

NAESP's Recommendations for the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) and the 60,000 elementary and middle-level principals we represent across the country are committed to ensuring students receive a quality public education. Elementary and middle-level principals are primary catalysts for creating a lasting foundation for learning, driving school and student performance, and shaping the long-term impact of school improvements efforts. Further, regardless of a child's socioeconomic class, race, ethnicity, or geographic location, principals must address all challenges facing today's families and students. As such, they are charged with the responsibility to lead learning communities that will help children succeed in the 21st Century.

The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) must now focus on meeting the needs of the whole child. Ignoring the outside influences America's students face when coming to the classroom is a disservice to their potential. We know that second only to teaching, the most effective means to improving student academic performance is strong school leadership.

General Principles for 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 and provide an imperative that educators have, as their main goal, the success of every student in learning.
- Educators require access to standards-based curricula that will lead to the development of high-level problem-solving skills.
- The law should authorize sufficient funding for federal mandates and be explicit in how to measure student learning through a variety of proven means.
- The law should provide public funds that are reserved for public schools.

Supplementing the K-12 Education Program

Educators have a responsibility to meet all of the needs of students. Each child goes to schools with a unique set of experiences and needs. Principals know that addressing the social, emotional, cognitive, health and nutrition, *and* academic needs of children are the only way to ensure students can achieve their greatest potential in school and later in life.

NAESP is a strong advocate of bolstering the partnership among schools, state and local governments and agencies, and federal agencies to help students build a solid foundation for academic and personal success.

- The reauthorized ESEA must recognize the importance of high quality pre-kindergarten education.
 - Success in K-12 education starts before students enter kindergarten. NAESP strongly believes that pre-kindergarten programs must be high quality, school-connected, and available to all four- and five-year old children in order to build the foundation for learning.
 - NAESP's trademark publication, *Leading Early Childhood Learning Communities*, emphasizes the roles and characteristics of successful pre-K programs and the impact they have on student success. This publication sets the standards for what principals should know and be able to do to lead quality early childhood learning communities.
- The reauthorized ESEA must include appropriate resources to assist states in establishing and implementing a system of high-quality early childhood education, including providing flexibility in combining existing funding streams to support these efforts.
- The reauthorized ESEA must include provisions and authorize separate (and new) streams of funding to help states develop systems of coordinated services designed to ensure that students are ready and able to learn.
- The federal government must provide adequate funding to ensure states and local schools can hire full-time school counselors, appropriate administrative support, health care professionals, and other student services personnel.
- The law must include support and funding for high-quality afterschool programs.

Addressing the Needs of the Lowest-Performing Schools

NAESP supports Congress' and the Administration's increased focus on identifying the lowest-performing schools, establishing rigorous interventions to turn these schools around, providing sufficient resources over multiple years to implement reform interventions, and holding these schools accountable for improving student performance. The federal government's role in public education must continue to

focus on promoting educational equity and providing states and local schools the flexibility and resources for these efforts.

As the catalyst for reform, principals play a crucial role in ensuring that a school's culture reflects the goals of the broader community and focuses on addressing the needs of students to succeed academically and personally.

- The reauthorized ESEA must give principals who are leading struggling schools the necessary time to establish and implement whole school reform. They must also be supported with strong professional development programs, which include standards-based mentoring during the first three years of service.
- The new law must emphasize the role of the principal as the instructional leader in schools, thus empowering them to adopt and implement curricula, lead reform efforts, and call upon other educational resources as necessary.
- ESEA must recognize the unique role of the principal to assess and support teachers and other personnel in struggling schools. Working closely with staff, principals can ensure that teachers' strengths are maximized and enhanced while removing ineffective teachers who have been given the necessary time and support to improve from classrooms.
- The reauthorized ESEA must provide principals, teachers, school support staff, and other members of the school community with a minimum of three years to turn around a struggling school.
- The law must recognize that there are multiple measures necessary to accurately determine success or failure of a child's academic success.

Assessment

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 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.

An effective system of assessment is one that measures student progress using multiple indicators so that the unique learning styles and needs of students can be taken into account, and includes growth models as well as formative and summative assessments.

- The reauthorized ESEA must provide funding to states to increase the quality of assessment and the rigor of assessment standards.
- The ESEA must ensure that assessments produce useable data for principals and teachers to inform classroom instruction. Assessments that do not collect useful data serve no purpose other than to apply an incomplete and narrow snapshot of a student or school’s progress.
 - ESEA must allow the use of formative classroom assessments to be included in data collection. This includes portfolio assessments, classroom evaluation, surveys, and other methods that will gauge how a student has performed academically.
 - Principals and teachers must be consulted when assessments are being developed or updated to ensure that they are aligned to school performance goals and result in useable data to improve instruction.
- The reauthorized ESEA must provide dedicated funding for professional development for principals and teachers to learn how to better analyze and apply assessment data to classroom instruction.
- The law must include multiple indicators of student, educator and school success and not rely on a single standardized test score.

Accountability

Principals welcome accountability. As the instructional leaders of their schools, principals must have access to high-quality data from assessments throughout the school year that can be used to inform classroom instruction and to direct reform efforts, especially in low-performing schools.

NAESP has expressed concerns about measuring student and school success primarily on standardized assessment scores in the past. We share the same concerns about identifying educator success using this measure, as well.

- The reauthorized ESEA cannot rely on the incomplete and narrow measure of success for schools, students, or educators provided in high-stakes assessments. These assessments serve a purpose—especially when the data collected are useful and timely—but cannot and should not be the primary measure of any school-related “success.”
 - Multiple measures of achievement and success must be at the core of accountability.
 - To accurately assess students’ comprehension of curriculum, schools cannot rely solely on multiple-choice tests. Too many states have moved to these types of assessments to speed up data collection and to determine “success.” By so doing, we are short-changing the assessment of the nation’s students, and we overlook or under-value

the assessment of higher order thinking skills and the ability to offer quality analysis in the form of open-ended questions—vital skills that serve students in school and life beyond school.

