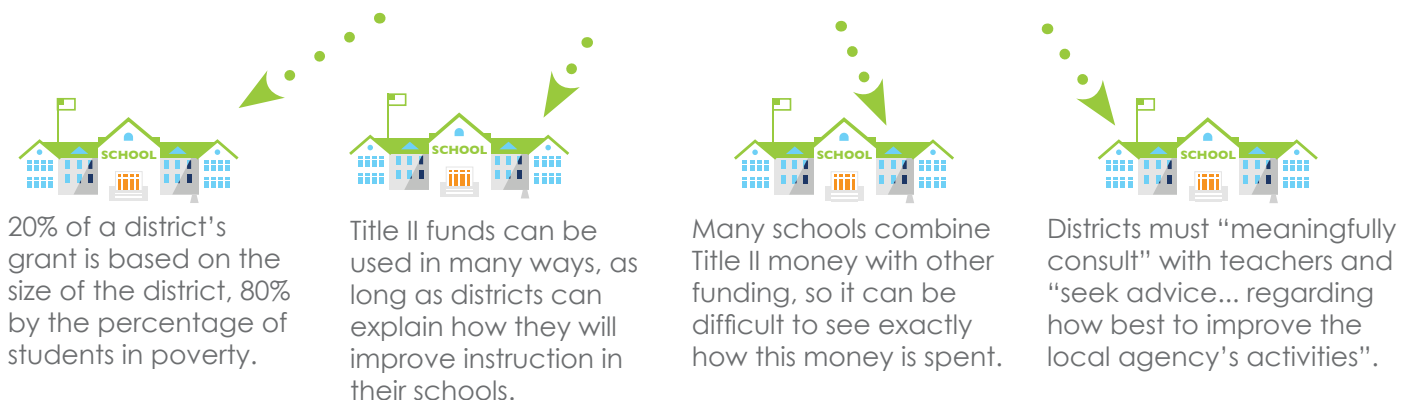
Teach Plus Fellows have already laid the groundwork for effective PD in Illinois by presenting this research and offering feedback to the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) as it developed its statewide plan for ESSA implementation. We were encouraged by ISBE's response to teacher voice, as 15 of the 16 recommendations we offered were incorporated into the final plan. But ultimately, most decisions about PD are made at the local level, and that's why your local advocacy is so important. It makes the biggest difference for the stakeholders who matter most: your students.

## +++++++ HOW ESSA FUNDS ARE DISTRIBUTED ++++++

Under ESSA, the federal government provides Title II funding to states in order to improve teacher quality. Each state decides how those funds will be distributed, but districts decide how it will be spent. Critically, under the new law, districts are required to involve teachers in that decision.



**Illinois gets about \$90 million, and 95% of that is passed on directly to districts.**



## RECOMMENDATION 1: *Become a National Board Professional Development School*

National Board Certified teachers have a demonstrable, long-term impact on student learning.<sup>2</sup> Students whose teachers hold National Board Certification learn more — the equivalent of one to two additional months of instruction every year, with even higher gains for low-income students. These teachers also score higher in other rigorous evaluations of teacher quality, typically in the top 25 percent of all teachers.

The National Board Resource Center<sup>3</sup> at Illinois State University has developed a program for teachers to work toward certification in school-based cohorts called National Board Professional Development Schools.<sup>4</sup> Because teachers work together consistently over the course of one or more school years to earn certification, the gains in teacher effectiveness are significant and long-lasting, and also contribute to a stronger culture of collaboration in the school.

In 2015, a group of teachers at Kankakee High School formed a cohort to pursue National Board Certification over a two-year period. That pilot program was so successful that it expanded to three cohorts spanning the entire unit district, and more than 30 teachers have submitted their portfolios for certification. Not only are these teachers sharpening their skills in the classroom, but they have engaged in regular discussions of practice over a two-year period, helping to create a culture of professional collegiality and openness that extends beyond the cohort to other teachers and groups across the district. The certification itself is secondary to the change in culture and the instructional improvement that comes from engaging in the process.

## RECOMMENDATION 2: *Implement Professional Learning Communities*

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) have been implemented in a variety of school settings and research has identified numerous positive impacts for both students and teachers, including positive gains in teacher practice, teacher attitude, and student performance as measured by standardized test scores.<sup>5</sup> As with all professional learning activities, the outcomes of PLCs are a result of the inputs, so it is important to implement them well.

Title II funds may be used for a variety of PLC-related purposes, such as bringing in outside coaches to facilitate initial implementation, providing stipends and/or release time for team leaders, restructuring the school day to provide for PLC meeting times, or purchasing instructional materials for group study.

Stevenson High School in Lincolnshire has long been recognized for its successful PLC model: "The entire staff is organized into collaborative teams, typically by course although a few teams are interdisciplinary and others are departmental. The start of instruction is delayed one day each week and teachers arrive to work early on that day to engage in a collaborative team meeting for approximately one hour. One day each month, the start of the school day is delayed three hours to provide teachers with more extended time for collaboration. Teams develop several common assessments each semester and use the results to impact their practice and to improve their programs."<sup>12</sup>



### RECOMMENDATION 3: *Teacher-Led Professional Development*

Many districts already ask teachers to lead professional development for peers, but some go beyond this and set up a structure to support classroom implementation of new learning. For PD to impact student learning, the key is long-term engagement. This could be addressed by setting up a structure to support extended practice. For instance, presenters might coach teachers on implementation of strategies.

