



**“The National Voice for Education Leaders”**

**AFSA Recommendations for the Reauthorizations of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)**

The American Federation of School Administrators (AFSA), AFL-CIO, is the international union of education leaders, representing nearly 20,000 school principals, assistant principals, supervisors and education professionals throughout the nation, the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico.

The significance of this reauthorization will have very powerful consequences for our nation’s children, parents, schools, education professionals and society as a whole, for many years to come. The last iteration of ESEA, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), has shone a light on the growing disparities and achievement gaps that are prevalent throughout our education system. However, it is very clear that NCLB places unfair demands on educators – providing insufficient support to meet the demands – and imposes sanctions that do nothing to benefit schools or children.

However, as evidenced by the administration’s Race to the Top (RTTT) program, the President’s FY 2011 Budget Request for Education, and the Department of Education’s recently released “Blueprint” for the reauthorization of ESEA, the administration is recommending much of what exists in NCLB be included in the reauthorization of ESEA; including the mandated corrective actions for the lowest performing schools – that are not based on actual evidence – rather than ensuring they have adequate resources combined with assistance in implementing tailored improvement efforts, and also a continued emphasis on standardized test scores.

AFSA urges Congress to give strong consideration to the following recommendations:

**1. Accountability**

AFSA supports the Department of Education’s proposed elimination of ‘Adequate Yearly Progress’ as the measure of a school’s performance. Schools, and the students and educators within their walls, should never be labeled as ‘failing.’ However, the administration’s proposed College- and Career-Ready standards, while presenting a high-standard of excellence for all students, maintain a strong reliance on standardized tests as the major basis of school evaluation. AFSA is committed to excellence in education, and believes that all schools must be held accountable for educating all students. However, ESEA must support school efforts to

improve, and help states and districts develop methods of using evaluations – not used as a means to punish – and that include multiple indicators of student learning that should be considered when measuring student performance.

We are also very concerned that the blueprint includes the four flawed corrective action methods that target our nation’s ‘lowest performing’ schools. Looking beyond the fact that these schools are labeled as failing using a flawed instrument, AFSA adamantly opposes these “improvement” methods that are not based on evidence, and all call for the immediate removal of the principal. *Rather than calling for their immediate removal, principals should be looked to as key players in implementing school reform initiatives, for they often have a unique understanding of the school culture and needs, and are able to create a system of core values within a school environment.*

Truly turning around schools in a manner that benefits present and future students is not an overnight fix. Reforms, of any nature, take time and supports. *AFSA recommends that school administrators be given the opportunity AND capacity to effectively implement reforms that cater to state and federally imposed goals before any federal corrective action is taken.* The time necessary for implementing such reforms will vary depending on several factors, including a school’s current status, environment, culture, available resources and support etc. Research has proven that whole-school reforms usually take a minimum of three to five years to implement. *Therefore, AFSA recommends that before federal action is taken, a minimum of four years be offered to implement individualized reform efforts after a school has been labeled as one of the nation’s lowest performing schools.* In addition, the federal government must support school and LEA efforts to develop strong cultures of learning, collaboration, community involvement and cooperation.

By allowing this time and providing the necessary support structures, school leaders are given the opportunity to use their knowledge of the school and surrounding community to develop effective reforms.

## **2. Professional Development**

*PD should: foster collective responsibility among educators for student performance; be team-based and facilitated by school-based leaders; take place several times per week in a continuous cycle of improvement; define clear teacher-learning goals based on data analysis; and inform ongoing improvements in student learning<sup>1</sup>.*

*Principals must receive a knowledge-base of reform practices during the principal certification process, and this knowledge must be continuously developed through local professional development opportunities.*

Research has found that leadership is second only to classroom instruction among school-related factors that influence student outcomes- direct and indirect leadership effects account

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<sup>1</sup> Bloom, Howard S. *Evaluation Review*, Feb2003, Vol. 27 Issue 1, p3, 47p. (AN 9004586)

for about one-quarter of total school effects on student learning. Furthermore, the quality of school leadership has a direct impact on student achievement, and teacher recruitment, retention and effectiveness.

However, professional development for administrators and supervisory staffs has long been overlooked. Although the Department of Education's blueprint recognizes the importance of professional development for school administrators, their recommendations are very general and not a central focus of contributing to student achievement. If school administrators are to compensate for all of the factors facing our children and schools, they must be equipped with the necessary tools and supported in the work that they have been called upon to do. Administrators must receive an equal or greater amount of professional development than teachers, as administrators are ultimately held accountable for student achievement and school progress.

