

# Reauthorizing ESEA the *Right* Way

## A Glossary to Education Policy Terms

### U.S. Education Policy

The original Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), enacted in 1965 as part of President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty, promised all students equal access to educational opportunities. The first section of the law, Title I, is the biggest source of federal funding for education. Most of the programs it supports are aimed at poor students and schools.

Congress has reauthorized ESEA eight times over the years. No Child Left Behind, the current version, was signed into law by President George W. Bush in 2002. Changing the name of the law signaled a new direction: greater emphasis on accountability and disaggregation of data to illuminate achievement gaps. It also brought widely deplored unanticipated consequences:

- Narrowing the curriculum
- Teaching to the test
- Lowering state academic standards
- Labeling and punishing students and schools based on poorly designed tests administered on a single day of the school year

The bottom line is that No Child Left Behind has failed to raise the achievement of all students and close achievement gaps — its own fundamental purpose.

As the ninth reauthorization of ESEA approaches, we call on Congress to correct the failures of NCLB and reaffirm every student's right to a great public school — a school that educates the whole child, involves the whole family, and engages the entire community.

*The National Education Association is the nation's largest professional employee organization, representing 3.2 million elementary and secondary school teachers, higher education faculty, education support professionals, school administrators, retired educators, and students preparing to become teachers.*

# Terms to Know

**Accountable:** Answerable or responsible for an outcome or result.

**Achievement gaps:** Disparities in the academic performance of otherwise comparable groups of students who vary by race, ethnicity, gender, or socio-economic status. For example, more than 80 percent of white students graduate from high school, while barely 60 percent of African-American and Hispanic students graduate.

**Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP):** Created by No Child Left Behind, this proxy for progress in academic performance is defined differently by each state. Schools are categorized on the basis of students' scores on standardized tests in language arts and mathematics given once a year in grades three through eight. AYP originally was designed to compare this year's students to last year's students to determine if the school and district were improving.

**American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA):** Signed into law in 2009 by President Barack Obama, this \$787 billion economic stimulus package provided more than \$130 billion for U.S. Department of Education programs. It also created competition-driven programs such as Race to the Top, the Teacher Incentive Fund, and School Improvement Grants.

**Assessment systems:** Formative assessments — for example, students' projects and real-world application of knowledge — are used to provide immediate feedback and improve lessons. Summative assessments — for example, statewide and end-of-course tests — “summarize” or “sum up” a student's learning; standardized tests are a form of summative assessment. All assessment systems should help students learn to solve problems and think critically.

**Charter management organization (CMO):** Non-profit entity that starts and manages charter schools.

**Collective bargaining:** Negotiations between an employer and a group of employees that determine the conditions of employment.

**Common core state standards:** K-12 standards developed for nationwide use by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers in partnership with NEA members, other educators, and content experts. The English-language arts and mathematics standards were issued in June 2010 and adopted by 40 of the 50 states within two months.

**Disaggregated data:** In general, “disaggregate” means to separate a whole into its parts. Under No Child Left Behind, it means sorting and reporting students’ test results in 10 categories: American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, Hispanic, black, white, multiracial, migrant, economically disadvantaged, limited English proficiency, and students with disabilities.

**Economically disadvantaged:** For purposes of No Child Left Behind, generally means students who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

**Education management organization (EMO):** Private company that runs public schools, usually on a for-profit basis.

**Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA):** Enacted in 1965 as part of President Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty to provide equal educational opportunity for all, especially poor students. Reauthorized eight times, most recently in 2002 as No Child Left Behind. Title I of ESEA is the largest source of federal funding for education.

**English-language learners (ELLs):** Students with limited proficiency in English, often because English is not their first language. The number of ELLs in our schools has grown rapidly — and continues to grow — especially in certain parts of the country. ELLs constitute more than 10 percent of the total U.S. student population and more than 20 percent in urban areas. Most ELLs are U.S. citizens.

**Growth model:** Measures progress by tracking the performance of individual students over time. More accurate than the current measure — Adequate Yearly Progress — which compares test scores of groups of students whose composition varies from year to year.

**Investing in Innovation Fund (i3):** Competition-driven program created by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) that funds programs run by partnerships of local educational agencies, nonprofits, and schools. Union-led schools and partnerships are eligible for grants awarded by this program.

**Local educational agency (LEA):** Board of education or other body that oversees public elementary or secondary schools in a city, county, township, school district, or other subdivision of a state.

**National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP):** Known as “the nation’s report card” because it is the largest, nationally representative, continuing assessment of U.S. student performance. Covers many subjects, including mathematics, reading, science, writing, the arts, civics, economics, geography, and U.S. history. Unlike state tests, NAEP data show essentially no progress since enactment of No Child Left Behind.

**No Child Left Behind (NCLB):** Eighth reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which was signed into law in 2002 by President George W. Bush.

**Race to the Top (RTTT):** Competition-driven grant program created by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) that requires states who apply for a one-time infusion of federal funds to agree to make lasting changes in state laws and policies.

**School Improvement Grants (SIG):** Title I program for struggling schools created by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) that uses the U.S. Department of Education's four turnaround models.

**Standardized tests:** All students receive the same directions, the same amount of time, and answer the same questions, usually in a multiple-choice format that is computer-scored. Each question has only one correct answer. Standardized tests usually are not designed to encourage critical thinking and problem solving.

**State educational agency (SEA):** State department of education that oversees public elementary and secondary schools.

**State report cards:** Data on the performance of schools and districts that are compiled and published (generally on the Web) to fulfill No Child Left Behind reporting requirements. Test scores are sorted into 10 categories: American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, Hispanic, black, white, multiracial, migrant, economically disadvantaged, limited English proficiency, and students with disabilities.

**Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF):** Provides competitive grants for development, implementation, and evaluation of performance-based compensation systems.

**Title I:** First section of ESEA and biggest source of federal funding for education, especially for poor students and schools in high-poverty neighborhoods.

**Turnaround models:** The U.S. Department of Education's four approaches to improving struggling schools. The "turnaround model" entails firing the principal and 50 percent or more of the staff, adopting a new governance structure, and changing the curriculum. Under the "restart model," a school is closed and then reopened by a charter school operator, charter management organization (CMO), or education management organization (EMO). The "closure model" entails shutting a school down and enrolling its students in other schools. The "transformation model," the only model offering the promise of lasting change, requires a new principal (unless a waiver is granted), professional development for teachers, extended learning time for students, and outreach to families and communities.

**Reauthorize:** To renew and revise an existing law.

**Value-added model:** Uses past performance to predict how much students' test scores will rise in a given year. Teachers get higher ratings if students do better than predicted and lower ratings if students do worse. Researchers agree that out-of-school factors — e.g., family background and motivation — are responsible for 60 percent of the variation in test scores and teachers less than 10 percent. Statisticians agree that current value-added models fall short with regard to “reliability” and “validity” — consistency and accuracy.

## About this Publication

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