

## **National Council for Educating Black Children**

The National Council for Educating Black Children (NCEBC) has a keen interest in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the major federal legislation aimed at equalizing educational opportunity for poor and minority children in America. In its work across the country, the NCEBC has found that the much-discussed achievement is a function of an unaddressed opportunity gap. Critical issues include a lack of access to high quality preschool experiences; under-resourced schools; poor quality instruction by underprepared teachers; and inadequate education of parents and involvement in their children's schools.[1]

Our recommendations for the reauthorization focus on these critical issues and are organized around proposals in the following areas:

1. Equalize school resources and opportunities to learn;
2. Create effective assessment and accountability strategies that improve schools.
3. Ensure high-quality preparation and development for teachers and leaders, especially those who serve in high-need schools;
4. Invest strategically in high-quality, relevant curriculum and supportive learning environments;
5. Support effective parent education and involvement

### **1. Address Inequalities in Access to Resources for Learning**

Although NCLB calls for closing the achievement gap, it does little to ensure adequate and equitable resources across schools. The onus of NCLB is on individual schools to raise test scores. However, the law does not address the profound educational inequalities that plague our nation. Despite a 3-to-1 ratio between high- and low-spending schools in most states, multiplied further by inequalities across states, neither NCLB nor other federal education policies require that states demonstrate progress toward adequate funding or equitable opportunities to learn. Furthermore, federal funds are allocating inequitably across states, giving more to the wealthy than the poor. Thus, in addition to measuring progress in achievement, a new ESEA should:

- Allocate resources more equitably across states. Currently the Title I formula allocates more funding to high-spending and wealthier states than to those with the greatest concentrations of need. The formula should be redesigned to invest more in states with the greatest concentrations of low-income children, adjusted for states' fiscal effort and costs of living.
- Enforce ESEA comparability provisions for ensuring equitable resources and equally qualified teachers to schools serving different populations of students. ESEA already requires that states develop policies and incentives to balance the qualifications of teachers across schools serving more and less advantaged students, so that disadvantaged students do not experience a disproportionate number of teachers who are unqualified, inexperienced, or out-of-field. However, this aspect of the law is weakly enforced,[2] and wide disparities continue to occur. The new Race

to the Top rules have not addressed this issue, as they have not protected funding for poor schools or equity funding promised in state school finance agreements from budget cuts. Neither have recent Rules committed to ensure equitable funding or teacher quality.

- Create incentives for states to equalize funding. As outlined in the Fattah – Dodd Student Bill of Rights, federal education funding to states should be tied to each state’s demonstrated movement toward equitable access to education resources, allocated in accordance with students’ needs and local costs of education rather than the wealth of the community in they reside. As a condition for receiving federal funds, each state should include in its application for federal funds under ESEA a report describing the state’s demonstrated movement toward adequacy and equitable access to these education resources – and a plan for further progress.
- Develop and use standards of resource adequacy to guide reporting and intervention. Currently, the child and the school are held accountable to the state for test performance, but the state is not held accountable to the child or his school for providing adequate educational resources. In too many parts of the country, students are asked to meet new standards without having the resources needed to do so. Opportunity-to-learn (OTL) standards should outline the resources needed for students to have a genuine opportunity to meet achievement expectations, including access to high-quality curriculum, teachers well-qualified to teach the curriculum, appropriate curriculum materials, books, technology, and supportive services; and access to other resources needed to succeed in school.
- Require states to report on opportunity indicators to accompany their reports of academic progress for each school, reflecting the availability of well-qualified teachers; strong curriculum opportunities; books, materials and equipment (such as science labs and computers); and adequate facilities. In its Opportunity to Learn campaign, the Schott Foundation calls for state-by-state evaluation of children’s equitable access to preschool education, college preparatory coursework, well-prepared and effective teachers, and instructional resources.[3] Such standards -- and the indicators used to measure them -- should provide information about the nature of the teaching and learning opportunities made available to students in different states, districts, and schools, and should provide a benchmark for evaluating access to critical resources.
- Require states to meet Opportunity-to-Learn standards for schools identified as failing. When schools are identified as failing, states should have an affirmative obligation to ensure that necessary resources are made available as part of any corrective action. An effective intervention system for diagnosing and remedying the sources of school failure is an essential component of an accountability system that works for students.
- Include analyses of access to learning opportunities in school reviews. At the school level, students are often given access to very different learning pathways and opportunities, and experience very different treatment as a function of race and

