

Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association

Subcommittee on Aviation

House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee

**Hearing on: “A Work in Progress:
Implementation of the FAA Reauthorization
Act of 2018”**

Submitted by:

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September 26, 2019



Chairman Larsen, Ranking Member Graves, Members of the Subcommittee, on behalf of over 300,000 AOPA members, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the recent bipartisan five-year FAA Reauthorization Act of 2018.

The Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA) is currently celebrating its 80th Anniversary and I am proud and humbled to be only the 5th President serving the Association since its inception in 1939. We have stayed true to our mission over these several decades by protecting and defending our freedom to fly, ensuring that safety remains our north star, and helping guide this uniquely American experience so we can pass it along, better than we received it, to the next generation of aviators.

First, I would like to commend the Committee for its work in passing a five-year FAA reauthorization. PL115-254 is widely recognized for both what it includes and what it does not include and helps provide the tools necessary for the FAA to plan, prepare, and ensure that our aviation system remains the safest and most efficient in the world.

We look forward to working with the Committee and all aviation stakeholders to bring efficiencies to the FAA, under its current construct, and develop a bright future for this amazing thing we call flight.

Today, I will briefly discuss a number of key provisions included in the statute that directly and positively impact general aviation and would like to give a special thanks to Ranking Member Sam Graves for his leadership and perseverance on several of the provisions in the Act.

Section 158 - Supplemental discretionary funds.

According to the U.S. Department of Transportation's Bureau of Transportation Statistics, there are over 19,000 public-use and private airports in the United States. These include general, commercial, military, heliports, seaplane bases, short takeoff and landing ports, ultralight, glider, and balloon ports.

The Federal Aviation Administration's 2019-2023 National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems (NPIAS) report indicates that there are 5,099 public-use airports in the United States of which the commercial airlines provide passenger service to 509 of these facilities and the remainder are used primarily by general aviation. As a point of reference, there are about 7,000 aircraft in the U.S. commercial fleet and over 200,000 aircraft in the general aviation fleet.

Thousands of public-use airports across the nation rely solely on general aviation to connect over 170 million people each year. General aviation contributes over \$219 billion annually to our nation's economy and produces 1.1 million jobs.

These airports are often vital to the economies of small communities and are used in a variety of ways including business, recreation, natural disaster relief operations, medical emergencies, law enforcement, agricultural support, and others.

With the support of this Committee, Congress appropriated an additional \$1 billion dollars in discretionary funds through the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2018, and an additional supplemental amount of \$500 million dollars in fiscal year 2019.

Speaking for myself and on behalf of those who fly in and out of small airports in rural communities across this country, we appreciate your support. These resources have provided a shot in the arm to our national airport system.

We know the Committee has long recognized the importance of our nation's airports and again expressed its commitment by including in PL115-254 an authorization of supplemental discretionary grant funds in the amount of \$1 billion dollars per year through fiscal year 2023. Funding for this authorization will help airports address safety improvement projects, including the nearly 3,000 non-primary entitlement (NPE) airports typically used by general aviation aircraft across the country.

The committee did address the issue of NPE expired funds in Section 155 of the FAA reauthorization bill and we look forward to continuing to work together on further reforms to the program to ensure that the NPE program works for airport sponsors and the funds are directed to airports for which they were intended.

Section 131 - Grant assurances.

AOPA has long advocated for changes to the definition of aeronautical activity in hangars and I thank Ranking Member Sam Graves, an avid aviator, for his leadership on this as well.

For many private aircraft owners, aeronautical activities occurring in airport hangars include building and maintaining an aircraft.

However, surprisingly, not until 2016 did the FAA decide to define aircraft building as an aeronautical activity and before then only permitted final assembly of aircraft in hangars located on federally obligated airports.

In 2016, the FAA published a policy update to the Federal Register that was meant to clarify how aviation facilities including hangars can be used on airports that receive federal funds. Most notably, the FAA's update allowed noncommercial experimental amateur builders of aircraft to do more work at airport hangars.

