ESEA Reauthorization Goals: More Opportunity and Learning for Students

“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 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)—the cornerstone of the federal presence in K-12 education—is designed to support programs to level the playing field for the most vulnerable, including children of poverty, students with disabilities, and English-language learners.
- With one in five children—more than 16 million—living in households with incomes below the official U.S. poverty threshold ($23,850 for a family of four), income inequality and lagging investments in public education have exacerbated the resource and opportunity gaps that exist for students across the country. Consequently, the federal role in ensuring equal 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 schools—with no significant closure of achievement gaps or opportunity gaps.
- 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 and created a culture of high-stakes testing that makes it impossible for educators to do what is most important: instill a love of learning in their students.
- A reauthorization of the 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” of quality school indicators to support learning and expose opportunity gaps.
- States and districts must collect and report gaps in resources, supports and programs offered to students
  - Report data—disaggregated by NCLB’s current student population groups—related to:
    - Students’ access to advanced coursework (AP/IB, dual enrollment)
    - Graduation rates
    - Students’ access to fully qualified teachers
    - Students’ access to specialized instructional support personnel (school counselors, nurses, psychologists)
    - Access to high quality early education programs
    - Access to arts and athletic programs
    - Eligible students’ access to community support services like health care and wellness programs
- States include in their ESEA applications "opportunity and equity plans" to remedy gaps or inequities revealed by the "opportunity dashboard".
Offer federal financial incentives to states to develop, adopt, and implement a state education finance system that would provide equitable and sufficient funding for every student to meet state content and performance standards.

Ensure all children have access to a high-quality early childhood education.

**Ensure more time for students to learn and teachers to teach**

- Reduce amount of mandated standardized testing, and use an approach known as “grade-span” testing—once in elementary, once in middle, and once in high school—to give teachers more one-on-one time with students, especially those most in need of extra help.
- Support classroom-level, teacher-developed assessments that are aligned with college and career-ready standards with clear scoring rubrics.
- Provide states and districts with the flexibility to determine – based upon input from classroom educators – the types of tests that will provide educators the most useful information to improve instruction and help students learn, and require states to attest in their state plans the elimination of tests that are redundant or not useful.
- Use time recovered from fewer tests to support performance-based and project-based learning and assessment, and to ensure students have access to well-rounded courses, including fine arts and physical education, instead of the narrowed curriculum that was an unintended consequence of NCLB testing mandates.
- Enact “Ethan’s Law” so that educators can tell parents about opt out options without penalty.

**Ensure qualified educators for students and empower them to lead**

- Build a pipeline of diverse, 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.
- Ensure educators have authority to do their jobs.
- 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 in how to interpret data and use it to modify instruction, curriculum, and drive student-centered supports.
- Provide professional development, resources and support for all personnel at the school level to effectively serve diverse learners, as well as foster and sustain an environment that best allows our students to learn successfully (such as 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.