class. Although OCR is revising its rules to better collect data on many of these conditions, there is no clear pathway to redress, other than grievances, even in cases where schools are under state review or program improvement. When there are serious shortcomings in schools' practices and outcomes, states should involve expert teams in evaluating the root causes of school failure -- including the qualifications of personnel, the nature of curriculum resources, student access to high-quality teaching, administrative strategies, organizational structures, and other essential aspects of students' experiences in school -- and, with the district and school, develop a plan to correct them. If policy changes are needed to implement a remedy or to ensure that the problems experienced by the school do not recur on a regular basis (in that school or in other schools), then the State and local district should also assume responsibility for developing new policies that are more supportive of school success and that ensure the protection of students' entitlement to high-quality education.

## **2. Create Effective Assessment and Accountability Strategies that Improve Schools.**

It is clear that the accountability measures in NCLB need to be revised so that they focus on critical school goals -- including the central importance of serving high need students and keeping them in school, enabling them to graduate successfully. We have seen that when sanctions are triggered by measures such as average school test scores, perverse incentives can be created that harm students, keeping out or pushing out those who do not achieve. Measures need to be based on the growth and success of all students in the school and on educationally sound evaluations of school practices. The incentive structure must provide incentives for schools which provide high-quality education to be rewarded for opening their doors to the students who are in the greatest educational need and for supporting the spread of successful practices to other schools.

It is also critically important to focus the teaching and learning enterprise on the right goals. This should include encouraging thoughtful measures of student performance that can support the kind of learning we need in schools and developing a more useful method for charting school progress. Although No Child Left Behind calls for multiple measures and for assessing higher-order thinking skills, its previous implementation caused most states to drop such assessments (due to costs and federal approval standards) and the law currently lacks incentives to encourage better assessments. This both undermines instructional quality and reinforces inequality, because low-income schools are most likely to experience an impoverished curriculum organized only around narrow, lower-level tests. To address these problems, a new ESEA should:

- Support the development and use of assessments that measure the knowledge and skills need in the 21st century. As in high-achieving countries -- and as called for by President Obama -- assessments should include evidence of actual student performance on challenging tasks that evaluate standards of 21st century learning. Curriculum and assessments should emphasize deep knowledge of core concepts within and across the disciplines, problem solving, analysis, synthesis, research ability, written and oral communication skills, and critical thinking. To do this Congress should

- Fund an intensive development effort that enables states or consortia of states to work with assessment experts to develop, validate, and test new high-quality assessments, including performance components, which are mapped to the emerging Common Core standards, and can be used in valid and reliable ways.
- Encourage improvements in state and local assessment practice. The new Elementary and Secondary Education Act should provide incentives and funding for states or state consortia to refine their state assessments, and introduce high-quality performance assessments that evaluate critical thinking and applied skills. It should also support states in making such assessments reliable, valid, and practically feasible, through scorer training and moderation systems, as well as the use of new technologies.
- Ensure more appropriate assessment for special education students and English language learners by underwriting efforts to develop, validate, and disseminate more appropriate assessments in the content areas for these students, and by ensuring that the law and regulations encourage assessments that are based on professional testing standards for these groups.[4] This would include helping to develop and requiring the use of tests that are language-accessible for ELLs and appropriate for special education students, and evaluating their gains at all points along the achievement continuum.

A new set of measures is also essential for evaluating school progress. Current NCLB rules requiring that 100 percent of students reach “proficiency” by 2014, and setting as many as 30 separate targets for schools to meet in order to make adequate yearly progress (AYP), will identify nearly all schools as failing by 2014, even if they are high-achieving or steeply improving. It is impossible with the current metrics to distinguish between a school that shows little gain for its students on any of the tests, and one that shows substantial gains.