The FAA also clarified that aircraft needing repair and maintenance are still considered "operational aircraft" and may be kept in hangars at the discretion of airport sponsors. In addition, the storage of nonaeronautical items are permissible provided they do not interfere with the intended aeronautical use of the hangar and are allowed by the airport sponsor.

While we applaud FAA's decision to update their hangar policy, Section 131 of the FAA Reauthorization Act codifies the FAA's updated hangar use policies so that the realities of general aviation flying, building and maintenance can be realized.

Section 556 - Aircraft Registration.

As you know, Section 556 of the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2018 requires the FAA Administrator to initiate a rulemaking to increase the duration of aircraft registration for noncommercial general aviation aircraft from three years to seven years.

AOPA strongly supports this common-sense provision. I don't believe FAA has initiated a rulemaking at this point but we look forward to its implementation as soon as possible.

Section 518 - Aircraft Registry Office.

Section 518, authored by Representative Sam Graves, deems the FAA Aircraft Registry in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma "essential" and therefore remains operational should a government shutdown occur. The FAA Registry office is responsible for most aircraft registrations, renewals, and other critical functions and handles thousands of transactions daily. This provision will have a significant and positive impact on general aviation registration requirements should a government shutdown occur in the future.

We also support Chairman DeFazio's "Aviation Funding Stability Act", H.R. 1108, which would ensure that all activities of the FAA are funded in the event of a government shutdown.

Section 512 - Air Shows.

Temporary Flight Restrictions (TFRs) imposed by the FAA for large outdoor events has caused issues when the agency has also approved air shows being held during the same times in the same areas. Section 512 of the Act encourages the FAA to work with general aviation, communities, and large outdoor event organizers to identify and

resolve these scheduling conflicts. The FAA is following through on this and meeting with stakeholders, including AOPA, to discuss ways to facilitate a positive resolution to this issue.

Section 532 - Clarification of requirements for living history flights.

We appreciate the Committee's support for living history flights as a way to attract a new generation of aviation enthusiasts and provide them with a flying experience and learning about aviation's past. This provision provided the needed clarification on the requirements for living history flights and is very much appreciated by those who participate in these activities.

We are pleased the FAA is working with stakeholders and it is my understanding the FAA is on target for a federal register publication later this year.

Section 576 - Tower Marking.

Improving visibility of certain towers for low-flying aircraft will certainly improve the safety of pilots and aircraft. As you know, this provision directs the FAA to issue regulations that require certain towers to either be marked or included in an FAA database. We look forward to working with the FAA to enact these regulations as soon as possible and as outlined in the statute.

Section 625 - Aviation workforce development programs.

This is an important provision intended to introduce high school students and others to STEM aviation education and opportunities, as well as training in aviation and aerospace skills. This issue is a top priority for AOPA.

Congress, and this Committee specifically, recognized the need to support aviation workforce development programs by establishing this grant program.

In July 2018, Boeing released its Pilot and Technician Outlook wherein they estimated a need for more than 800,000 new pilots worldwide of which more than 200,000 are needed in the United States over the next 20 years. The report also mentioned that 750,000 new aviation technicians will be needed around the world. This will be a formidable challenge and one we must confront together – industry and government.

Most people that aspire to become aviators start in general aviation, so it is vital that we collaborate on efforts to ensure that this pipeline remains open to all. The pilot education grant program will support the creation and delivery of curriculum designed to provide high school students with meaningful science, technology, engineering, math and aviation education and encouraging our nation's youth to become the next generation of commercial, general aviation, drone or military pilots.

The aviation technical workforce grant program includes scholarships, apprenticeships, establishment of new training programs, purchasing equipment for schools, and supporting career transition for members of the armed forces.

These two programs are each authorized at \$5 million per year over the next five years, it is imperative that Congress provide full funding in fiscal year 2020 and beyond to help ensure that we can meet the pilot and aviation technical workforce demands here in the United States.

