




The American Association of Educational Service Agencies

1998
Legislative Agenda

January 16-17, 1998
Washington, D.C.

Developed cooperatively by AAESA members...



*American Association of Educational Service Agencies
1998 Annual Legislative Agenda
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And thank you AASA staff for your participation and coordination efforts.

The mission of AAESA is to serve as a national voice for educational service agencies, and to support the learning, technical assistance, advocacy, and research needs of its members. AAESA has a strategic initiative that states, "we will strengthen our ability to affect education policy through effective governmental relations activities." It is the feeling of the participants in this part of our governmental relations activity that the positions taken by AAESA should reflect and support the role of the federal government in education using the following broad concepts.

- Education is one of the most important roles of government. Nothing will share a greater impact on the future of this country since we are developing the minds of future leaders and citizenry.
- ESAs need to be written into each piece of federal educational law.
- There should be no federal mandates without federal funding.
- Voluntary national testing should be made available and be integrated with current statewide assessment.
- The U.S. Department of Education should be maintained as an executive department and its role should be examined to ensure that it is effective.
- The U.S. Department of Education should provide national leadership for state, educational service agencies, and local districts in the following ways:
 - promoting education for all learners;
 - focusing on student achievement and developing successful models of teaching and learning;
 - establishing best practices in education based on successful models;
 - identifying new, innovative models for education;
 - leading collecting and disseminating research on what does and does not work in education.

Vocational Education

The House passed its version of the renewal of the Perkins Vocational Education Act this past session. The bill reflects an education program, administered by local school districts, with funds driven by a new formula (less population (60%), more poverty (40%)) directly to schools. The SEA retains 10% of funds with a 2% overall cap on administration costs. A 5% set aside is given for rural/urban schools districts

with SEA grants for drop-out prevention and graduation improvements. The minimum grants to LEAs drops from \$15,000 to \$10,000.

The Senate has put together a bill consolidating vocational education, adult education, and job training, into one "workforce" initiative. They retain the Eisenhower formula and changed the amount the SEA can retain from 8.5% to 14% with 10% for administration. The minimum grants increased from \$15,000 to \$25,000. At the last minute, a new title was added that allowed "eligible entities" (governor's) to consolidate funds and reprioritize the goals.

AAESA will continue to advocate the following positions.

1. *How much control of K-12 vocational education programming should businesses have?*

Recommendation: Business should advise schools regarding vocational education, but control over the program should be in schools where liability and accountability are located.

2. *Should AAESA support Certificates of Mastery instead of diplomas?*

Recommendation: Certificates of Mastery should be used:

- a. in conjunction with, not in lieu of, high school diplomas; and
- b. for all students, not just vocational students.

3. *Should the funds run through the governor or the SEA?*

Recommendation: All federal vocational education funds should flow to SEAs and then to LEAs.

4. *What role should educational service agencies play in the new vocational education program?*

Recommendation: ESAs should be eligible for funds directly from the SEA or as a fiscal agent for consortia of LEAs. ESAs/LEAs should have mandatory representation on any state advisory boards or panels.

5. *Should the formulas be used on population/poverty or a combination?*

Recommendation: Vocational education funds should be distributed based on enrollment.

6. *How should the federal school to work transition program be included in the vocational education act?*

Recommendation: The school to work transition program needs better definition of purpose, more coordination with school based programs and greater accountability for results to work well with high school vocational education. The program must be less fragmented for it to work in school districts. Transition to work can no longer be linked only with vocational education programs, but must be expanded and integrated into the entire K-12 curriculum. The purpose should be to bring all students into contact with careers and the world of work. To accomplish this purpose, responsibilities of business post secondary institutions and schools must be clearly defined.

Charter Schools

As states began to authorize charter schools, Congress expressed in its "Improving America's Schools Act" that it was time to study this phenomenon and decide what charter schools are and whether they help kids. The organizations conducting the mandated study say their central research questions are:

- How are the charter schools implemented?
- What are the impacts of various charter schools on achievement and student learning?
- Under what conditions do charter schools improve learning?
- Are charters "creaming" the best students?
- Do charters have different goals and if they do, will the understanding of "success" differ from school to school?

Unfortunately for the student, states have moved ahead with innovations in chartering that exceeded the original assumptions of the study about the structure and governance of charter schools. In a new development, Educational Alternatives, Inc. a private school management company is either opening or been hired to manage 12 charter schools in Arizona. This area of charter schools bears watching, if only because it was unanticipated. The unclear aspect of charter schools future involves sectarian schools. In November, a referendum on permitting charters for sectarian schools failed in Washington state by a wide margin (64%-36%).