Furthermore, under current rules, all schools that serve English language learners will eventually be declared failing, because a Catch-22 provision in the law requires reaching 100 percent proficiency for this group, but removes students from the subgroup after they become proficient, making the target impossible to meet. Schools that serve a steady stream of new immigrants who are non-native English speakers are, by definition, unable to make adequate yearly progress under the law, no matter how successful they are in helping their students learn English over time. In addition, the focus on increasing test outcomes alone has created incentives for schools to boost scores by keeping or pushing out low-scoring students, especially those with special needs and English language learners. School incentives should recognize the value of keeping students in school as well as improving learning. To address these problems, the new ESEA should:

- Use a Continuous Progress Index to measure student and school progress. A Continuous Progress Index should be used to evaluate school progress on an index of measures that includes assessments of student learning along with school progression and graduation rates. Other indicators of school functioning could also be included, as

they are in school report cards in many states and high-achieving nations. Such an index would evaluate students' growth over time, across the entire achievement continuum, thus focusing attention on progress in all students' learning, not just on those who fall at the so-called "proficiency bubble." This would recognize schools' gains with students who score well below and above a single cut score and encourage more appropriate inclusion of special education students and English language learners. The index would accommodate longitudinal value-added measures of student learning, and it could include multiple assessments of student learning that capture more complex inquiry and problem solving skills. It could also include assessments of subject areas beyond reading and mathematics – such as writing, science, and history – which are important in their own right and essential to develop students' knowledge and literacy skills as they are applied in the content areas.

A continuous progress index would give schools a reasonable growth target to aim for each year for each student group – so that incentives encourage ongoing improvements for all groups. It would encourage schools' attention to all students' learning, and allow for several kinds of important evidence about progress to be considered in evaluating schools. It would also more clearly identify those that are truly failing, so that states can focus their resources for improvement where they are most needed, using a school quality review process to diagnose school needs and to support more productive interventions.

- Support states to develop a diagnostic School Quality Review system to evaluate schools, to guide improvement, and to share best practices. Having data on school outcomes is not enough to guide improvement. An expert analysis of school capacity and needs is a necessary first step toward identifying problems and moving strategically toward solutions. Schools that are identified as needing improvement should be further evaluated through a school inspection system, like those common in many other nations, in which trained experts evaluate schools by spending several days visiting classrooms, examining samples of student work, and interviewing students about their understanding and their experiences, as well as looking at objective data such as test scores, graduation rates, and the like.[5] Schools are evaluated on the quality of instruction and other services and supports, as well as students' performance and progress on a wide range of dimensions. Schools receive extensive feedback on what the inspectors saw and recommend. Reports are publicly posted. Schools requiring intervention are then given more expert attention and support, and placed on a more frequent schedule of visits. Those that persistently fail to pass are placed in intervention status and can be transformed or closed down if they are not improved. Successful schools are highlighted and studied. A new ESEA should support state education agencies to create the capacity for school inspections or review led by expert practitioners who can help diagnose needs and outline effective strategies for improvement. Such quality reviews might initially be focused on the needs of schools requiring intervention, and eventually expanded to provide a means for continuous improvement for all schools across the state and as a coordinated means to share best practices.

### **3. Ensure Well-Prepared Teachers and Leaders in High-Need Communities**

Low income students, students of color, and English language learners are especially disadvantaged by growing disparities in access to well-qualified teachers -- disparities which are strongly associated with student achievement. For example, a recent large-scale study of high school students' achievement in North Carolina found that teachers were more significantly more effective if they were fully prepared when they entered teaching, had taught for more than two years, were certified in the specific field they taught, had higher scores on a teacher licensing test, and were National Board certified. The effects on student achievement of having a teacher with most of these qualifications as compared to having one with few were greater than the effects of race and parent education combined.[6] The achievement gap would be much reduced if low-income minority students were routinely assigned such highly-qualified teachers rather than the poorly qualified teachers they most often encounter.

Furthermore, although the federal government has encouraged the expansion of alternative routes to teaching, many of these routes prepare teachers inadequately, thus creating negative effects on student achievement.[7] These effects were illuminated by a recent Mathematica study, which found that, in the high-minority, low-income schools that hire such teachers, the reading and math achievement of students taught by teachers from what the study called "low-coursework" alternative programs actually declined between fall and spring of the academic year.[8] Teachers from the "high-coursework" alternative programs did better, and their traditional route counterparts did better still, suggesting that more complete preparation for teachers leads to better outcomes for students. Students of fully prepared teachers did significantly better than those of alternatively certified (AC) teachers who were still taking coursework while they taught.

