

BUSINESS COALITION FOR STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Principles for the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

The Business Coalition for Student Achievement (BCSA) – representing business leaders from every sector of the economy – believes that improving the K-12 education system in the U.S. is necessary to provide a strong foundation for both U.S. competitiveness and for individuals to succeed in our rapidly changing world. We are committed to working with all stakeholders on this essential task.

Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) should be a top priority of the 111th Congress. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) deserves credit for focusing attention on the need to close the achievement gap, and for advancing education reforms to help all students reach at least grade-level proficiency in reading and mathematics throughout the nation. Now is the time to update ESEA and improve as well as build upon features of NCLB – more transparency, increased accountability for performance at all levels of the school system, and expanded choice for children and parents.

During this reauthorization, federal law must recognize new developments since this law was last revamped in 2001 including, but not limited to: the common standards movement initiated by states; over \$100 billion in federal stimulus dollars for new and existing programs to support states, school districts, and schools; requirements to obtain Race to the Top and Investing in Innovation competitive grants; advances in technology and data systems to inform learning and to measure school, student and teacher performance; new Department of Education regulations, and additional research about what works in education. The following reform principles based on both research and practice will lead to a stronger, more results-oriented ESEA:

Expect Internationally Benchmarked Standards and Assessments to Reflect Readiness for College,

Workplace and International Competition – The standards and assessment provisions in a reauthorized ESEA must:

- Incorporate challenging state-developed common internationally benchmarked standards and aligned assessments tied to college and workplace readiness.
- Continue annual assessments of student achievement in math and reading, while working to establish annual assessments of student achievement in science.
- Invest in R & D to develop a next generation of assessments to measure progress in other subjects and skills needed for college and workplace readiness.
- Base annual progress measurements on rigorous measures of year-to-year growth in academic achievement tied to specific goals, including goals for specific subgroups of students.
- Provide for the fair and comprehensive participation of special needs and English language learning students with particular focus on “at risk” students and schools.

Hold All Schools Accountable While Putting a Laser-like Focus on Ending “Dropout Factories” – Schools

must continue to be accountable for getting all students (and subgroups) proficient in at least science, mathematics and reading. In addition, special attention must be placed on the less-than-3% of high schools that produce half of America’s dropouts. Specifically, this must include:

- Maintaining the current law’s consequences for schools that are chronically under-performing and ensuring that states and districts undertake proven interventions to put an end to “business as usual” at chronically low-performing schools.
- Increasing support for the School Improvement Grants program, while simplifying current federal guidance to target resources and support to those schools in most dire need of reform.

- Supporting initiatives to develop new personnel and governance policies in low-performing schools.
- Targeting distribution of effective educators to high-needs schools through updated incentive programs.

Measure and Reward Teacher and Administrator Success – High-performing schools need highly effective teachers and administrators, and the best way to do that is to:

- Change the current law’s definition of “highly qualified teachers” to the definition of “highly effective teachers” used in the Race to the Top Fund.
- Redesign and strengthen ineffective professional development programs to make them more “teacher driven” using research proven strategies that boost student achievement.
- Improve the use of data systems to measure teacher effectiveness and design compensation systems based on pay for performance models, not just seniority and additional training.
- Implement policies and practices to fairly and efficiently remove ineffective educators.
- Continue to focus on policies that promote equal distribution of highly effective teachers. Align teacher preparation at the postsecondary level with expectations for teacher effectiveness and common, internationally benchmarked, college- and career-ready standards.
- Invest in high quality alternative certification initiatives and programs that bring talented individuals, including majors in STEM fields and second career teachers, into the teaching pool.
- Expand the Teacher Incentive Fund with a priority on STEM.

Foster a “Client Centered Approach” by Districts and Schools – Good organizations, whether public or private, know that without an intensive focus on its clients, long term success is impossible. ESEA should require the following “client centered” provisions:

- Easy to understand report cards that include data on the performance of each student group and that do not rely on the use of statistical gimmicks and sleights-of-hand to sugar-coat results and undermine accountability measures.
- High quality Supplemental Educational Services (SES) programs that require districts to provide students and parents with timely and easily understood information on their options to choose either free tutoring or the ability to move to higher performing public schools.
- Increased support for parent involvement programs.
- Additional involvement of community and business groups in school improvement, transformation, and turnaround activities.

Leverage Data Systems to Inform Instruction, Improvement, and Interventions – The use of data to inform and improve student learning has been one of the most important developments in education reform over the past decade. ESEA reauthorization should build upon these efforts, including recent efforts supported by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), and develop fully functioning statewide data systems that:

- Enable teachers to access user-friendly data to help support instruction.
- Offer timely, accurate collection, analysis and use of high quality longitudinal data that align to district systems to inform decision-making and improve teacher effectiveness and student achievement.
- Provide educator training on the use of data to differentiate instruction for students, especially for those who are not yet proficient and those who are more advanced.
- Integrate existing data systems so that teachers and parents get a comprehensive and secure profile that includes information necessary to customize instruction.
- Provide leadership with the full range of information they need to allocate resources or to develop, enhance or close programs.

Invest in School Improvement and Encourage Technology and Other Innovations to Improve Student Achievement – Improving schools in the 21st century is not a static process, it requires constant innovation and research focused on what works. ESEA must include support for high-quality research and proven reform initiatives by:

- Using the competitive approach in the Race to the Top and Investing in Innovation funds to support the next generation of partners (non-profit and for-profit) to assist with school reform efforts.
- Supporting R&D to improve school, educator, and student performance as well as reforms that revamp unproductive school governance, compensation regimes, and building use.
- Supporting expansion of high-quality charter schools and virtual schools and holding them accountable for improved academic achievement with the same expectation that we have for public schools.
- Supporting academic-focused extended learning time initiatives (including afterschool and summer programs) for at-risk students.
- Reforming secondary schools and holding them accountable for increasing the graduation rate (using the common definition adopted by the nation’s governors), and graduating students who are ready for college and work.
- Offering opportunities for students to enroll in advanced coursework (such as Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate), early-college high schools, or dual enrollment programs that prepare students for college and careers.
- Engaging students by demonstrating that standards based curriculum has real world applications in acquisition of knowledge and increased opportunities for career exploration and exposure.
- Utilizing advanced communications technologies to improve delivery and increase effectiveness for students and teachers with optimization of online learning tools and multiplatform devices and systems.
- Encourage parent engagement by using technology to provide information about their child’s achievement and how to best support remediation or determine the need for increased support where appropriate.

Establish a Dedicated Strategy and Funding Stream to Improve STEM Education – For students to graduate from high school with the foundation, knowledge, and skills they need in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), ESEA should:

- Support a targeted “innovation fund”, which focuses funds towards taking proven STEM programs to scale while encouraging the development and research of new strategies to increase student achievement in STEM subject areas.
- Support collaborations (schools, districts, states, communities and businesses along with other partners) to develop high-quality online and in person professional development for STEM teachers.
- Continue development and support of student of curricula, inquiry based learning, project based learning and hands-on activities in addition to other proven strategies to improve student achievement in STEM.

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