# Every Student Succeeds Act

In 2015, the US Congress passed the ‘Every Student Succeeds Act’ (ESSA) which was later inscribed and consented into law by President Obama; this took place on December 10, 2015. The new legislation replaced the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (McGuinn, 2016). The NCLB, enacted during the tenure of President George W. Bush, was considered excessively strict on local schools because it granted the federal government excessive regulation powers in education (Dee & Brian, 2010). The ESSA, a bilaterally negotiated legislation, reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) to increase the role of states in education. The ESEA was ratified in 1965 and approved by President Lyndon B. Johnson. The initial aim of legislating the ESEA was to improve access to education for learners from low-income populations. Conversely, the Obama administration’s challenges in passing the ESSA shows the influence of politics in various US governments’ delivery of development agenda to the nation.

## Historical and Constitutional Background

As earlier stated, the enactment of the ESSA reauthorized the ESEA by deferring previous federal roles to various state and local institutions. The ESSA is a culmination of progressive legislation fronted by different administrations and negotiated among the politicians that occupy the US Congress on various periods (Thomas & Brady, 2005). During the civil rights period, there was rampant inequality in access to education among the non-white population in the US. A legislative approach was proposed by President Lyndon Johnson to enhance education opportunities among the low-income population (Soss, Hacker, & Mettler, 2010).

According to President Johnson, the legislation would not only provide a legal avenue for the federal government to fund education, but also provided oversight roles that would enhance performance and accountability. Johnson considered universal access to education as the ultimate weapon to eliminate poverty in the US. It was Johnson’s cordial working relationship with the US Congress that ensured that the Act gained majority support. In 1968, Congress increased the ESEA beneficiaries to include other vulnerable populations such as migrants and vulnerable children (Soss, Hacker, & Mettler, 2010).

Initially, the Congress played a major oversight role on the implementation of ESEA. Audit reports indicated gross misuse of the federal aid to the poor students thereby heralding major amendments between 1969 and 1980. The amendments enhanced restrictions on the utilization of Title 1 aid. The federal government’s influential role persisted into the 1980s despite a sharp decline in federal funding of local schools. The Act was later amended to incorporate student testing as an accountability measure during President Reagan’s second term in office. The Act later morphed into the NCLB during George W. Bush’s presidency. The ultimate reauthorization of the NCLB into ESSA was delayed severally during President Obama’s administration due to hostile relations between republicans and democrats in Congress (Goldstein, 2017). Obama's inability to gain support for ESEA in Congress indicates that politics plays a significant role in education.

## Checks and Balances

In legislating the ESSA, the Congress rewrote the NCLB eliminating the nationwide application of standardized tests as the core measure of accountability. According to politicians from the two sides of the political divide, the bill provided individual states with an opportunity to establish customized mechanisms of measuring performance. The ESSA retained federal funding for disadvantaged communities but eased the federal oversight role in education management (Baker & Miron, 2015). Essentially, the Act empowers states to design tailor-made systems of testing and measuring improvements. However, some stakeholder raised concerns about the ability of some state education authorities to transition from the structured assessment system established under NCLB and create accountability systems that served the unique needs in their schools (McGuinn, 2016).

Further, the ESSA has been faulted on the basis of its leniency on performance standards for beneficiaries of federal grants. In the NCLB schools that benefitted from federal grants had to issue regular standardized tests to evaluate their performance. Schools that performed poorly would face punitive measures that included reduction of funding and closure (Dee & Brian, 2010). The lenient evaluation provided by the ESSA may end up as a disincentive to the education providers leading to reduced academic performances. Interestingly, the ESSA still maintains the issuance of two standardized tests in elementary school and one final standardized test at the end of secondary school (Klein, 2016).

## Public Policy, Elections, and Media

The ESSA ultimately reduced the role of the federal government in evaluating the performance of schools serving needy students. The federal oversight served public interest considering that public funds are used to run education programs in the concerned schools. Klein (2016) observes that the ESSA does not entirely eliminate the oversight role of the federal government. The Act seeks to enhance the cordial working relationship between the federal government and the various state governments. The author argues that the state governments are better placed to oversee the implementation of the education programs in their jurisdictions while providing better opportunities for community involvement (Klein, 2016).

Interestingly, education has not been a significant factor in the national election campaigns compared to other issues such as international policies and public health. However, politics still influence policy decisions related to education (Gebhardt, 2013). For instance, during Obama's administration, the reauthorization process for NCLB was adjourned severally and had to be negotiated between Republicans and Democrats before the ESSA was adopted (McLaughlin, West, & Anderson, 2016).

## Voting and the Election Process

The ESSA emerges as one of the most intensely negotiated policies in US education history. Previous administrations had fond relative ease in passing reauthorizations of ESEA. During the Obama administration, however, the house was divided along political and ideological ideologies. By the time President Obama took the reins of power, the process of reauthorization was due. However, Republicans controlled both houses thereby frustrating all attempts to legislate the act. Reauthorization attempt failed in 2009 despite the process being approximately two years overdue. Another attempt failed in 2011. During the period between 2009 and 2015, the federal government had to offer waivers to states to exempt them from the strict provisions of the NCLB (Rebell, 2016).

In 2015, with the Obama administration's term coming to an end, the Democrats reached out to the Republicans and proposed a bipartisan bill in Congress. The efforts by the Democrats were rewarded when the ESSA was passed in Congress gaining support from both sides of the house (Sundquist, 2017). The various congressional votes on the ESSA demonstrated the ideological differences among the various representatives sent from various states. The state governments advocated for increased control of education in their jurisdictions while the federal government sought more stringent checks and balances (Janda, Berry, Goldman, Schildkraut, & Manna, 2016).

## Conclusion

The ASSA was passed in 2015 with the main aim of reauthorizing the EASA. The act legislation of the Act was delayed severally due to ideological differences between the Democrats and the Republicans in the Congress. Although the Act was finally passed in 2015, it was a negotiated document that encompassed views from both sides of the house. The ESSA reduces the federal government's oversight role in education while enhancing state authority in the oversight of schools in their jurisdiction. The progressive change in the EASA over the years through congressional bills indicates the fundamental role that politics plays in the development and implementation of public policy.

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