Current rules under Race to the Top offer mixed messages -- on the one hand expecting states to equalize access to highly effective teachers and, on the other, urging states to employ low-coursework alternative certification programs that have been shown to produce lower student achievement and higher teacher attrition -- exacerbating the revolving door of inexperienced teachers in high-need schools.

An equitable and adequate system will need to address the supply of well-prepared educators -- the most fundamental of all resources -- by building an infrastructure that ensures high-quality and continuously improving preparation for all educators and ensures that well-trained educators are available to all students in all communities. These educators must know how to teach in ways that enable students to master challenging content and that address the specific needs of different learners, including new English language learners as well as students with special education needs. In addition, teachers and school leaders must have opportunities to improve their cultural competency skills and their ability to engage students in challenging, interesting and relevant learning experiences.

To achieve this, current ad hoc approaches to teacher and principal recruitment, preparation, licensing, hiring, and ongoing professional development must be reshaped so that all students will have access to effective teachers and school leaders. A new ESEA should

- Create incentives for driving states toward effective teacher education and professional development programs- Revise the current rules requiring states to invest in alternative programs to a requirement that states evaluate and expand effective preparation programs for teachers. The Department should call for states to evaluate all their programs – both traditional and alternative – in terms of retention, performance of their graduates on valid teacher performance assessments, and evidence of later effectiveness in the classroom in terms of both practice and outcomes. States should incorporate these data into program approval and accreditation decisions. They should study the features of programs that are most effective, and incorporate into program guidelines the features found to improve teacher outcomes.
- Support better measures of teacher effectiveness as the basis for licensing, hiring, and recognizing teachers. Federal investments and accountability expectations (under Title II of both ESEA and HEA) should encourage the development and use of teacher performance assessments that evaluate whether prospective teachers can actually teach successfully in classrooms. Current tests used for licensing and program accountability measure basic skills and subject matter knowledge in ways that demonstrate little about teachers’ abilities to teach effectively. Several states, including Connecticut, California, New Mexico, and Oregon, have incorporated performance assessments in the licensing process at both the initial and professional levels. Currently, 20 states have joined together to create a common version that could be used nationwide to make preparation and licensing performance-based.

The assessments require the practices teachers need to learn to be effective with diverse students – for example, planning and teaching a curriculum unit with built-in adaptations for English language learners and students with disabilities; reflecting on evidence of student learning each day to revise plans for the next day; and tracking student learning growth with the goal of adapting instruction to ensure progress for all learners. These measures of performance have been found to predict teachers’ value-added effectiveness, as well as providing strong levers for improving preparation and mentoring. Federal support for the development and use of such performance assessments would not only provide a useful tool for accountability and improvement, but also facilitate teacher mobility across states by creating a portable license. High scorers on these assessments, like those who receive National Board certification, could be granted a national license that would allow them mobility across states, and might become eligible for incentives to attract effective teachers to high-need schools.

- Invest in successful preparation models that improve clinical preparation and the ability to teach high-need students. Fully fund the Teacher Quality Enhancement grants under Title II of HEA (authorized at \$300 million annually) that support urban and rural teacher residency programs and partnership school initiatives with IHEs. As in medicine, the federal government should invest in high-quality training sites that serve as models of practice to drive improvement. In teacher preparation, such sites should focus on how to teach standards-based content to diverse learners, including training in culturally responsive instruction and an understanding of how to teach ELL students and those with special learning needs. Successful programs, whose graduates are highly

competent from their first days in the classroom, should be further documented, and their features should be incorporated in challenge grants to universities to revamp current practices.

Investments should focus on the establishment of professional development schools which, like teaching hospitals in medicine, partner with universities to offer top-quality learning settings for children, prospective teachers, and veteran teachers alike. These school-university partnerships create the opportunity for those entering the profession to learn best practices and to develop their skills under the wing of experts while taking coursework on teaching and learning that is tightly integrated with clinical practice. Evidence shows that well-implemented professional development schools improve both teachers' skills and student learning and ground teacher education in good practice.