Professional development must be systemic, sustained, and coherent. It must also be provided at the local level, with a focus on the unique needs of the school with a specific understanding of the community it serves. It must vary in topics and methods of administration, so that educators are offered a balanced array of professional development, in which they may effectively explore and further their personal education as well as develop fundamental areas of knowledge. Title II funds provided to State educational agencies under ESEA must adequately support these endeavors, and LEAs must receive the support and resources to provide educators with appropriate professional development opportunities.

Increased and consistent time and compensation must be afforded to foster peer collaboration, including time to focus on strategies and improve instruction. Professional development must also meet the individual and systemic needs to improve school performance and encourage post-graduate programs, in collaboration with universities and school systems, as incentives to retain and improve the performance of school leaders.

Specifically, professional development must:

- Be developed in collaboration with local principal organizations;
- Meet the specific needs of the school's teachers, principals and school supervisors;
- Foster collective responsibility for student learning;
- Be developed with principal, teacher and school supervisor input and ensure all are fully prepared to implement the educational strategy;
- Be designed and implemented in a collaborative manner that increases teacher, principal, superintendent and other supervisory staff capacity in improving student learning;
- Primarily occurs multiple times per week during the regular school day on a consistent basis and in a continuous cycle of professional learning and improvement;
- Define a clear set of educator learning goals to improve student learning and improving classroom practices;

- Include coherent, sustained and evidence-based strategies to meet educator learning goals

### **3. Assessments**

All students must be offered a rich and intellectually challenging curriculum that includes all subject areas, music and the arts, as well as physical education. Only then will they remain engaged in the curriculum and truly receive a high quality education.

The Department of Education's blueprint calls for standardized tests in subjects other than reading and math, in order to ensure that those subjects are taught. It is imperative that students be evaluated on their understanding and comprehension of many topics. Yet, in order to accurately reflect individual student knowledge, assessments must go beyond predominately multiple choice tests and incorporate performance assessments, including student portfolios, a student's ability to use technology, perform scientific tasks, present ideas and defend them, and ability to solve complex problems. They must also provide teachers and administrators with prompt feedback, so that instruction may be tailored to meet individual student needs.

To be most-effective, state content and achievement standards must be consistent across state borders while maintaining international benchmarks. Such action will allow for less troublesome student mobilization and the sharing of best-practices among LEAs.

Assessments must:

- Align with state content and achievement standards;
- Align with college and career ready standards and skills;
- Be used for purposes for which they are valid and reliable;
- Be consistent with nationally recognized professional and technical standards;
- Be of adequate technical quality for each purpose required under the reauthorization;
- Be internationally benchmarked;
- Include samples of student work, such as performance tasks and projects;
- Include a technological component, which is an essential part of fostering 21st century skills among students;
- Provide multiple, up-to-date measures of student performance including measures that assess higher order thinking skills and understanding and not be based solely on test scores;
- Support the use of growth measures – provided that such measurers incorporate multiple measures;
- Provide useful diagnostic information to improve teaching and learning; and
- Ensure that the needs of diverse learners are met by utilizing universal design

#### **4. Data**

With the increased emphasis on implementing educational data systems across the country, the Federal Government must provide sufficient funding to be used for the implementation of high-quality, comprehensive longitudinal data systems that track student progress across district and state lines. Educators at the local level must be provided with the skills and resources to effectively utilize the information provided by the implementation of comprehensive state longitudinal data systems.

Data should not be used as a punitive measure, judging educators and districts on test scores that are often unreflective of actual student achievement and performance. Tying data to sanctions and punitive measures negates the true benefits of regularly including data within a school setting.

To be most effective, data should also include individual student information that is outside of a school's control. Specifically this should include student mobility, transience, attendance, behavior records, language backgrounds, community and socio-economic conditions, and access to health care. We applaud the Department's recognition that race, gender, ethnicity, disability status, ELL status and family income have an effect on student achievement. While the Department has also noted that states and districts collect additional information about teaching and learning conditions, including school climate such as student, disciplinary incidents; or student, parent, or school staff surveys about their school experience, it is imperative that these indicators be tracked throughout all states and districts throughout K-12.

