

Dear (State Education Agency Leader),

We were encouraged by the Environmental Literacy Leadership Summit held in April about the opportunities that we have to advance environmental literacy at the state and regional level in support of the new Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement. As you will recall that the Agreement includes three outcomes: (1) providing student Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences in each elementary, middle, and high school; (2) increasing the number of Sustainable Schools and ensuring that students are actively engaged in those efforts; and (3) establishing supportive policies, programs, and metrics at all levels to advance this work.

At the meeting we focused significant time on examining opportunities provided by the environmental education provisions of the recently enacted Every Student Succeeds Act. We are writing to follow up with you about these opportunities.

As you know, the Act includes two grant programs in Title IV that would support a wide range of activities to enrich student learning and 21st century success.

- Title IV Part A is a new flexible block grant program that gives school districts the authority to select from (among other things) a number of student enrichment activities, including environmental education, and field-based and service learning activities to support STEM learning.
- Title IV Part B is a continuation of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers competitive grant program which supports after school and out-of-school time learning opportunities, including environmental literacy programs.

While there is precedent for use of federal education funds, including 21st CCLC and the former Math Science Partnership grants, to support high quality, systemic environmental education programming, this is the first time that federal education policy has made environmental education and related learning explicitly eligible for funds.

We ask that you consider ways that you can leverage existing partnerships and priorities to maximize use of Title IV funds for environmental education. Specifically, we urge you to:

- Include representatives from the environmental education community, including nonformal community partners, in stakeholder discussions during implementation planning for ESSA and development of needs assessments related to the use of Title IV funds.
- Prioritize the use of Title IV, Part A funds for the inclusion or expansion of field and classroom-based environmental education programs across the curriculum and in out of school time settings.
- Highlight in requests for proposal the potential use of Title IV, Part B funds to advance environmental literacy programs and after school programming provided by community-based environmental education providers.
- Leverage existing investments and partnerships by aligning the use of Title IV funds with priorities and strategies established by state-wide environmental literacy plans.

Over the past 20 years, research has consistently shown that students who engage in environment-based educational programs and related instructional projects develop knowledge and skills that translate directly to critical thinking and problem-solving proficiency. Environmental education programs are based on sound science, skill-based learning and promote applied learning which are all necessary for 21st Century careers. Moreover, hands-on, environment-based programs provide a real-world context for

learning science and other subjects. This authentic approach to education is interesting and motivating to students and has been demonstrated to help close the nation's achievement gap.

ESSA offers new challenges and opportunities to states and school districts as they strive to provide a rigorous and well-rounded education and prepare today's students for tomorrow's world. On behalf of the Chesapeake Bay Program Partnership, we look forward to working with you to continue to advance the Environmental Literacy goal and outcomes of the Watershed Agreement.

Sincerely,