

111TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 749

To improve and expand geographic literacy among kindergarten through grade 12 students in the United States by improving professional development programs for kindergarten through grade 12 teachers offered through institutions of higher education.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

MARCH 31, 2009

Mr. COCHRAN (for himself, Mr. DODD, Mr. ALEXANDER, Mr. AKAKA, Mr. BINGAMAN, Mrs. MURRAY, Mr. WICKER, and Mr. CARDIN) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

A BILL

To improve and expand geographic literacy among kindergarten through grade 12 students in the United States by improving professional development programs for kindergarten through grade 12 teachers offered through institutions of higher education.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Teaching Geography
5 is Fundamental Act”.

1 **SEC. 2. GEOGRAPHY EDUCATION.**

2 Title II of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20
3 U.S.C. 1021 et seq.) is amended—

4 (1) by redesignating part C (20 U.S.C. 1041)
5 as part D;

6 (2) by redesignating section 261 (20 U.S.C.
7 1041) as section 291; and

8 (3) by inserting after part B (20 U.S.C. 1031
9 et seq.) the following:

10 **“PART C—GEOGRAPHY EDUCATION**

11 **“SEC. 261. FINDINGS.**

12 “Congress makes the following findings:

13 “(1) Geographic literacy is essential to a well-
14 prepared citizenry in the 21st Century because geo-
15 graphic factors assume greater importance as the
16 world’s economies, societies, and political structures
17 grow more global in scale.

18 “(2) In a recent National Geographic-Roper 9-
19 country survey of geographic literacy among young
20 adults aged 18 through 24, Americans ranked sec-
21 ond to last. Only 13 percent of young adults aged
22 18 through 24 in the United States were able to cor-
23 rectly identify Iraq on a map of Asia and the Middle
24 East.

25 “(3) The economic stature and competitiveness
26 of the United States requires increasingly sophisti-

1 cated levels of geographic knowledge and mastery of
2 geographic tools.

3 “(4) United States Department of Labor data
4 identifies geotechnology as one of the 3 fastest grow-
5 ing employment fields serving industries such as in-
6 surance, banking, real estate, forestry, and agri-
7 culture as well as Federal, State, and local Govern-
8 ments.

9 “(5) The National Academy of Sciences urged
10 creation of a national program to improve the geo-
11 graphic competence of the United States general
12 population and the school age population.

13 “(6) Geography is defined as a ‘core academic
14 subject’ within the Elementary and Secondary Edu-
15 cation Act of 1965 (as amended by the No Child
16 Left Behind Act of 2001).

17 “(7) A recent National Geographic Society sur-
18 vey found that all 50 States and the District of Co-
19 lumbia recognize geography in their curricula or con-
20 tent standards, and an increasing number require
21 geography for graduation and include geography in
22 mandated statewide assessments.

23 “(8) Seven of 10 educators responding to a Na-
24 tional Geographic survey felt their professional de-
25 velopment opportunities in geography were inad-

1 equate and half believed their schools had inad-
2 equate basic materials for teaching geography.

3 “(9) The National Geographic Society has
4 spent over 15 years pioneering an extraordinarily ef-
5 fective national program for improving the teaching
6 of geography by engaging university faculty
7 geographers and highly trained teachers in State Ge-
8 ographic Alliances dedicated to providing high qual-
9 ity professional development opportunities for kin-
10 dergarten through grade 12 teachers.

11 “(10) More than 60 colleges and universities in
12 all 50 States have received grants from the National
13 Geographic Society to support State Geographic Alli-
14 ances and their professional development programs.
15 Alliance-trained kindergarten through grade 12
16 teachers and their higher education partners conduct
17 workshops, develop localized teaching materials, and
18 facilitate communication among thousands of teach-
19 ers whose responsibilities include teaching of geog-
20 raphy in various formats and grade levels.

21 “(11) A study by Mid-continent Research for
22 Education and Learning that assessed student aca-
23 demic achievement in geography on the National As-
24 sessment of Educational Progress showed that stu-

1 dents taught by Alliance-trained teachers out-
2 performed other students by almost 10 percent.

3 **“SEC. 262. PURPOSES AND OBJECTIVES.**

4 “(a) PURPOSE.—The purpose of this part is to pro-
5 mote geographic literacy and improved understanding of
6 global cultures among kindergarten through grade 12 stu-
7 dents by expanding programs that employ the geographic
8 knowledge and expertise of faculty members in institutions
9 of higher education for the benefit of kindergarten
10 through grade 12 teachers and to otherwise advance geo-
11 graphic literacy.

12 “(b) OBJECTIVES.—The objectives of this part are
13 the following:

14 “(1) To increase students’ knowledge of, and
15 achievement in, standards-based geography to enable
16 the students to become better informed and more
17 productive citizens.

18 “(2) To increase the number of highly qualified
19 teachers of United States and world geography and
20 to enable the teachers—

21 “(A) to improve student mastery of geo-
22 graphic principles; and

23 “(B) to increase practical applications of
24 those principles.

1 “(3) To encourage geographic education re-
2 search, to develop and disseminate effective instruc-
3 tional materials, and to promote replication of best
4 practices and exemplary programs that foster geo-
5 graphic literacy.

6 “(4) To assist States in measuring the impact
7 of education in geography.

8 “(5) To leverage and expand private and public
9 support for geography education partnerships at na-
10 tional, State, and local levels.

11 **“SEC. 263. GRANT PROGRAM AUTHORIZED.**

12 “The Secretary is authorized to award a grant to a
13 national nonprofit education organization or a consortium
14 of national nonprofit education organizations (hereafter in
15 this part referred to as the ‘grantee’) that has as its pri-
16 mary purpose the improvement of the quality of student
17 understanding of geography through effective teaching of
18 geography in the Nation’s classrooms.

