



THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20202

April 18, 2003

Honorable [REDACTED]  
Superintendent of Education  
State Department of Education

Dear Superintendent [REDACTED]

As staff members from the U.S. Department of Education have met with states to review their accountability systems, the issue of capacity to provide the professional development and technical assistance required to meet the goals of the No Child Left Behind Act has been a recurring theme. I would like to share with you my perceptions of the role that education service agencies (ESAs) can play in the implementation of NCLB.

While not all states have ESAs, and they are called different names in different states (BOCES, IUs, ISDs, ESCs, ESDs, RESCs, RESAs, County Offices of Education, among others), where they exist, they play an important role in implementing, as well as communicating, the requirements of NCLB to local districts. I know how critical the Region IV Education Service Center was to my work in Houston. Even very large districts need assistance in providing the breadth of professional development activities and technical assistance to their schools. It was also indispensable to the small districts in the region.

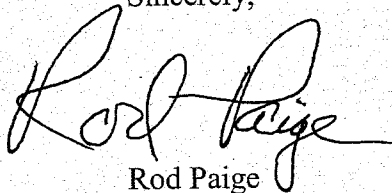
ESAs are often the key communicators between federal and state entities and local education agencies (LEAs). In many respects, they are the agencies closest to LEAs in both distance and working relations. It is my understanding that meetings among ESAs, their local superintendents, and key LEA staff occur regularly. ESAs generally know district programs, services, and concerns. Often, they are able to successfully respond to district needs in a flexible, adaptable, efficient, cost effective, and direct manner. As you implement the programs in NCLB, you may wish to not only include ESAs in the planning stages of these programs, but utilize their services to the fullest extent possible under your State laws.

In implementing NCLB, I recognize a number of areas where ESAs could be most useful. They range from staff quality, including alternative certification programs, teacher development, and paraprofessional training, to implementation of key aspects of the accountability system. In some states, ESAs provide the data management systems and expertise that enable districts to meet state requirements and use their data effectively to make better decisions. Economies of scale through ESAs allow districts to leverage limited resources into targeted support for multiple schools and to share costs with other school districts. ESAs must also be accountable to their customers, react to the marketplace, act as entrepreneurs, and respond to federal, state, and local district needs.

Page 2

I have been meeting regularly with members of the board of the Association of Education Service Agencies, and I can tell you that ESAs are committed to partnering with the U.S. Department of Education, governors, and chief state school officers in implementing the No Child Left Behind Act. They are a resource I commend to you as you move forward to reach our goal of leaving no child behind.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rod Paige". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Rod" being more prominent than the last name "Paige".

Rod Paige