



UNITED VOICES FOR EDUCATION

May 7, 2010

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chair
Senate Health, Education, Labor
and Pensions Committee
428 Senate Dirksen Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Michael B. Enzi
Ranking Member
Senate Health, Education, Labor and
Pensions Committee
835 Senate Hart Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Enzi and members of the HELP Committee:

The United Voices for Education (UVE) thanks you for this opportunity to make recommendations related to ESEA reauthorization. UVE is a coalition of representatives from 42 educational stakeholder organizations that are dedicated to excellence in education for all children.

What We Believe

UVE believes that we cannot successfully reach the goal of having all children graduate from high school prepared for success in further education, work, college, and citizenship unless we focus on educating the whole child. Educating the “whole child” refers to meeting the academic *as well as* the social and emotional needs of students.

UVE believes that successful whole child education is made possible only when students are assured a safe, respectful, bully-free and violence-free school environment that is conducive to and free of crucial impediments to their full and healthy academic, social, and emotional growth and development.

UVE believes that such a positive school climate can be assured only if schools’ efforts to improve their school climate are encouraged and that such improvement becomes a part of the basis on which the overall success of schools to improve the education of the children in their care is determined.

UVE believes that for school climate improvement to take place, such improvement needs to be viewed and prioritized by schools as being of equal importance to their efforts to meet accountability standards in students’ academic improvement.

UVE believes that for the academic success of students to improve, conditions for learning in schools must improve as well, which can only occur when impediments to children’s education and growth are reduced or eliminated through the establishment of a safe, caring, respectful school climate.

UVE believes that effective and proven interventions, strategies and programs that are supportive of educating the whole child will, when responsibly implemented, develop students' social skills, community awareness and civic responsibility that in turn will lead to improvement in students' academic success.

UVE believes that schools should be offered the opportunity for, but not be compelled to, implement any single strategy or program; rather they should be given access to an array of effective strategies and programs that promote the creation of a civil, caring school climate that contributes to the development of the whole child.

UVE believes that schools should only implement strategies and programs that they believe fit the needs of their students as implementation of such efforts without a school's willingness and belief in their potential success is certain to fail.

UVE ESEA Recommendations

UVE recommends that as you reauthorize ESEA and improve on NCLB, the new law acknowledges the successful efforts of schools to improve their climate and that ESEA count such progress as part of the overall evaluation of a school's efforts to improve the education of children.

Improvement in school environments, as they become more and more conducive to the education of the whole child, should be assessed both through the hard data measurements already being tracked by many state and local accountability frameworks, in such areas as attendance, school drop out rates and incidences of violence, and through other new data sources that assess improvement of school and community conditions for learning and improvement in school climate.

UVE further recommends that such improvement be regarded as an essential part of the school profile. The data should not be used to sanction schools, but rather to improve the learning climate leading to raising the quality of education for its students.

UVE therefore recommends that ESEA include accountability structures and metrics in its assessment of schools' efforts to create safe, respectful, violence-free environments. As part of the assessment of schools' efforts to improve education, ESEA should acknowledge schools' implementation of programs that encourage positive school environments to flourish. Such intervention strategies include programs in the arts, community based learning, counseling, service learning, character development, physical education, and personal wellness programs, all of which support and are conducive to the development of the whole child.

UVE recommends that such improvement be given equal emphasis and importance to that of measurements and assessment of students' academic progress, and that improved instruction be linked to current school-employed pupil services supports.

UVE acknowledges that such assessment of progress in school climate would necessitate a major change for schools and, in light of that fact, UVE recommends that initially, schools, districts and states should only be required to publicly report progress on these new school climate measures as part of the ESEA publication of school success, and in states'

identification of both schools in need of improvement and schools whose efforts have resulted in meaningful progress

However, UVE suggests that the evaluation of a school for the purpose of determining improvement should be deferred at least until more experience is obtained with these new metrics. UVE unanimously agrees that acknowledgment of success and other forms of accountability of schools in this regard is essential; otherwise it is unlikely that schools will perceive that they have a mandate to address climate improvement as a priority, and will be more prone to focus on students' academic improvement to the exclusion of efforts to improve school climate. UVE strongly believes that improved academic success, and schools' efforts to narrow the education gap, will be greatly improved if, and only if, conditions for learning in schools improve as well.

Respectfully submitted by the UVE Steering Committee:

Arnold Fege, Chair
Director, Public Engagement and Advocacy
Public Education Network
601 13th Street, NW, Suite 710 South
Washington, DC 20005

Molly McCloskey, Vice Chair
Director, Constituent Partnerships
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
1703 N. Beauregard Street
Alexandria, VA 22311

Dr. Charlotte Frank
Chair, Board of Directors
Operation Respect
Senior Vice President
Research and Development
McGraw-Hill Education
1221 Avenue of the Americas, 50th Floor
New York, NY 10020

Bob Lynch
President
Americans for the Arts
1000 Vermont Avenue, NW, 6th Floor
Washington, DC 20005

David Osher
Vice President
American Institutes for Research
And Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning
1000 Thomas Jefferson Street, NW
Washington, DC 20007

Peter Yarrow
President and Founder
Operation Respect
2 Penn Plaza, 23rd Floor
New York, NY 10121