



Will Historic Election Year Bring About Historic Education Advances?- 01/23/08

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Many people swear by the power of the New Year's resolution to keep them mindful of their goals for the year that lies ahead. Some believe that by writing their resolutions down, they will be more likely to remember them as they prepare for the rigors of breaking bad habits or beginning new and positive routines. As we begin this new presidential election year—a year that finds the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA; currently No Child Left Behind) still not reauthorized—these are some of the things we hope each of the presidential candidates will add to their own list of resolutions. Students, teachers, and principals bear increasing pressure to make adequate yearly progress, but the current iteration of the law imposes unnecessary obstacles to that goal. Principals are instructional leaders, building organizers, and community leaders, yet most don't receive the necessary professional development to do the job most effectively. Currently, only 14 states require new principals to participate in a mentorship program. It is encouraging that the most recent ESEA reauthorization discussion draft includes provisions for such programs.

We urge the presidential candidates to resolve to remember students in middle-level schools who are often neglected in discussions about school reform. We have written here before about our organizations' support for Representative Raul Grijalva's (D-TX) Success in the Middle Act. Real school reform requires an improvement continuum at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. Too often, we emphasize discrete elementary school reform or high school reform without recognizing the support students need in between.

We also believe the Graduation Promise Act offers some promising ideas for local-state-federal partnerships to help middle and high school students complete their K–12 education and graduate. This initiative provides the much-needed assistance that districts across the country require in order to get the lowest performing middle and high schools in the nation on the right track. The act authorizes \$2.5 billion in funding to create a partnership between federal, state, and local governments, and strengthens state systems making it easier to identify, differentiate among, and target the level of reform and resources necessary to improve low-performing high schools, ensuring transparency and accountability for that process. We can not have success at one level of schooling and expect subsequent success without the necessary supports. The Graduation Promise Act would help ensure that all students receive a quality education from start to finish.

Both NAESP and NASSP are also working for other improvements in the ESEA, moving away from the onsize-fits-all approach to judging student and school success solely on test scores. We also call for provisions requiring the use of multiple measures to assess achievement; delaying subject matter testing of English language learners until those students are proficient in English; testing students with disabilities on the level at which they are taught instead of forced chronological grade-level testing on material to which they have not yet been exposed; and help from government and community agencies to assist schools in addressing the needs of the whole child through a system of coordinated services. We call on all of this year's candidates for office to work for congressional action on these much-needed improvements in the reauthorized ESEA, moving beyond No Child Left Behind and its flawed structure. In the dozen or so presidential-candidate debates thus far, education is but an aside. We urge presidential hopefuls to include education reform as a central plank in their platforms before they start writing their acceptance speeches, because it is imperative that the welfare of our nation's education system be taken as seriously as the welfare of our nation's healthcare system. That would be a New Year's resolution worth keeping!