

**The American Association of Educational
Service Agencies**

**1999
Legislative
Agenda**

**January 22-23, 1999
Washington, D.C.**

Developed cooperatively by AAESA members...

1999 Legislative Conference Attendees

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And thank you AASA staff for your participation and coordination efforts.

The mission of AAESA is to serve as the national voice for educational service agencies, as we support the learning, technical assistance, advocacy, and research needs of our members. AAESA's strategic initiative states, "We will strengthen our ability to affect education policy through effective governmental relations activities." Participants in this part of our governmental relations activity believe that the positions taken by AAESA should reflect and support the role of the federal government in education using the following set of beliefs.

Beliefs that Guide Our Governmental Relations Partnership Activities

AAESA believes that ESAs provide (1) leadership to help all students reach high standards of performance and (2) cost-efficient regional services. Therefore, AAESA actively promotes and supports the following premises:

- Education is one of the most important roles of government. Nothing will provide a greater impact on the future of this country in as much as we are developing the minds of future leaders and citizenry.
- The role of ESAs must be identified in each piece of federal law, so they can effectively carry out the regional leadership role in ensuring equity and access to programs and services for all students and school districts.
- The highest priority of the federal role in education should be to fund fully IDEA and significantly increase Title I funding before new programs are added.
- Unfunded federal mandates are the greatest problem for ESAs and LEAs. AAESA supports the current Unfunded Mandate Act of 1995, but this legislation must be consistently enforced. Federal education programs in existence prior to passage of the Unfunded Mandates Act of 1995, which were left out of the law, should be included in it.
- AAESA believes Congress should require states to implement federal rules and regulations, not state variations of the federal law which run counter to the law or limits local flexibility. States should be required to identify where they have added regulations to the federal regulations for every program. Where states add to the federal regulations, school districts should be permitted to challenge those regulations to the U.S. Department of Education and receive timely decisions regarding the appropriateness of the state decisions.
- The U.S. Department of Education should be maintained as an executive department and its role should be examined regularly to ensure its effectiveness.

- The U.S. Department of Education should provide national leadership for states, 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 effective educational practices.
- Rules and regulations of the Department of Education and other agencies affecting ESAs should be monitored and influenced.

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)

The reauthorization of ESEA is the highest priority of AAESA during the 106th Congress. AAESA strongly supports the historical purpose of ESEA, which is to “provide equal educational opportunities for disadvantaged children”. AAESA recognizes that ESEA is the major source of federal funds dedicated to improving the achievement of disadvantaged children, training of the professionals serving these children and impacting the structure and organization of the school disadvantaged children attend. The following positions are critical to AAESA:

- Support continuation of the current law, with no major changes in the law during this reauthorization.
- Continue focusing Title I on poverty and disadvantaged students.
- Ensure that the formula for identifying eligibility includes all children in poverty. Determine how to get more accurate information from the census counts and/or federal lunch counts.
- Expand the definition of ESAs so that every ESA is eligible for ESEA funding.
- Expand the opportunity for all ESAs to deliver and participate in all aspects of high quality professional development.

- Recommend that parental and or family involvement be strongly encouraged to improve student learning and to build family interest in school and learning. However, methods of family and parental involvement should be left to local districts and the school sites served by the federal programs.
- Congress should explore consolidation of all technology under one title.
- Support the Paperwork Reduction Act for rural schools with the recommendation that those LEAs that participate in ESA consortiums remain eligible for these joint efforts.

Block Grants

Some members of Congress support moving from project-specific grants to federal block grants. This move 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 and that sum itself has been significantly reduced over time.

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 is at the discretion of the governor, there is a loss of local control, thus eliminating block grants primary strength.
- 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 activities such as the following:
 - 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), Project GREAT (Gang Resistance Education and Training) and (Safe and Drug-Free Schools grants)
 - Other federally supported alternative education programs.
- Project-specific grants can serve as catalysts to support greater family involvement 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.

Choice and Charters, Not Vouchers or Tuition Tax Credits

Educators must acknowledge that the traditional system of public education does not work for all students. Therefore, some alternatives are needed, such as charters and inter-district school choice (open enrollment). However, alternatives that exist without public oversight are unacceptable.

Vouchers, as discussed by Congress, do not provide the oversight necessary to ensure all students will have fair access to “voucher” programs. Vouchers that can be used in private schools with discriminatory admissions criteria do nothing to enhance parental choice.

The concept of a tuition tax credit, which is now becoming more popular than vouchers, is little more than a modified voucher and has many flaws. These flaws include:

- Using public funds to pay for children to attend any private school, including those with discriminatory admissions criteria;
- Providing more financial assistance to middle income, rather than poor families;
- Providing public funding to schools where there is no requirement for oversight and accountability.

The flaws in tuition tax credits could lead toward a more segregated and segmented educational system that could ultimately have a damaging impact on our democracy.

AAESA will:

- Support only those alternatives to the traditional system that are accessible to all students and are not selective.
- Oppose any voucher or tuition tax credit proposal that amplifies the gap between the “haves” and “have nots.”
- Advocate for public oversight of all traditional and alternative models for education.
- Encourage high quality, professional development programs for all personnel including those in charter schools and other alternative programs.
- Work to focus the education debate on improving our public schools and not funneling public school resources into private schools.

Early Childhood

AAESA will:

- Advocate for early childhood education funding support (age 0-8) to become part of our national educational priorities.
- Promote the establishment of exemplary/model child care centers in schools and other community sites where intergenerational nurturing contacts become the norm.
- Encourage the institutionalization of Family Resource Centers in school buildings and other appropriate educational sites which support the teaching-learning process.
- Continue to advocate and support readiness to learn.

School Construction and Modernization

- AAESA supports the administration's proposal to pay the interest on school bonds or other debt instruments through tax credits for investors.
- AAESA supports the proposal by William Archer, R-TX, to extend the amount eligible from \$10 million to \$25 million of debt that can be arbitrated for construction, and extending the construction completion time from two to four years.
- AAESA supports the inclusion of ESAs in school construction and modernization projects.

E-rate

- AAESA strongly supports maintaining Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC) and its divisions as the vehicle for governance of the E-rate.
- AAESA strongly supports maintaining Federal Communications Commissions (FCC) jurisdiction of the E-rate program.
- AAESA strongly opposes establishing a termination date for the E-rate. Sun setting the E-rate would make it difficult to keep up with fast moving technology and negatively affect long term planning.
- AAESA supports the E-rate going directly to the ESAs and LEAs.

Ed-Flex Program

AAESA supports Ed-Flex and believes the provisions of Ed-Flex need to be extended from the twelve pilot states to all states so every ESA and LEA has an opportunity to participate.

Medicaid Changes

- AAESA opposes any efforts to eliminate the Medicare reimbursement for social services that schools provide to children, and particularly opposes continuation of federal mandates to provide services that are not eligible for reimbursement.
- AAESA supports the Administration's position on presumptive eligibility.

Mandatory Social Security

- AAESA adamantly opposes mandatory social security. The association believes that any such proposal would duplicate state required retirement systems, treat everyone unequally; and constitute double taxation without comparable benefit. Currently, the military, federal government employees, certain railroad employees, the legislature and President are exempt.

National Forest Funds

- AAESA will work with state ESA Associations that are directly affected and have established positions on National Forest Funds.

AAESA supports collaboration between the Regional Education Laboratories and ESAs

- AAESA supports the Department of Education administering the Regional Education Laboratories through the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI),
- AAESA supports best practices and research.