1. *What position should AAESA take on federal aid to charter schools that are legally formed by other chartering authorities?*

Recommendation: Schools chartered by local boards of education, that are covered by the basic protections for all students including equal access, complete accountability for fiscal, health and safety standards, and the legal

requirements for separation of church and state, should be eligible for federal assistance.

2. *What role should the educational service agencies play in the implementation of charter schools?*

Recommendation: ESAs should be eligible for the federal funded charter school found in IASA, and SEAs should not be able to terminate or limit that eligibility.

3. *What is the federal role in charter schools?*

Recommendation: The appropriate federal role regarding local charter schools is research and development.

Vouchers

Vouchers will again be discussed in the 105th Congress.

1. *Should AAESA continue to oppose vouchers?*

Recommendation: AAESA advocates use of public tax dollars for public education only, and therefore strongly opposes any voucher programs that would provide public funds to non-public schools.

Higher Education Act Title V - Professional Development

The entire Higher Education Act will be reauthorized in the 105th Congress. Title V, Professional Development has always been geared toward teachers, but never has been funded.

1. *What should the federal role be regarding professional development?*

Recommendation: The federal role in professional development should include:

- a. making teacher training a relevant training partnership between higher education, states, ESAs and school districts.
- b. focusing on achieving the new standards, expectations or requirements established by states, ESAs and school districts;
- c. assisting states, ESAs and LEAs to fill in difficult areas, such as professional development for rural schools;

- d. actively preparing school, school district and ESA administrators, because those areas have been under served in professional development;
- e. leading in research and development regarding improved teaching and leadership; and
- f. providing services based on a consumer model, that permits groups of teachers and administrators to choose the training that is most appropriate for them from the marketplace of providers.

2. *What role should educational service agencies play in staff development programs?*

Recommendation: ESAs should be eligible to compete or apply for funds under Title V. The state grant program should fund agencies with a history of success with in-service, professional development. Funds should also be provided to ESAs for action research and development in teaching and administration.

Bills were introduced in both the House and the Senate that may be attached to this reauthorization that will have far reaching implications for rural schools. H.R. 2228 and S. 1484 would mandate certificate disclosure of all educators. These bills would cut off any district's federal fund allotment, if the district failed to comply with the teacher certification disclosure materials (letting parents know if teachers are teaching in areas for which they have proper education and certification.)

Recommendation: AAESA supports certified and qualified educators, however with the current shortages it is not possible for all teachers to be certified, i.e., New York and California. AAESA will work with Congress to strengthen the laws regarding certified staff while addressing teacher shortages and alternative certification.

Block Grants

Numerous members of Congress support moving from project-specific grants to federal block grants. This moves away from funding program-specific grants has a negative impact on education. Historically, when block grants have been implemented, the sum of the block grant has been less than the total for the program-specific grants.

AAESA opposes block grants for the following reasons:

- While block grants provide more local control over programs, they tend to be used to maintain or expand existing programs, rather than encouraging innovation.
- If block grant funding remains at the discretion of the governor, there is a loss of the local control, thus eliminating block grants primary strength.
- Those programs that are innovative, such as regional laboratories, math/science centers, National Educational Talent Search and the STARS school program, could be threatened by block grants.
- By placing programs such as Eisenhower, Title I, Title IV and Title VI into block grants, school districts would no longer be required to provide, or have the resources for, the following types of activities:
 - Professional development for content related workshops (Eisenhower)
 - Violence Prevention (Safe Schools Grant)
 - Professional development workshops at the local level (Title I)
 - Project SAVE (Students Against Violence through Education) and Project GREAT (Gang Resistance Education and Training) (Safe and Drug-Free Schools grants)
- Focused truancy and dropout prevention strategies that use alternatives to out-on-the-street suspensions (Safe and Drug-Free Schools grants).
- Project-specific grants can serve as catalysts to support greater family improvement in the teaching and learning process. Research has demonstrated that when parents and extended family members are active participants in the education of their children, there are great benefits for the school, home and broader community.

Electrical Deregulation

Legislation will be introduced during the next Congress to restructure the electric industry. While various plans are being proposed, all would impact K-12 schools. If a restructuring plan is passed, it would likely lower electric rates for most K-12 districts. This would occur because districts or groups of districts would be able to shop around nationally for the best deal on electricity that they could find. The small number of districts that are currently "off the grid" and districts in areas where electricity is artificially cheap because of the present system could see a rise in their electricity rates. Most schools currently pay the residential rate for power, which is usually two to four times the commercial rate.

1. *AAESA should support/remain silent/oppose a restructuring of the electric industry?*

Recommendation: AAESA supports the deregulation of electrical utilities and retail sales of power, that include a flexible and streamlined process whereby schools, alone or in consortia, could obtain reduced rates for electricity and easier access to services.

