

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE REAUTHORIZATION OF THE ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION ACT**

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was created in 1965 in the interest of providing equitable educational opportunities to students in this nation. Since that time, there have been many reauthorizations of the law. The latest version is the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which has brought about many changes in the federal role in education. The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) supports the laudable goals of NCLB and its mandate for shining a light on the progress of student subgroups. We believe, however, that the next version of the ESEA should provide for some changes in the ways schools are expected to move toward closing the achievement gaps that exist among student subpopulations, ensuring that students are taught in schools staffed by well-qualified teachers and principals, and enhancing student achievement. In addition, the reauthorization must restore the responsibility for student achievement to the state level.

Principals and other school staff welcome accountability and work daily to improve teaching and learning in their schools. Educators should receive assistance and resources from every level of government to help them implement federal, state, and local education mandates.

NAESP's ESEA Task Force, comprised of elementary and middle-level principals from throughout the United States, has been working since December of 2005 to assess the impact of the ESEA on students and educators and make recommendations for key aspects of the next version. There is much to be learned from the experience of implementing the current and former iterations of the ESEA, and this experience informs NAESP's reauthorization recommendations.

### **General Principles for the Reauthorization**

- The appropriate federal role in education is to promote educational equity and provide resources to assist states, districts, and schools in their daily work to help students to achieve at their highest level of ability.
- The reauthorized ESEA should focus on teaching and learning and provide guidance to help educators in their work to enhance student achievement.
- The law should reflect an understanding that educators have as their main goal the success of every student in learning the curriculum and in developing high-level skills for comprehending information and solving problems.
- The law should authorize sufficient funding for federal mandates and be accompanied by commensurate appropriations.
- Public funds must be reserved for public schools.

## **Accountability for Schools and Students: Assessing Student Achievement and Fostering School Improvement**

### **Assessment**

**Guiding Rationale:** It is important to know each student’s level of achievement and to apply appropriate instructional methods to address student needs. Because education takes place in local schools that must primarily implement state requirements, NAESP believes it is important for states to continue to bear the responsibility for the assessment of their students. We believe an effective system of assessment is one that measures student progress using multiple means, so that the unique learning styles and needs of students can be taken into account. We support the use of assessments primarily for diagnostic purposes – to measure student achievement and analyze the need for adjustments in the curriculum or teaching methods employed in each school. We oppose the high-stakes use of standardized test scores alone. It is important for the federal government to provide funding and to make sure that students receive equitable educational opportunities, regardless of the state in which they live.

- Each state must develop a state assessment system that identifies high levels of achievement for all students in a fair, challenging, and equitable manner over a reasonable time frame.
- Each assessment system should employ a growth model, demonstrating the progress of individual students and student subpopulations over time.
- Each assessment system should incorporate multiple methods of gauging student progress and achievement.
- The federal government should provide grants to states for promising innovations in assessment.

### **Helping Schools Succeed**

**Guiding Rationale:** Because schools deal with changing populations and a continuum of student needs, every school should be in a continual process of improvement, carrying out a plan reflecting that school’s unique characteristics and goals, and describing the steps the school will take to make demonstrable improvements. Principals, teachers, and other school staff should work as a team to design and implement the plan and promote responsible parental involvement to assist in this effort. The federal government and the state have an important role to play in helping schools carry out their improvement plans by providing financial resources, ongoing high-quality professional development, and technical assistance.

**Different instructional needs call for flexibility in determining class sizes and configurations, and it is important for school leaders to have the authority and the resources to create the most efficient class sizes and configurations for their school.**

**As the instructional leader of a school, the principal must also have the authority to make key decisions about staffing and the use of resources at the school.**

- States have the primary responsibility for assessing the quality of their schools and effecting positive change in those that need improvement.
- Each state should create a school accountability system to guide schools and to measure their success in making needed changes to increase student achievement.
- Each state should establish a system of rewards for schools that exceed improvement targets and specialized assistance for schools that fall short of their targets.
- When student subgroup test scores are used as part of the system for measuring progress in school improvement, the scores of a student who is a member of multiple subgroups should be factored in as part of only one subgroup.

## **Special Education**

**Guiding Rationale:** Students with special needs deserve to receive an education that addresses their unique situation and helps them to achieve to their highest level of ability. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) sets out the federal requirements for the education of students with disabilities, and the reauthorized ESEA should include provisions that complement the IDEA with regard to assessing the progress of these students. As with other students, the assessment of the achievement of students with disabilities should be accomplished through the use of many types of assessment in order to provide accurate and valid information. Information based on the Individualized Education Program (IEP) should be a major component of the assessment of student progress. While it is very important to know how well the needs of students with disabilities are being met, it is also important to avoid a situation in which the quality of an entire school is ultimately judged solely by the progress of any student subpopulation.