#### **5. Shared Accountability**

Schools cannot be the only ones held responsible and accountable for each child's education and progress. A key means for dramatically improving student achievement is to enhance family support for student learning at home and at school. Schools and districts must be afforded linkages to social workers, bilingual staff, child care and collaboration with community health based organizations and immigrations services, to build parent involvement and assist parents to partner more easily and readily with the school to support their children's academic progress.

Parents must make sure their child attends school daily and on time, ensure there is literacy time set aside daily in the home, discuss their child's academic progress with their teacher(s) regularly, discuss and plan for post-secondary education with their child and address appropriate classroom behavior. Parents must also be held accountable for attending free parenting workshops and seminars.

Funds must also be provided to all Title I-funded schools and programs to provide parenting skills and adult literacy to enable parents to better assist their child's learning, and adult mentoring programs for children without families available to provide such support. Specific

resources must be allocated to incorporate parents of students with special needs into the mainstream parent community.

It is well documented that schools with high quality, structured parent/family involvement programs yield better grades, higher test scores and higher graduation rates, and decrease drug and alcohol use and violent behavior. Moreover, family involvement and accountability programs are linked to higher teacher and administrator morale and increased job satisfaction.

## **6. Opportunity to Learn**

President Obama has often referred to education as a civil right. Indeed, the Elementary Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) was a civil rights piece of legislation enacted to promote equity in education. However, 45 years after the enactment of ESEA, there remain gross inequities in state and local funding systems for education.

In addition, it is morally unacceptable that the many school districts that have the greatest need actually receive the least support and resources. Many school districts serve large concentrations of low-income, English Language Learners (ELL), and students with special needs. Yet, because 90% of education funding is derived from local tax bases, these schools receive a disproportionate share of per-pupil funding. Funding for wealthier districts outweighs poor school districts by 3:1 in most states. Sadly, this leaves many schools without the resources or materials they need (science labs, quality teachers, college preparatory curriculum, etc.) to prepare students to academically succeed.

Currently, NCLB overemphasizes outcomes (test results) and lack of attention to inputs (equitable funding, student background, family income, individual student preexisting academic achievement, preexisting school resources, parent involvement, etc.) which is greatly thwarting its goals. AFSA believes that if there are to be common standards of achievement, there must also be a *common opportunity standard*. All children, regardless of race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status deserve an equal opportunity to learn. This includes a quality early childhood education, highly qualified teachers and principals, college and work preparatory curriculum, and equitable instructional resources.

AFSA strongly recommends that the reauthorization of ESEA:

- Provide federal incentives for states to reform their inequitable school funding systems. Require states seeking this aid to adopt policies that will result in equitable funding both between and within school districts.
- Require states to provide additional Title I funds and direct additional resources to support disadvantaged students. This funding should supplement existing state and local money – not supplant it.

## **7. Funding**

One of the biggest criticisms of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is that its lack of funding leaves schools and educators unable to implement any type of meaningful education reforms. A reauthorized ESEA must be fully funded, providing educators with adequate funds and

resources to be able to support such initiatives as creating new and efficient data systems, reforms to turnaround low-performing schools, the appropriate training for teachers and leaders to be able to implement such reforms, the development of state assessments that reflect higher educational standards, and the overall quest of creating a better system of education for our nation's students.

The members of AFSA are greatly concerned regarding the strong emphasis placed on competition within the President's FY 2011 Budget request for education. Rather than increase funds for unproven, ineffective programs and initiatives, AFSA recommends that the reauthorized version of ESEA reflect an investment in programs that have been proven to support students and their educational progress (i.e. Headstart, early Headstart, School Leadership, Title I Grants, Elementary and Secondary School Counseling, etc.). In this time of economic crisis, school leaders depend on sustained, reliable funding methods, and cannot afford to base their yearly budgets around unpredictable government funds. In fact, many of the administration's policies emphasize competition, whereas certain states are rewarded grants while other states receive level funding. Many low-income and rural districts remain at a disadvantage to be able to compete for such high-stake competitive grants.

The consolidated method of funding education programs and initiatives as presented in the President's FY2011 Budget is another issue of concern. While AFSA greatly appreciates the \$4 billion increase allocated for education funding, the fact that the budget consolidated the funds of various education programs into "buckets" forces states and districts to pick and choose programs that will receive funds- programs that may assist entirely different populations of students or educators. Rather than consolidate these funds, AFSA urges Congress to take into account the populations of students and educators, no matter how small, that these essential programs assist, and fully and equally fund the reauthorization of ESEA.

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