Child Nutrition

Several child nutrition programs are up for reauthorization this year. They include: Summer Food Service Program for Children; Commodity Distribution Program; School Breakfast Program; Child and Adult Care Food Program; and Nutrition Education and Training Program. The School Lunch Program has a permanent authorization, but is always subject to amendments.

Child Nutrition Advocates are pushing for: universal school breakfast in all elementary schools; commodities for school breakfast program; reduced paperwork for school lunch by eliminating the "reduced price" category, thereby increasing the number of "free" meals and having only two categories, "free" and "paid"; and expanding the child and adult care food program to include after school snacks and meals, allowing children up to age 18 to participate, and by allowing all schools to participate (remove "grandfather" date).

1. *Should AAESA support a universal breakfast? Universal lunch?*

Recommendation: We support breakfast and lunch programs for students. We also believe that LEAs and ESAs should have the flexibility to determine what will work best for their students and the community they serve.

Head Start

Head Start is a program jointly funded by the federal government (DHHS) and local communities to provide comprehensive services to children and families who meet income guidelines. At least 10% of the children served must be children with disabilities.

Early Head Start was established with the 1994 reauthorization. This program will expand services to eligible children 0-3 and their families. During the last fiscal year, 22,000 children under age three were served in such programs. Presently, there is an Early Head Start program in every state.

The average cost per child is \$4,571.00. For each of these dollars spent, research has indicated that \$7.00 is saved.

In 1998, Head Start is up for reauthorization. In 1994 both houses of Congress worked together early in the process so that the reauthorization went smoothly and was not bogged down with numerous floor amendments.

Based on issues raised by an April 1997 Government Accounting Office (GAO) Report, AAESA should:

- Support the major GAO recommendation to have the Health and Human Services (HHS) director include in his/her research plan an assessment of the impact of regular Head Start.
- Support research by Health and Human Services regarding Head Start by including the following current or projected research projects:
 - Health and Human Services' well-balanced, innovative set of new studies on Head Start recommended by leading researchers;
 - Major longitudinal studies of Head Start planned by Health and Human Services or being conducted by other agencies;
 - Planned research focused on program improvement;
 - Studies of program impact that Health and Human Services currently has under way in special programs such as Early Head Start.

Clinton Literacy Initiative

The Administration will resubmit its Literacy Initiative, suggesting the use of volunteers to tutor school-age children in an effort to expand and improve the nation's literacy rate. Some have objected to the use of volunteers, indicating that learning to read is a highly complex skill that requires professional intervention.

Recommendation: AAESA supports the concept of volunteerism but the proposal needs greater focus on local efforts. Cleaner reliance on proven models for teaching reading as well as support for reading specialists. The program must also deal with transportation costs, for coordination and for administrative costs for securing and screening volunteers.

School Construction and Facilities

Capital improvements or deferred or delayed maintenance are major issues for K-12 schools. The General Accounting Office recently found more than \$112 billion in maintenance problems nationwide and the Department of Education estimates that America will need more than 6,000 new schools in the next 10 years. Congress is currently looking at ways for the federal government to assist school districts with these problems; however, many members of Congress believe that it is not a federal issue.

Recommendation: AAESA supports federal support for school infrastructure and will continue to work with the Department of Education, Department of the Treasury, The White House Staff and Congress.

Reauthorizing Issues

- *IDEA: The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act is rewritten as Public Law 105-17. AAESA will continue to work as the regulations are finalized and implemented to ensure that they are presented, explained, and enforced as intended by Congress.*

Recommendation: AAESA will continue to work with Congress and the Department of Education to address the overburdened and complicated regulations.

- *Special Education Services to Prisoners: AAESA continues to be concerned about the issue of special education services to convicted felons under the age of 22 who are in state prisons and county jails. The Office of Special Education Programs under the U.S. Department of Education has found states out of compliance in providing special education services to eligible felons. The U.S. Department of Education has threatened to withhold special education funding. The House of Representatives has adopted an amendment to Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education appropriations bill to limit the amount of special education funds which can be withheld to the amount of funds which would be spent on eligible felons.*

Recommendation: AAESA supports a change in federal and state laws that will ensure that no special education funds are lost due to failure to provide services to prisoners. AAESA also supports statutory changes, which will make correctional authorities, rather than the state Departments of Education, responsible for providing necessary special education services to prisoners.

Improving America's Schools Reauthorization (IASA)

Although the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) will not be authorized until the 106th Congress (1999-2000), AAESA will begin work in 1998 to identify the key IASA issues and programs of concern to our membership, Title I, its funding formula, proposed block grants, and other proposals and programs will be reviewed. This preliminary work will be done in 1998, so AAESA can begin work immediately when the new 106th Congress starts its work on rewriting the elementary and secondary education act.