These kinds of programs are most needed in communities where they are often least available and where schools have often been difficult to staff. Rather than bringing in teachers with the least training to teach the students with the greatest needs, the federal government should invest in high-quality teaching residency programs for candidates who will prepare in and commit to these districts. As piloted in cities like Chicago, Boston, and Denver, teaching residencies place prospective teachers in the classrooms of expert teachers — often in schools designed to exemplify high-quality practice for high-need students — for a full year, with a salary or stipend, while they complete tightly linked course work for certification and a master's degree from partner universities. They then receive mentoring for their first 2 years of independent teaching. Candidates learn sophisticated practices from the best urban teachers, and they pay back this investment by pledging to teach for four or five years in the district. Research shows that more than 90 percent of the graduates of these programs have continued to teach in the districts where they were trained after four years. Funding for these programs should be expanded.

- Invest in expanding and strengthening teacher education programs in HBCUs and MSIs that will prepare a strong pipeline of teachers and leaders of color. HBCUs have traditionally been the strongest producers of black teachers in a number of communities and, while some programs have shrunk considerably, others have maintained their presence, and there is a new resurgence of effort in many HBCUs (and a new effort in many Minority serving institutions) to improve and expand teacher and leadership education programs that can help produce a well-prepared, diverse educator work force committed to staying in these communities. An initial competition of \$50 million to support the creation and expansion of high-quality programs would stimulate these important efforts.
- Invest in Grow-your-Own Programs that develop high school students, para-educators, and others from local communities to prepare to teach. Many communities have launched grow-your-own programs that have been quite successful. This is a different kind of alternative route that stimulates a new pipeline of teachers. These programs package financial aid for college with advisement and mentoring as candidates make their way to and through college and preparation programs.

- Support an infrastructure for regularly-available high-quality professional development. States should be supported to develop an infrastructure for high-quality professional development by funding professional development time and organizing the multiple resources of the state – from universities, districts, and nonprofit organizations – to ensure that expertise and capacity are developed to address teaching in the content areas, through Subject Matter Projects and networks, to develop culturally responsive curriculum and instruction, and to support student needs, including those of English language learners and special education students. Teacher and Leadership Academies can play a key role in doing this, helping to organize intensive institutes and networks to support leadership learning and teaching in the content areas; training principals and teachers as mentors and coaches who can support others in districts; and providing materials and expertise to support professional learning at the school level. Districts should enable schools to tap both these external resources and the critical resource of expert teachers within the schools, by creating time and regular opportunities for peer coaching and collaborative learning.
- Invest in Leadership Development. Despite the obvious importance of school leaders, only a few states and districts have developed pathways to recruit dynamic teacher leaders into high-quality training programs for the principalship. While some initiatives have been extremely successful in transforming the quality of leadership and the performance of schools, [9] they are not yet supported by stable policies to ensure a strong supply of able leaders, especially in the communities where they are most needed. Furthermore, these leaders need to know how to design and create the schools of the future, not just administer the schools of the past.

The federal government should offer matching grant funding to states to develop competitive service scholarship programs, like the North Carolina Principal Fellows program, and high-quality program models that proactively recruit talented candidates who combine teaching expertise and leadership potential and who want to work in high-need communities. In exchange for at least four years of leadership service in public schools, the initiative would underwrite the cost of a full-year internship under the wing of an expert principal who has succeeded in reforming schools in high-need communities, while prospective principals are studying instructional leadership, organizational improvement, and change management in high-quality programs tightly connected to schools.

Federal challenge grants should also be available to create and further enhance State Leadership Academies in every state. These Academies, located in universities, state agencies, or free-standing organizations, can serve as centers where each state's top educational leaders gather to share practices and help create and coordinate the professional development infrastructure in their states. As in existing successful Academies, these can serve as hubs to develop institutes, coaching, and mentoring supports, and principal and superintendent networks that address the unique challenges encountered by leaders in diverse kinds of schools. The federal government should also launch a line of research about the effectiveness of these various approaches to leadership development so that future investments can be guided by evidence about what best supports leaders' capacities to develop high-performing school organizations.