We appreciate the leadership of Chairman Peter DeFazio, Ranking Member Sam Graves, Aviation Subcommittee Chairman Rick Larsen, Subcommittee Ranking Member Garrett Graves, Congressman Dan Lipinski and the entire Committee who expressed their support for full funding of these grant programs to the Appropriations Committee.

AOPA has also taken a leadership role in developing our future aviation workforce by getting young people interested in aviation through programs such as the AOPA High School Initiative.

By providing high-quality STEM-based aviation education to high school students nationwide, AOPA is opening the door to aviation careers for thousands of teens.

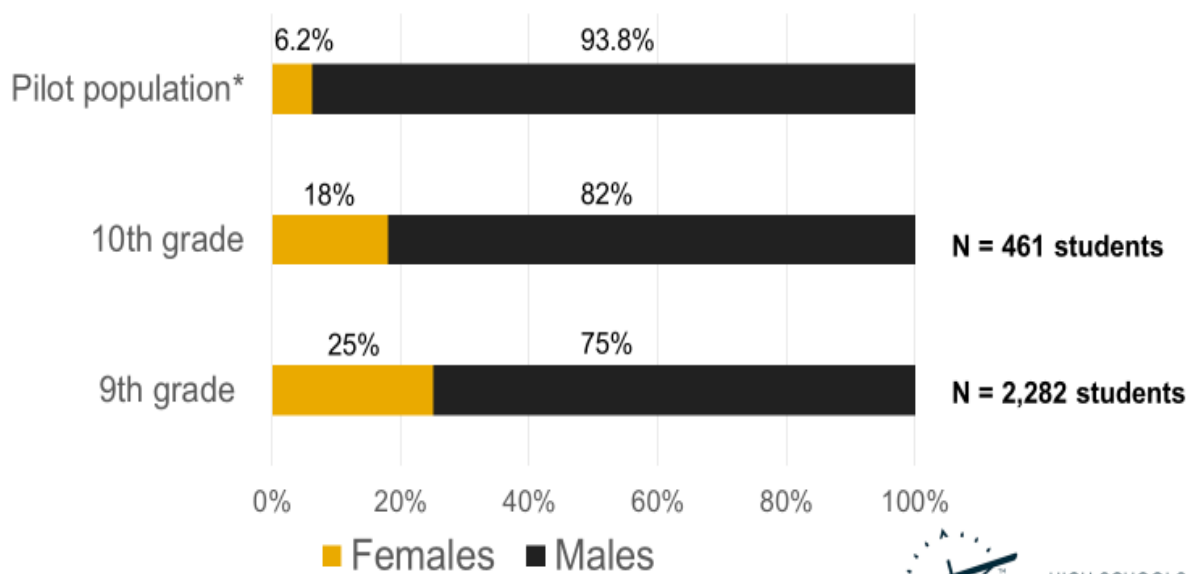
The courses are designed to capture the imagination and give students from diverse backgrounds the tools to pursue advanced education and careers in aviation fields. Working with professional instructional designers, AOPA is currently offering three years of a four-year high school aviation STEM program that falls along two tracks—pilot and unmanned aircraft systems. The fourth year of the program is currently in development.

The program conforms to Common Core math and science standards and Next Generation Science Standards and, in keeping with career and technical education best practices, will lead to a certification or industry-accepted test, such as the FAA Private Pilot knowledge test or a Part 107 small UAS (drone) pilot certification.

For the 2018-2019 school year, our curriculum was being used by an estimated 2,282 ninth-grade students at 80 schools in 27 states. There were another 461 students at 25 schools in 15 states using the tenth-grade curriculum.

We are already seeing a dramatic improvement in gender demographics when comparing students using the ninth-grade and tenth-grade curriculum during the 2018-2019 school year compared to today's pilot population as indicated in the chart below.