- Progress toward the achievement of goals specified in the IEP should be included among the factors used to determine student and school success.
- The assessment of the achievement of students with disabilities should be based on a growth model that measures their progress from year to year.
- Students with disabilities should be tested at the level at which they are taught, and this level may differ from a student's chronological grade level.
- A special education teacher who is fully certified and licensed in special education should be considered to be a highly qualified teacher.

## **English Language Learners\***

**Guiding Rationale:** When a student arrives at school lacking the ability to speak English, he or she is at an immediate and significant disadvantage in terms of benefiting from the curriculum. It

**is important to help these students learn to understand, speak, and write in English simultaneously with their acquisition of knowledge of math, language arts, science, and the other content areas in the school curriculum. These efforts must be supported with adequate funds and other resources, accompanied by an understanding of each English Language Learner's (ELL) progress in learning English and subject-matter information. Assessment of this progress must be done in a fair and realistic manner, and decisions about when and how to test English Language Learners must be made by the educators who know when the ELL students are ready to be assessed and how that should be accomplished.**

- Each state should develop standards for the education of English Language Learners, including provisions for each to have a specific plan that establishes the point at which the student is to participate in state subject matter assessments given in English.
- A student whose first language is not English should be given the state assessments only after he or she has become proficient in English.
- The assessment of the achievement of English Language Learners should be based on a growth model that measures their progress from year to year.

*\* English Language Learners are sometimes referred to as Limited English Proficiency, or LEP, students.*

## **Ensuring that Schools Are Staffed by Well-Qualified Professionals**

**Guiding Rationale: It is important for any professional to receive excellent preparation and to keep up to date with the latest information and best practices of that profession. Principals and teachers are no different. They require high-quality continuing education and technical assistance to carry out their work to the best of their abilities, backed by research-based professional development. Principals and teachers should participate in professional development as a school team along with other professional staff, and they should also be provided with ongoing training that is unique to their position in a school. The federal government has a role to play in this effort, funding research on instructional leadership, pedagogy (best practices), and child and adolescent development to inform the professional development opportunities provided throughout an educator's career.**

- Criteria for determining the qualifications of principals, teachers, and other education professionals are the responsibility of each state.
- The federal government must provide resources to assist states in establishing qualification systems and a process to help education professionals reach and maintain their peak performance levels.
- For states experiencing a shortage of qualified principals and/or teachers, the federal government should provide resources for the development of programs to recruit and retain excellent education professionals.

- The reauthorized ESEA should require that school principals receive ongoing, high-quality professional development that addresses their unique role as instructional leaders of schools.
- Districts and states must be provided federal assistance to develop and fund mentoring programs for principals and teachers during their first three years in their new positions.

## **Supplementing the K-12 Program**

**Guiding Rationale: Each student arrives at school with a unique set of experiences and needs. Many students lack even the most rudimentary academic readiness preparation. Many are undernourished or ill, and some have never received medical or dental care. Others may be homeless or experience parental neglect. All these factors have a strong effect on a child’s ability to learn and thrive. It is important for schools and other state and local agencies to work together to help students succeed in their educational careers and lay a strong foundation for success in later life as well. This means ensuring that children are well fed and nurtured. Schools cannot do this alone and must not be expected to do so. A system of coordinated services, in which health and human services agencies work to support schools and students, should be established in every state, funded by state and federal resources.**

- The reauthorized ESEA should include provisions and authorize a separate funding stream to help states develop systems of coordinated services designed to ensure that students are ready and able to learn.
- The reauthorized ESEA should provide for resources to assist states in establishing and implementing a system of high-quality early childhood education, including flexibility in combining funding streams to support it.
- The federal government should assist states in providing each public school with full-time counselors, appropriate administrative support, health care professionals, and other student services personnel.
- The law should include provisions for high-quality after-school programs that offer a variety of activities and academic assistance.

## **Partnering for Success**

Education must remain a top priority for our nation. The long-term vitality of our nation’s schools depends upon an accountability system that is developed and monitored at the state level. State systems understand the responsibility of ensuring high academic standards for all children. It would serve our nation well to support the education of every child through a comprehensive system of multiple measures, administered in each state and designed to gauge the growth of students over time. The federal government must support the work of the schools by creating an equitable educational field where each child has the resources necessary to achieve at the highest levels.

The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act provides an opportunity for a return to state authority for education, accompanied by an abundance of federal resources, to help schools move closer to ensuring the success of every child. NAESP remains committed to advocating for our nation's children and schools, and we look forward to being a strong partner in the reauthorization process.

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