Title II funds can be used to provide stipends for teachers who lead inservice development for peers and follow up by helping them implement new strategies. Given the cost of bringing in outside experts for the same purpose, this is actually a cost-saving measure that also lets teachers take the lead in improving instruction. There is little research to show the positive impacts of teacher-led PD compared to outside presenters, but research by Teach Plus indicates that 87 percent of teachers find peer-led PD valuable to their practice.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, Educators for High Standards recently recommended teacher-led PD as an additional way to support the key Standards for Professional Learning.<sup>7</sup>

In Elgin, District U-46 has formalized teacher-led PD by creating a Professional Development University. Teachers undergo training in adult learning principles to become credentialed presenters, and then add topics to a course catalog that teachers across the district can select from for professional development. A model like this ensures teachers learn from one another regularly, and improves the quality of offerings through presenter training. Title II money could be used to conduct presenter training, provide stipends for presenters, or set up the administrative structure. For instance, U-46 has an Office of Professional Development that includes position titles such as a Teacher Leader for Professional Development and a Teacher Leader for Professional Growth.<sup>13</sup>

### RECOMMENDATION 4: *Teachers as Mentors and Coaches*

Another effective use of Title II funds is to create programs in which experienced, highly-skilled teachers coach others on an ongoing basis. The majority of students in our nation now attend classrooms with novice teachers at the helm, making this a particularly important intervention.<sup>8</sup> Districts, especially in impoverished areas, often have a difficult time retaining and rewarding high quality teachers, but a teacher mentoring program improves the retention and professional development of both novice and experienced teachers.<sup>9</sup> All of the possibilities listed here apply not just to mentoring new teachers, but coaching veterans as well.

Urbana School District #116 has used Title II funds to strengthen their mentoring and induction program. Teachers new to the district participate in monthly induction activities in which they learn more about issues, such as parent teacher conferences, relevant to the success of their individual school buildings. Teachers also have the opportunity to participate in the mentor program. This two-year program includes a two day training to prepare new mentors. During the program, mentors and proteges participate in ongoing professional development and are provided with release time to both observe in each other's classrooms as well as conduct observations in other classrooms in the district.

Money from Title II can be used to train skilled teachers to be effective coaches. Research shows that new teachers who worked with trained mentors gain a higher level of teaching skills than those who had untrained mentors.<sup>10</sup> Districts can also fund substitutes and other expenses supporting regular meetings with coaches, who can then work with their mentees to plan lessons and observe them in a non-evaluative format to provide needed feedback. In addition to training, Title II funding can also provide stipends for experienced teachers who take on this extra role, or hire more faculty to allow mentor teachers to be in the classroom part-time and spend the rest of the day observing and coaching colleagues.

### A NOTE ON OTHER USES

There are other possible uses for Title II funds, including some not related to PD, and we encourage you to conduct your own research to determine what will be most effective in your district.



Title II is not new, although it can now be used in new ways. That means your district has already been receiving Title II funds. Before advocating for a particular use, it is a good idea to find out how much money your district has received and how it is being used already.

## FINDING OUT HOW MUCH YOUR DISTRICT RECEIVES

### THE QUICK WAY

- + ISBE publishes past and projected Title II funding amounts for each district on its ESSA Funding page: <https://www.isbe.net/Pages/No-Child-Left-Behind-Federal-Funding.aspx>. Click the drop-down menu for "ESSA Title Allocations" and you can look at the projected funding for your district this year, or the amount it received in previous years (it will be labeled "Title IIA"). Schools are listed by RCDT codes, which you can look up here: <https://www.isbe.net/Pages/RCDTS-Lookup.aspx>.

### THE MORE DETAILED WAY (YOUR DISTRICT'S BUDGET)

- + Budgets are usually posted on the district or school website. Typically, they are found under headings like "school board" or "administration," on a page like "public access," "school documents," or "disclosures." Your district's page titles will vary.
- + Budgets are public, but because every district website is different, you may want to ask an administrator or someone familiar with how the school shares this information if you have trouble finding it. Some schools may not post it online.
- + Illinois school budgets are standardized. Scroll past the budget summary to "Estimated Receipts/Revenues" (this usually covers about 5-10 pages).
- + Title II Teacher Quality funding will be under the heading "Receipts/Revenues from Federal Sources (4000) and the subheading "Restricted Grants-in-Aid Received from Federal." This amount will be in column (10) - Educational receipts.

## DETERMINE HOW FUNDS ARE BEING USED

It can be difficult to determine how your district spends Title II money, because it is usually combined with other money. While income is grouped by source in school budgets, making Title II easy to find, expenses are grouped by use - so you will not see how those specific dollars are spent.

