

ESEA Reauthorization –



There is a consensus that NCLB needs revision, but there is no consensus about what revisions should be made.

- The House and the Senate have yet to make any progress on ESEA reauthorization. The Obama administration is still formulating their position. But mostly no one is truly sure how to begin the reauthorization and what changes should be made.

In general, 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:

- Over its 44 year history ESEA has become a collection of 93 generally disconnected and disjointed programs that were added in 7 succeeding reauthorizations.

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 would support the 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. 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.

Timing of Reauthorization

Secretary Duncan has begun listening tour to gauge input on the administration's reauthorization proposal. In all likelihood, we will see the reauthorization proposal closer to President Obama's State of the Union in January 2010. Already, the administration is making it clear that their proposal will align with the assurances highlighted in the Race to the Top. The House side may begin negotiations before the administration presents its proposal. It is expected that the House will begin their work based on their reauthorization proposal based on the draft bill they released back in the fall of 2007. The Senate is further behind in their discussions. The Senate just named Senator Tom Harkin (D-Ia.) as the new chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee. It will take some time for him to hire his committee staff. In addition, there has been a large turnover in staff on the democratic side of the committee that will force the process to slow down as they get up to speed. We are expecting plenty of staff level conversations and negotiations later this fall and into the New Year.

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.