



ESEA Reauthorization

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act, now known by its short title from the last reauthorization “No Child Left Behind,” has been in the process of being reauthorized for more than three years. In that time, many education groups argued that ESEA should be refocused, reframed, and renamed to supplement the improvement of educational outcomes for low income and minority students:

As was the case last year, while there is consensus that NCLB needs revision, there is not consensus about what revisions should be made: The House and the Senate both held a series of hearings over the last year. While they have made progress in terms of bipartisan discussions, there has been no draft bill language; therefore, we do not expect reauthorization until 2011. The Obama Administration released its Blueprint for reauthorization earlier this year. Not surprisingly, the Blueprint Proposal was aligned with the four assurances from the State Fiscal Stabilization and ARRA Race to the Top funds. It remains unclear exactly how those proposals are integrated into Congressional efforts. The highly politicized environment in Congress, especially in the Senate, makes it very difficult to move legislation. Compound the situation with the impending midterm elections, and there is widespread agreement that reauthorization won't be completed this year. That said, the discussions are ongoing, and the following talking points will be helpful in informing your Congressional delegation:

Key Issues in Reauthorization

- **Accountability:** AESA and nearly all other education groups agree that improvement of ESEA requires an accountability system that is transparent; uses multiple sources of evidence and a growth measure; is fair to all students; and calls for federal authority that is commensurate with federal funding. Some civil rights groups and disability groups strongly support the current accountability language.
- **Assessment:** Most scholars and educators and their organizations, including AESA, would like to move beyond the current generation of once a year tests that are a snap shot in time. This is not reported until a student is in the next grade level. Instead AESA supports the additional use of formative assessments to encourage the use of assessments to directly improve student achievement.
- **Special Learners:** AESA agrees with the majority of educators that the progress of special education students would be more accurately measured using multiple measures including tests developed for students with disabilities, and that the progress of English language learners should be measured in a language they understand, with appropriate assessments based on proficiency level.

- **Teachers:** AESA believes that states should define highly qualified teachers and should provide incentives for special education and for general education teachers in hard to staff urban schools and in rural isolated schools. AESA supports the notion of federal funding to supplement teacher's salaries in hard to staff schools. We urge Congress to utilize the collective experience of education service agencies when it comes to training prospective teachers and providing high quality professional development.
- **Serving the total child:** A clear consensus among the education groups and human service groups is a new emphasis on addressing the non-school factors that are barriers to academic success. AESA is supportive of these efforts given the wide range of programs that they run to meet the needs of the total child.
- **Early Childhood Education:** Support for children in their first five years of life, including social intervention and full funding for and alignment of Head Start to public education are widely supported ideas. The Obama administration has strongly supported state efforts to increase access to and the quality of early childhood programs. AESA supports the Early Childhood Challenge grants, a program to assist states with early childhood efforts.
- **Health:** The health programs that are in other agencies are not well tied to the development and well-being that contribute to the educational progress of low-income students. The needed services and supports include continued Medicaid reimbursements for school-based administrative and transportation claims; a health care system focused on low-income families, including prenatal care and school-based, school-linked and community health clinics; and federal funding and access to mental health care and dental care.
- **Formula vs. Competitive:** The Administration, through both its Blueprint for Reauthorization and FY11 Budget Proposal, proposed a significant change in policy, with a notable increase in the proportion of federal dollars that would move to school districts through competitive grants, not formula programs. Competitive grants put certain districts—especially small, rural districts, those lacking the administrative capacity, and/or ESAs who may not be included in the state definition of LEA and may therefore not be eligible to compete—at a disadvantage for securing funds.

Talking Points:

1. Ask your Representatives and Senators to support a new framework for the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act that focuses the federal role on students in poverty.
2. Urge your members to support strengthening the connection between high poverty schools and federal programs providing health and mental health care for children and their families, quality services from ages zero to five and extended learning opportunities.
3. Ask your members of Congress to support efforts to improve the assessments used by the states and encourage the use of formative assessments that inform instruction and provide timely and instructionally useful information to teachers and principals to directly improve student achievement.
4. Urge your member to support a federal accountability system that is focused on useful interventions with strong ESA involvement and linked to the amount of federal assistance a school is receiving.

5. Urge your member to remember the important role of ESAs in professional development for teachers and wrap around services for children and their families.