

ESEA Reauthorization Goals: More Opportunity & Learning For Students



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“It is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms.”—U. S. Supreme Court, *Brown v. Board of Education*

BACKGROUND

- ▶ The original Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)—the cornerstone of the federal presence in K-12 education—was designed to help level the playing field for the most vulnerable students, including children of poverty, students with disabilities, and English-language learners.
- ▶ One in five children—nearly 15 million—live in households with incomes below the official U.S. poverty threshold (\$24,418 for a family of four in 2014). Income inequality and lagging investments in public education have exacerbated resource and opportunity gaps for students across the country. Consequently, the federal role in ensuring equal educational opportunity is as essential today as it was when the Supreme Court decided *Brown v. Board of Education*.
- ▶ Under No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the focus has shifted away from student learning and opportunity towards testing, labeling, and punishing the educators and schools serving our most vulnerable students.
- ▶ Instead of raising student achievement, NCLB has perpetuated a system that delivers unequal opportunities and uneven quality to America’s children based on the zip code where they live. The culture of high-stakes testing has narrowed the curriculum, emphasized rote memorization over critical thinking, and made it impossible for educators to do what is most important: instill a love of learning in their students.
- ▶ Reauthorization of ESEA is an opportunity to set a new vision of shared responsibility for a public education system that promotes opportunity, equity, and excellence for **ALL** students.

PRIORITIES FOR REAUTHORIZATION

Create a new generation accountability system that advances opportunity and excellence for all students

- ▶ Develop an “opportunity dashboard” to expose opportunity gaps and make it possible to help remedy inequities.
- ▶ Require states and districts to collect data and report gaps, disaggregated by student groups—in resources, supports, and programs offered to students—on graduation rates and other indicators of school quality, including students’ access to:
 - Advanced coursework (AP/IB, dual enrollment)
 - Fully qualified teachers and paraeducators
 - Specialized instructional support personnel (school counselors, nurses, psychologists)
 - High-quality early education programs
 - Arts and athletic programs
 - Community support services like health care and wellness programs
- ▶ Require states to develop “opportunity and equity plans” to remedy any gaps or inequities revealed by the dashboard.
- ▶ Provide federal financial incentives for states to develop, adopt, and implement education financing systems that provide sufficient funding to give every student access to the resources and supports they need to meet state content and performance standards.

- ▶ Ensure that every student has access to high-quality early childhood education.

Ensure more time for students to learn

- ▶ Reduce the amount of federally-mandated standardized testing with the approach known as “grade-span” testing--once in elementary, once in middle, and once in high school—to allow students to focus more on critical thinking and less on rote memorization. This approach also gives educators more time to connect one-on-one with students, especially those most in need of extra help.
- ▶ Decouple the use of standardized tests from high stakes decision making.
- ▶ Support classroom-level, teacher-developed assessments that emphasize critical thinking and problem-solving skills, align with college and career-ready standards, and have clear scoring rubrics.
- ▶ Give states and districts flexibility to determine—based on input from classroom educators—the types of tests that provide the most useful information to help educators improve instruction and help students learn.
- ▶ Require states to eliminate tests that are redundant or not useful.
- ▶ Use the time recovered from fewer tests to give students access to well-rounded courses—including history, fine arts, and physical education—instead of the narrowed curriculum that is an unintended consequence of NCLB’s testing mandates.
- ▶ Enact “Ethan’s Law” so that educators can tell parents about opt-out options without incurring penalties.

Ensure all students have qualified educators who are empowered to lead

- ▶ Recruit, train, and retain fully qualified educators who are available to every student in every zip code, and who are prepared to teach in today’s classrooms on day one.
- ▶ Incentivize educator-led professional development and leadership programs to allow the expertise of accomplished educators to shape education policy and practice at all levels.
- ▶ Provide professional development, resources, and support for educators, and train them to interpret and use data to tailor their instruction to individual students.
- ▶ Provide professional development, resources, and support for all school personnel, including education support professionals, to create schools that are desirable places to be and that promote successful learning (including cultural competence, bullying prevention, positive behavioral supports, and restorative practices).
- ▶ Publicly report teacher turnover rates, categorized by years of experience and ethnicity.
- ▶ Require states to report on mentoring and induction programs now in place, and identify gaps between high-poverty and low-poverty schools.