2018-19 CURRICULUM PARTICIPATION DATA BY GENDER



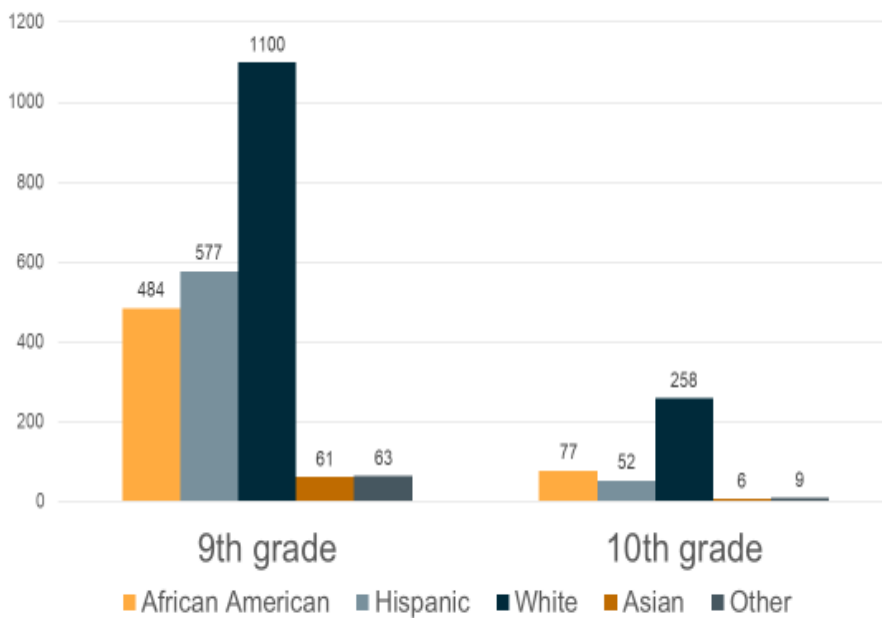
*Pilot population data from Bureau of Labor Statistics



We are also seeing a dramatic improvement in diversity demographics where 52% of the students taking the ninth-grade curriculum and 44% taking the tenth-grade curriculum are non-white.

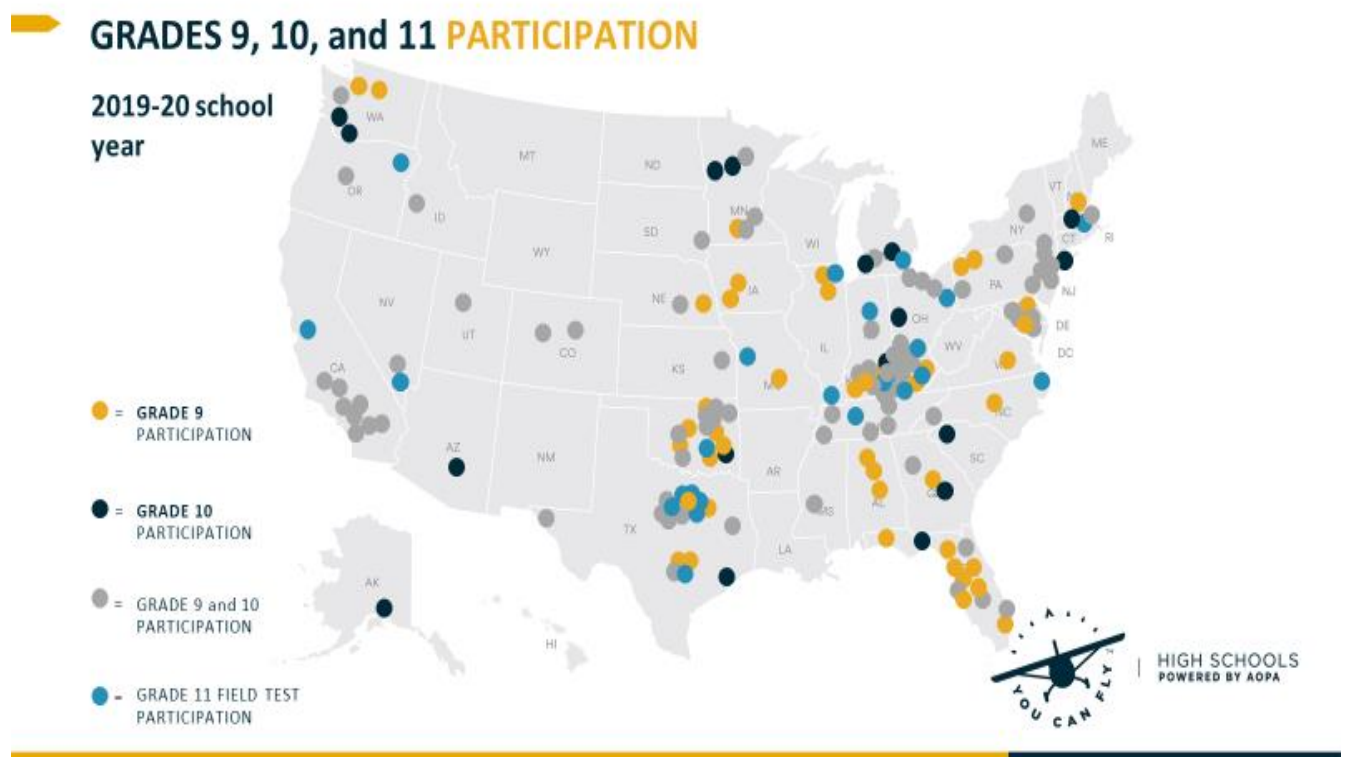
The chart below shows the ethnicity of the students participating in our program for the 2018-2019 school year.