19 **“SEC. 264. USE OF FUNDS.**

20 “(a) DIRECT ACTIVITIES.—The grantee shall use not
21 more than 25 percent of the funds made available through
22 the grant for a fiscal year—

23 “(1) to strengthen and expand the grantee’s re-
24 lationships with institutions of higher education and
25 with State and local agencies and other public and

1 private organizations with a commitment to geography
2 education and the benefits of geography education;
3

4 “(2) to support and promote research-based
5 training of teachers of geography and related disciplines in kindergarten through grade 12 as a
6 means of broadening student knowledge of the world, including the dissemination of information on
7 effective practices and research findings concerning
8 the teaching of geography;

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11 “(3) to support research on effective geography
12 teaching practices and the development of assessment instruments and strategies to document student
13 understanding of geography;

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15 “(4) to convene national conferences on geography
16 education to assess the current state of geographic literacy and to identify strategies for improvement; and

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18 “(5) to develop and disseminate appropriate research-based materials to foster geographic literacy.

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21 “(b) SUBGRANTS.—

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25 “(1) IN GENERAL.—The grantee shall use not more than 75 percent of the funds made available through the grant for a fiscal year to award subgrants to eligible recipients.

1 “(2) ELIGIBLE RECIPIENT DEFINED.—In this
2 part the term ‘eligible recipient’ means an institution
3 of higher education associated with—

4 “(A) a State geographic alliance;
5 “(B) a nonprofit educational organization;
6 “(C) a State educational agency or local
7 educational agency; or
8 “(D) a partnership between or among an
9 alliance, organization, or agency described in
10 subparagraph (A), (B) or (C).

11 “(3) SUBGRANT USES OF FUNDS.—Eligible re-
12 cipients shall use the subgrant funds for 1 or more
13 of the following purposes:

14 “(A) Conducting teacher training pro-
15 grams that use effective and research-based ap-
16 proaches to the teaching of geography at the
17 kindergarten through grade 12 level.

18 “(B) Applying Geographic Information
19 System (GIS) or other geographic technological
20 tools to the teaching of geography.

21 “(C) Applying Internet and other distance
22 learning technology to the teaching of geog-
23 graphy or to the continuing education of teach-
24 ers.

1 “(D) Promoting rigorous academic stand-
2 ards and assessment techniques to guide and
3 measure student performance in geography.

4 “(E) Promoting research in geography
5 education, emphasizing research that leads to
6 improving student achievement.

7 “(F) Carrying out local, field-based activi-
8 ties for teachers and students to improve their
9 knowledge of the concepts and tools of geog-
10 raphy while enhancing understanding of their
11 home region.

12 “(G) Promoting comparative studies of
13 world cultures, economies, and environments.

14 “(H) Encouraging replication of best prac-
15 tices and model programs to promote geo-
16 graphic literacy.

17 “(I) Developing and disseminating effec-
18 tive, research-based geography learning mate-
19 rials.

20 “(J) Convening State-based conferences to
21 assess the state of geographic literacy and to
22 identify strategies for improvement.

23 **“SEC. 265. APPLICATIONS.**

24 “(a) GRANTEE APPLICATIONS.—To be eligible to re-
25 ceive a grant under this part, the grantee shall submit

1 to the Secretary an application at such time, in such man-
2 ner, and accompanied by such information as the Sec-
3 retary may require.

4 **“(b) ELIGIBLE RECIPIENT APPLICATIONS.—**

5 **“(1) SUBMISSION.—**To be eligible to receive a
6 subgrant under this part, an eligible recipient shall
7 submit an application to the grantee at such time,
8 in such manner and accompanied by such informa-
9 tion as the grantee may require.

10 **“(2) REVIEW.—**

11 **“(A) IN GENERAL.—**The grantee shall in-
12 vite individuals described in subparagraph (B)
13 to review all applications from eligible recipients
14 for a subgrant under this section and to make
15 recommendations to the grantee regarding the
16 approval of the applications.

17 **“(B) REVIEWERS.—**The individuals re-
18 ferred to in subparagraph (A) are the following:

19 **“(i)** Leaders in the field of geography
20 education.

21 **“(ii)** Such other individuals as the
22 grantee may determine are necessary or
23 desirable.

1 **“SEC. 266. REQUIREMENTS.**

2 “(a) ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS.—The grantee receiv-
3 ing a grant under this part for a fiscal year, and each
4 eligible recipient receiving a subgrant under this part for
5 a fiscal year, may use not more than 15 percent of the
6 funds made available through the grant or subgrant, re-
7 spectively, for administrative costs.

8 “(b) MATCHING REQUIREMENTS.—

9 “(1) IN GENERAL.—In order to be eligible to
10 receive a subgrant under this part an eligible recipi-
11 ent shall agree in the application submitted under
12 section 265(b) to provide matching funds towards
13 the costs of the activities assisted under the
14 subgrant.

15 “(2) AMOUNT.—An eligible recipient shall pro-
16 vide matching funds in an amount equal to 20 per-
17 cent of the subgrant funds received under this part
18 for the second and each succeeding fiscal year for
19 which subgrant payments are made.

20 “(3) SOURCE OF MATCHING FUNDS.—Matching
21 funds may be provided in cash or in kind, fairly
22 evaluated, including facilities, staffing salaries, and
23 educational materials.

1 **“SEC. 267. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.**

2 “There are authorized to be appropriated to carry out
3 this part \$15,000,000 for fiscal year 2010 and each of
4 the 4 succeeding fiscal years.”.

