Earlier this year, the Center on Education Policy outlined four core principles for a revised federal role to improve elementary and secondary education. Using those principles, the Center evaluated S.1, the bill recently passed by the Senate to reshape the major federal education programs for grades K through 12. The Center also reviewed the recently enacted budget resolution for 2002 outlining congressional funding priorities. Here is what we found based on the information currently available:

### OVERALL GRADE FOR EDUCATION BILL: **B-**
### OVERALL GRADE FOR BUDGET RESOLUTION: **F**

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CEP Core Principle #1:
High Standards and More Accountability

The federal government should continue to encourage high academic standards, but should also demand meaningful accountability for increased student achievement and accept national responsibility to help in the proper use of tests.

STRENGTHS

• S.1 continues current federal requirements for state content and student performance standards in mathematics and reading/language arts, and adds requirements for states to develop standards in science and history by school year 2005-06.

• S.1 increases testing of students by requiring annual assessments of children in grades 3 through 8.

• S.1 requires state test results to be reported in a manner that helps parents and teachers address the specific academic needs of individual students.

• S.1 shortens the time line for identifying Title I schools and school districts (those with significant percentages of low-achieving students) in which student achievement is not improving. Strengthens the interventions that must be undertaken to raise student achievement.

• S.1 requires Title I schools, districts, and states to track the progress of particular subgroups of students (including students who are economically disadvantaged, disabled, limited-English proficient, or from racial and ethnic minority groups), and to raise the achievement for these subgroups.

• S.1 requires states to participate in the National Assessment of Educational Progress, at federal expense, so that there is an outside yardstick of a state’s performance.

• S.1 has specific accountability mechanisms for monitoring state and school district progress in achieving goals in other ESEA programs.

WEAKNESSES

• S. 1 establishes a ten-year goal for all students to achieve at the proficient level of performance on the state test, but then sets a low standard of achievement for subgroups of students (economically disadvantaged, disabled, limited-English proficient, and racial and ethnic minorities); as long as the test scores of each subgroup improve by 1% each year, a school would not face any consequences. Also, if states only meet this low standard of achievement, it is unlikely that they could achieve the goal of all students scoring at the proficient level within ten years.

• S. 1 establishes a complicated system for identifying schools that are not making adequate yearly progress in improving student achievement. The effects of this system are unclear.

CONCERNS

• S.1 contains accountability requirements that may mean more paperwork and red tape for districts and states.

GRADE : B

CEP Core Principle #2:
Adequate Funding to Give Children a Fair Chance to Learn

Title I funding should be doubled to provide all students with a fair chance to learn.

• S. 1 establishes annual funding goals for the Title I program which, if appropriated, would fully fund the program over 5 years. The bill also calls for mandatory full funding of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act program. In addition, the bill sets funding goals that allow room for growth in other ESEA programs. These gains are an empty promise, however, because the Congress failed to provide this funding in the FY 2002 budget resolution.

GRADE : F
CEP Core Principle #3: Rational Approach to Program Consolidations

The numerous federal education programs that exist now should be consolidated into fewer categories, but separate programs should be retained if they are fulfilling an important national purpose that can only be addressed by targeted aid. The three conditions that must exist in any consolidation are that there is a clear purpose and accountability, that there is an assurance of increased appropriations, and that the funds are distributed to school districts based on the number of low income children they are serving.

REGULAR PROGRAM CONSOLIDATIONS

- S. 1 combines many existing federal programs into four consolidated authorizations to improve teacher quality and reduce class size, integrate technology into education, support innovative programs, and support bilingual and immigrant education programs. However, the bill also adds several new programs to the Act, thereby reducing the effects of the consolidations. Under most of the consolidations, there are clear purposes for which the funds can be used and strong accountability measures, and money is targeted to school districts based on poverty rates or counts of children with other special needs. The funding goals for most of the consolidated programs are higher than the current combined appropriation levels for the programs being consolidated. However, the Congress rendered these funding goals meaningless by failing to provide a significant funding increase in the FY 2002 budget resolution.

GRADE: B

STRAIGHT A's DEMONSTRATION PROGRAM

S. 1 allows 7 states and 25 school districts to consolidate most ESEA program funds. The consolidated program has several purposes, which could dilute the impact of the federal funds if a state or school district spreads the funds across too many purposes. The program contains accountability provisions, but they hinge on the Title I accountability requirements, which may set a low achievement standard for disadvantaged students. High poverty school districts are guaranteed a certain level of funding, but states have the option of developing their own formulas to distribute federal dollars, which is a concern because, historically, the federal government has done a better job at targeting funds on high poverty school districts than states have. Finally, the impact of the “demonstration” program could be great if it includes the seven largest states, which educate approximately 44% of all U.S. school children.

GRADE: D

CEP Core Principle #4: Private School Participation

The federal government should continue the principle of equitable participation for private school children in federal education programs, but should not get caught up in divisive battles over vouchers. Instead, a reasoned dialogue ought to take place between the public and private school leaders of the country.

- S. 1 strengthens assurances that private school children and teachers will participate equitably in federal programs. It does not contain vouchers to pay for private school tuition, but it does permit vouchers for students in persistently failing public schools to purchase supplemental educational services, such as tutoring. Finally, S. 1 does not promote a reasoned dialogue between national public and private school leaders.

GRADE: B