2018-19 CURRICULUM PARTICIPATION DATA BY ETHNICITY



For the 2019-2020 school year, we are seeing increased interest in using the AOPA high school curriculum. The number of schools using our ninth-grade curriculum has increased to 143 schools; while the tenth-grade has increased to 114 and the eleventh-grade field test is currently at 23 schools.

We are also increasing the footprint of the AOPA High School Initiative across the country for the 2019-2020 school year, as indicated in this chart.



The interest in our curriculum from high schools across the country has been overwhelming and we look forward to working with the Committee to ensure that high schools who want to teach students about aviation and all that it offers actually have that opportunity.

Mr. Chairman, before I conclude my remarks, if I may, and while not related to the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2018, I would like to again thank the Committee and mention the success of bipartisan legislation passed and signed into law as part of the FAA Extension, Safety, and Security Act of 2016.

Known as third class medical reform, and commonly referred to as BasicMed, this program is one of the most significant reforms for general aviation in decades. In just over two years since the program was launched, more than 50,000 private pilots are safely flying under these new medical requirements.

The FAA's implementation of this program has been tremendous and more and more private pilots are moving to this program, which includes medical education training for pilots. It also reduces the bureaucracy and costs that have frustrated pilots for decades. So again, I want to thank this Committee for their support of this new program.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, we must continue to work together, industry and government, to ensure we continue our nation's leadership in all sectors of aviation. The workforce grant programs this Committee included in the 2018 FAA Reauthorization are a great start.

As the Committee is aware, in order to meet bold challenges, we need bold initiatives. Recognizing this, I am hopeful the Committee will work with Senator Jim Inhofe of Oklahoma and others to establish a National Center for the Advancement of Aviation. We strongly believe standing up such a center will facilitate cooperation, collaboration, and coordination across all sectors of aviation; civil, commercial, and military -- and which is so desperately needed.

A national aviation center would bring the industry together by fostering such things as programs that create a diverse and skilled aviation workforce, ensuring the deployment of STEM aviation educational opportunities for high school students, leveraging the sharing of new and emerging flight training methods, and conducting safety and economic data trend analysis. A national aviation center would do more to grow, develop, and promote aviation and bring the needed and long overdue collaboration of our collective industry that is so vital to our nation's economy. We certainly welcome the opportunity to work with the Committee on the development of this proposal.

I would like to again thank the Subcommittee for this important hearing today and look forward to answering any questions.