



**JOINT STATEMENT ON THE REAUTHORIZATION OF
THE ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION ACT (ESEA)
May 18, 2007**

The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) is an opportunity for a refocused national discussion about public education that offers Members of Congress the opportunity to elevate this dialogue, to be bold, to embrace not only the call for equity in American education but the demand for innovation as well.

The undersigned groups—representing teachers and other school staff, principals, local administrators, and school board members throughout the nation—are committed to the goals of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), the most recent version of ESEA: high academic achievement for all students and closing the achievement gap. Since the enactment of NCLB, all of our members have worked tirelessly to help achieve the positive goals of NCLB. Their experience with the law over the past five years, however, has led us to conclude that the principles and goals of the law cannot be achieved without certain fundamental changes in the law, vastly improved implementation, and adequate funding. These modifications are essential to driving the kinds of reforms needed to improve student achievement on a more sustainable basis.

Congress must listen to the front-line educators, the ones who know students the best. Our organizations have reached consensus about the need for significant improvements that should be made to the statute during reauthorization. To that end, while each of our organizations has developed and proposed specific recommendations to address our priorities for the reauthorization of ESEA, the undersigned groups - based in local education systems - have reached consensus that changes need to be made regarding the following areas:

Accountability

The current accountability framework does not accurately or fairly assess student, school, or school district performance. What has evolved in the name of accountability is a measurement framework that bases its determination of school quality on a student's performance on a single assessment, fails to recognize progress being made, and subjects schools and school districts to an "all-or-nothing" system. Further, schools and school districts with greater diversity may be adversely impacted by the current accountability system's formula used to calculate performance that over identifies schools and then punishes them by redirecting significant amounts of federal resources to unproven federally mandated activities.

The federal accountability framework must be redesigned to improve our public schools rather than to abandon them. States must be authorized to establish accountability systems that focus on multiple measures of overall school and school district quality and effectiveness, including growth and progress models. Federal resources must be leveraged to enable states to provide the full continuum of effective technical assistance targeted to those students and schools most in need. In addition, the accountability system must recognize success.

Assessments

There is a critical need for valid, reliable, unbiased assessment systems that are aligned with state standards. Inappropriate testing too often results in supplying inaccurate information about student achievement to parents and policymakers and fails to inform instruction. States should be required to develop appropriate assessments for all students and should ensure that alternative assessments, native language assessments, and appropriate accommodations are available for students with disabilities and English language learners. Further, the quality of state assessments and their alignment with state content standards must be improved. Adequate funds should be provided to states for these purposes or to consortia of states to work together to develop common assessments aligned to state standards.

Improved Assessment for English Language Learners and Students with Disabilities

Providing high-quality instruction and accurately assessing academic growth for students with disabilities and students who are learning to speak English constitute the greatest challenges for school districts. States and school districts should have maximum flexibility in addressing the assessment and learning needs of these students. ESEA must spark improved understanding of academic growth for students with disabilities and students who are learning English. Students with disabilities should be assessed as determined by their Individualized Education Program team and not subjected to arbitrary caps. States must take steps to increase the availability and quality of alternative assessments to meet the needs of each child who is learning English or has a disability. Likewise, districts should have the necessary flexibility to appropriately assess English language learners in English content after they demonstrate a comprehension of English.

School Improvement

Meaningful intervention at the state and local levels can help to raise individual student achievement in struggling schools, but the current sanctions under NCLB have proven to be ineffective and unworkable. The current system of punitive sanctions should be replaced with helpful interventions that are tailored to the needs of schools and communities. Districts should have the resources and flexibility to implement school improvement interventions that are data-driven and designed to meet the specific needs of target populations. Assistance and interventions should empower schools to analyze and define the problems a school is facing; establish a school leadership team, consisting of principals, teachers, and other school staff, to develop a long-term improvement plan with measurable outcomes; work with the school leadership team to implement the strategies; and gather data to determine the success of the strategies.

Educator Quality and Professional Development

Criteria for determining the qualifications of principals, teachers, and other education professionals are the responsibility of states and local school districts. 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. The next version of ESEA should require that principals, teachers, and other school staff be provided with ongoing, high-quality professional development throughout their careers, including mentoring at the beginning of their careers and ongoing training that is unique to their respective positions in a school. Sufficient federal funding must be provided for this purpose. For states or districts 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 where they are most needed.

American Federation of Teachers
American Association of School Administrators
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Education Association
National School Boards Association