4. Invest strategically in high-quality, relevant curriculum and supportive learning environments in high-need schools.

The challenge of getting to scale with good educational practice[10] is one of developing widespread educational leadership and expert teaching, on the one hand, and encouraging the design of effective organizations on a system-wide scale, on the other. Schools have to be places that support good teaching and learning, and the work that students and teachers are asked to do needs to be work worth doing. U.S. schools that have been redesigned to foster more personalized relationships through smaller learning communities that foster teaching teams that share students, advisory systems that provide individualized supports and parent connections, have produced lower rates of violence, vandalism, and dropout, and higher rates of attendance, student graduation and college-going.

Schools that also offer more challenging and relevant curriculum have increased achievement, by providing opportunities for hands-on instruction that takes community-based concerns into account. Such schools are also much more able to attract and retain well-qualified teachers, as they are satisfying places to learn and work. Ultimately, teachers and students want most of all to be efficacious, which is why supportive teaching and learning conditions are so important to retention and, ultimately, effectiveness for both. To accomplish this, a new ESEA should:

- Encourage more productive school designs and curriculum through continuation and expansion of Small Learning Communities grants and the development of grants for high school models like Career Academies that successfully integrate career technical education with preparation for college. Federal policy needs both to fund new designs and to systematically remove regulatory obstacles to new approaches. To achieve more personalized school settings in which students do not fall through the cracks and teachers have adequate time to create strong instruction together, federal incentives in ESEA should encourage restructured time and staffing so that teachers have regular time to work with one another and with individual students in every school: an appropriate goal would be at least ten hours a week for joint planning and collaborative learning (about half of what teachers in high-achieving nations receive). These commitments should be accompanied by investments in technology that extend the capacity of every teacher and child to connect with an infinite variety of resources and tools for learning, and in new assessment systems that value students' abilities to use these tools to solve real world problems.
- Sponsor successful models for school transformation. Research has found that a combination of professional learning, support for teaching and learning conditions – including strong leadership and the necessary resources for teaching -- and incentives is critical to improving school performance. All of these factors should be included in school improvement supports under ESEA.

In addition, schools should be supported to become hubs of community involvement and gateways to critical social service providers without the burden of having to manage hundreds of small, disjointed categorical programs that come and go and create more

barriers than opportunities. In communities with concentrations of poverty, schools should be enabled to combine funding streams to offer family literacy programs, adult education courses, and on-site health clinics where substantial proportions of students might not otherwise have access to quality health and dental care. Extending federally supplemented opportunities for tutoring and enrichment before and after school could keep school buildings open in disadvantaged communities beyond traditional school hours, while family literacy, parenting and integrated job training and placement opportunities should draw adults to schools for needed services in these traditionally underused hours.

- Expand funding for successful community schools models and encourage strategies for funding and service provision that enable local schools to become hubs of educational and health services for children and families. Funding and guidance for many family service programs are scattered throughout the federal government's portfolio. However they land in communities in ways that create fragmentation, inefficiencies, and bureaucratic red tape rather than a coherent system that places the child and the family at the center. Even well-educated citizens can be overwhelmed by the complexities and the barriers this disjointed approach creates. Organizing these activities around schools, and maximizing their power to impact education is the innovation that can fuel student achievement gains and enable them to fully realize their potential as stewards of our democracy. To accomplish this, more than coordination is needed. Federal leadership should proactively support integration of program streams to enable more effective services at the school level. Start-up costs for developing these models could be underwritten in the neediest 25% of schools for an allocation of \$750 million.[11]

## **5. Support effective parent education and involvement.**

A major purpose of public education is to build a knowledgeable and committed public for the nation. Yet, it is sometimes hard to find the public in today's public schools. While lip-service is given to community and family involvement in schools, federal policies reflect only a marginal commitment to such involvement. The public's role is often limited to approving local plans to meet state or federal mandates, not to participating in determining the policy itself. Parents are rarely asked to engage in deciding what their children should learn or how to organize their schools. Their role, and that of the general public, is generally relegated to the most menial of democracy's tasks: approving a pre-developed plan to meet prescribed outcomes for an external evaluation.