- + Try asking your principal or another administrator who works with the budget. This is usually the best way to find out, but make sure you are asking the person who manages the budget — and understand that because these funds get mixed with others, there may not be a simple answer.
- + Your district is required to submit an application to ISBE to secure Title II funding that describes how it will be used. If you have trouble finding this information, you might consider asking for a copy of that form from the person responsible for submitting it.
- + If you're unable to determine how Title II funding is used, and administrators don't know either, consider making that a part of your ask (see below). After all, if nobody knows what it's being spent on, how can it be more important than what you are asking for?



## +++++++ GET A SEAT AT THE TABLE +++++++

ESSA provides teachers with an opportunity to have a stronger voice in their professional learning. As districts seek to implement ESSA as outlined by the state, teachers need to advocate for the types of professional development necessary to meet student needs. To do that, you will need to meet with your school administrator and ask for what will benefit you and your students. But if you've never been in this position before, it can be unfamiliar ground. Here are some tips:

### 1 GET INFORMED:

- ☐ Understand Title II funding and expenditures at your district level (see previous page).
- ☐ Review the state-adopted Standards for Professional Learning to better understand the prerequisites for effective professional learning.<sup>11</sup>
- ☐ Use data to identify student learning needs and the professional learning that will best meet those needs in your school.
- ☐ If you haven't had administrator meetings like this before, and are unsure how to start, try talking to someone in your school who has, like a union leader or department chair.

### 2 PREPARE YOUR "ASK":

- ☐ Gather support, input, and buy-in from colleagues — try to speak with one voice. Let your school's structure dictate how you approach this. You may consider advocating through your union, school improvement team, or with other teacher leaders, depending on who will support this work and has the ear of your administration.
- ☐ Understand your proposed solution well, and be prepared to answer questions and support your recommendation with evidence. We've provided a start in this guide.
- ☐ Prepare a one page summary of your request, with appropriate research, to leave with the administrator after the meeting.
- ☐ Request a meeting with the administrator responsible for professional development programs in the district. The best time to schedule this meeting is in the fall, so that you can make your pitch well before budgets are submitted in the spring.

### 3 MAKE YOUR PITCH:

- ☐ Begin with an anecdote or data that drives the need for the professional development change you are seeking. Keep it brief ~ 30 seconds. For example, you might describe a time you identified a need to improve your skills, but had to seek out professional development on your own because PD provided by the school didn't meet your needs.
- ☐ Be clear about the "ask" you are making so your administrator knows what you want.
- ☐ Explain the benefits of the PD solution you are suggesting. Also describe any potential drawbacks, and the solutions to them.
- ☐ Emphasize data, student impact, and teacher support behind your recommendation.

### 4 RESPOND TO CONCERNS

- ☐ Be prepared to provide examples and explain why your idea is more effective than the current uses of Title II funds.
- ☐ Answer questions honestly. If you do not know the answer to a question, say so, find the answer after the meeting, and report back.
- ☐ Come prepared to compromise - Is there a compromise you would accept? What's the minimum acceptable victory? Resources are finite, and perfect isn't always possible.
- ☐ Follow up after the meeting with an email or note thanking your administrator for their time and answering any questions they may still have.

#### LOCAL ADVOCACY IN ACTION:

In 2016, a group of teachers in Colorado saw a need for teacher-led professional development. Partnering with local unions, they trained 16 teachers to lead professional development for 120 teachers, impacting more than 3,000 students. After the program was implemented, 94 percent of participants made changes to their classroom instruction, and 98 percent of those surveyed said that they wanted their local association to continue to focus on professional learning. The program reached a new generation of union members:

*"I've been a teacher and union member for five years, and this is the first time I've felt connected to the union. I used to delete their emails because I didn't see what they had to do with me, but this program directly impacts my work with students."*

— Sari Saperstein,  
Teacher Leader

## +++++ ENDNOTES +++++

- <sup>1</sup> <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/20/6612>
- <sup>2</sup> [http://www.nbpts.org/sites/default/files/Policy/impact\\_brief\\_final.pdf](http://www.nbpts.org/sites/default/files/Policy/impact_brief_final.pdf)
- <sup>3</sup> <http://nbrc.illinoisstate.edu/>
- <sup>4</sup> <https://nbrc.illinoisstate.edu/downloads/NBRCFLIER.FY17.pdf>
- <sup>5</sup> <http://www.k12.wa.us/Compensation/pubdocs/Vescio2008PLC-paper.pdf>
- <sup>6</sup> [http://teachplus.org/sites/default/files/publication/pdf/teachers\\_teaching.pdf](http://teachplus.org/sites/default/files/publication/pdf/teachers_teaching.pdf)
- <sup>7</sup> <http://www.educatorsforhighstandards.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/efhs-lifelong-learners-professional-learning-redefined.pdf>
- <sup>8</sup> <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/01/19/17coggins.h30.html>
- <sup>9</sup> <https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=YriMDAAQBAJ>
- <sup>10</sup> <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27542279>
- <sup>11</sup> <https://learningforward.org/docs/pdf/standardsreferenceguide.pdf>
- <sup>12</sup> <http://www.allthingsplc.info/evidence/details/id,695>
- <sup>13</sup> <https://sites.google.com/a/u-46.org/district-professional-development-committee/>

[www.teachplus.org](http://www.teachplus.org)