The evidence regarding the importance of family/school/community collaboration in terms of student achievement and democratic well-being is clear, but too often ignored.[12] The ability of communities and parents to use information in making decisions about school programs and individual student needs is often sorely limited by barriers to public participation in the education of our children. There are two equally important aspects of family and community involvement in schools. First, parents and guardians must be invited into the educational process by to learn about what the school is doing, to share their knowledge about their own child, and to support the child in his or her educational journey. Building strong bonds between parents and teachers allows the educational experience of the child – at home and at school – to become mutually reinforcing and enables parents and

teachers to work as partners, rather than in parallel play. To facilitate genuine partnerships, new uses of time and new approaches to access must be part and parcel of how we allocate educational resources. Schools that structure regular parent-student-teacher meetings at times when parents can attend – at school or in home visits – and in ways that support genuine two-way communication, develop bonds that pay off in multiple ways. To facilitate this work, federal investments should:

- Foster family engagement in school life and school improvement by subsidizing the additional time needed for teachers and advisors to meet with parents within and after school hours to share information about the child's progress and to plan and solve problems together. As well as resources, such as translators for families whose language is not English, which help them communicate with teachers and schools. In addition, the federal government could provide incentives for employers to provide time for parents to meet with teachers and participate in school life – at least a half day each year to enable parents to be involved in the education of their children.
- Provide for genuine community input into school improvement processes. Families and community members should be invited into the process of learning about what is happening in schools, participating in discussions about school change and improvement, and sharing their visions and resources for what schools can become. The use of site councils in democratically run schools in Chicago, formal contracts between parents and schools in many communities, and the kind of shared participation and governance demonstrated in the Comer school development model have all been successful in developing relationships between parents and schools.
- Ensure access to data about student opportunities to learn. Federally-supported data systems should enable a dynamic process of knowledge development and use that stimulates inquiry at each level of the system and engage members of local communities in a dialogue about what is going on in schools, what is working, and what is to be done. NCEBC supports the collection, reporting, and use of data about student opportunities and outcomes that can provide the basis for Community Action Plans to address serious problems in systemic ways.
- Support literacy centers for supporting literacy learning in high-need communities – ensuring that young people and their parents have access to libraries, literacy learning supports, and information for guiding their academic decisionmaking.

The federal government can play a vibrant role in providing citizens with information and the means to act upon it. We should look to the new ESEA to better safeguard equity by protecting the rights of students and to jumpstart quality by enabling local communities to do a better job of evaluating what is happening, what is working, and what is to be done.

### **Conclusion**

Creating schools that enable all children to learn requires the development of systems that enable all educators and schools to learn. At heart this is a capacity-building enterprise leveraged by clear, meaningful learning goals and intelligent, reciprocal accountability systems that guarantee skillful teaching in well-designed, adequately resourced

schools for all learners. It is not only possible but imperative that America close the achievement gap among its children by addressing the yawning opportunity gap that denies these fundamental rights. Given the critical importance of education for individual and societal success in the flat world we now inhabit, inequality in the provision of education is an antiquated tradition the United States can no longer afford. If no child left behind is to be anything more than empty rhetoric, we will need a policy strategy that creates 21st century learning opportunities for all students, from preschool through college, supported by necessary school resources, access to knowledgeable, well-supported teachers and leaders, productively designed schools, and parent education and engagement.

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[7] Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, Rockoff, & Wyckoff (2008); Clotfelter et al. (2007); National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (1996).

[8] Constantine et al. (2009) ; Darling-Hammond (2009).

[9] For descriptions of successful programs, see Darling-Hammond, L., Meyerson, D., LaPointe, M., & Orr, M. (in press). Preparing school leaders for a changing world. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

[10] Elmore, R. (1996).

[11] School of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century staff report that schools need about \$30,000 annually in start-up costs to organize the resources provided through a range of other federal and state programs into a coherent community-based school design. Matia Finn\_Stevenson, email message to authors, April 1, 2008.

[12] See for example, J. Epstein (1991). School and family connections: Theory, research, and implications for integrating societies of education and family. In D.G. Unger & M.B. Sussman (eds.), *Families in community settings: Interdisciplinary perspectives*. NY: Haworth Press.