- The law must allow for the time, tools, and talent principals require to perform their job well.
 - Reform and sustainable improvement requires time. Principals require at least three years to implement whole-school reform.
 - Reform and sustainable improvement requires resources and flexibility. Principals must be able to use current and future resources flexibly.
 - Reform and sustainable improvement requires talent. Principals must have the authority to capitalize on their teachers and support staff's strengths.
- The reauthorized ESEA must reflect an accurate measure of educators' efficacy that weighs not only student achievement data, but also access to high-quality, embedded professional development and mentoring; school climate surveys; teacher surveys; attendance of students and school faculty; parental involvement; community involvement; and, many other factors that are directly linked to achievement and a school's overall success.
 - Principals and teachers must be consulted in establishing any assessment of their efficacy.

Helping Schools Succeed

Gone are the days when a principal's role was to simply "manage" the operation of a school building. Gone, too, are the days when teachers could be assured that their students have help with schoolwork at home or a parent who feeds them breakfast and helps them get to school on time and prepared to learn. The number of issues that distract schools' important work of educating students grows exponentially each year. Schools cannot address all of these issues alone.

State and federal governments have a responsibility to assist schools in addressing the myriad issues facing schools and their larger communities. Funding, flexibility, and other resources must be made available to schools that require this help.

- The reauthorized ESEA must provide principals with the authority and autonomy to be the true instructional leaders in their buildings. Only with greater supports and flexibilities can principals drive continuous improvement.
- The law must prioritize high-quality, embedded professional development for principals and teachers. NAESP calls on Congress to provide a dedicated

stream of funds of no less than \$100 million for principal professional development and mentoring.

- Professional development is especially critical for improving educators' understanding and use of the assessment data made available to them.

Special Education

Students with special needs deserve an education that addresses their unique situations and helps them to achieve at their highest level of ability. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) sets the federal requirements for the education of students with disabilities. NAESP believes strongly that the reauthorized ESEA must compliment IDEA and not work counter to its requirements, especially in regard to assessment of these students.

- The reauthorized ESEA must count progress towards a student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP)—developed in conjunction with parents, teachers, school support personnel, and principals—among the factors of the student's and the school's success.
 - The assessment of students with disabilities should be based on growth model progress from year to year.
 - Students with disabilities should be assessed at the grade level at which they are taught, even when this level differs from their chronological grade level.
- The ESEA must recognize a state's teacher licensing requirements. In particular, NAESP believes ESEA should accept the credentials of a special education teacher who is fully certified and licensed in special education in the state in which they teach as a highly qualified teacher.
- The law should provide funding for professional development of principals and teachers in positive behavioral supports and other widely accepted supports for special needs students.

English Language Learners

When a student arrives at school lacking the ability to speak English, he or she is at an immediate and significant educational disadvantage. It is critical that these students are taught to understand, speak, and write English while simultaneously acquiring instruction in math, science, and other content areas. Assessment of these students' progress must be fair and realistic, and the decisions about when and how to assess English Language Learners must lie with the educators—in consultation with parents—who are most familiar with the student's ability.

- The ESEA should provide incentives to states to develop clear standards for the education of English Language Learners, including the necessary local flexibilities required to determine the proper assessment of these students.
- The federal government must provide states and local schools with access to funds that bolster English language acquisition in schools. Access to grants to hire quality language teachers and to provide training to general education teachers to support English Language Learners in the classroom, to cite two examples, would help address the needs of these students.

Building and Supporting Powerful Principals

It is imperative that undergraduate and graduate students receive proper training and preparation before becoming educators. It is equally as imperative that educators continue to receive quality professional development throughout their careers to stay current with best practices and promising techniques. Too often, however, professional development for principals is an after-thought and programs are significantly under-funded. In the current ESEA, for instance, professional development for principals is listed only as an “allowable use” of funds under Title II. Consequently, only 3 percent benefit from those funds. Principals need quality, embedded professional development and mentoring throughout their career.

- The law must require all professional development for educators to be high quality, embedded when appropriate, and research based.
 - Principal professional development programs continue to focus on the broad skills of “managing” a school, often overlooking the tenets and techniques of instructional leadership.
- The reauthorized ESEA must provide a dedicated stream of funds in Title II of no less than \$100 million per year for principals.
 - Principals must receive ongoing training on child and adolescent development;
 - Principals must be experts in data analysis and use and have a thorough understanding of the latest assessments and tools;
 - Principals must receive continuous training on instructional best practices in order to fully support their teachers and support staff;
 - Ongoing mentoring of principals is key to their success, particularly in the early years of the principalship.
- ESEA must ensure that states continue to determine the qualifications of principals, teachers, and other education professionals.
 - The federal government can increase quality and rigor of state qualifications through funding incentives. However, no incentive

should be required to be met for a state to continue to qualify for existing streams of funding, such as Title I.

- The federal government must continue to provide funding support for states and schools to fill gaps in hard-to-staff schools and subjects.

Contact NAESP

To learn more about NAESP's positions on the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), or other issues, please contact our offices located in Alexandria, Virginia by dialing (703) 684-3345.

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About NAESP's Recommendations for ESEA Reauthorization

This document represents the second edition of NAESP's ESEA reauthorization recommendations. The original recommendations were crafted in 2005 by a committee of active elementary and middle-level principals from across the country. The committee reviewed current law and determined the proper role and best course of action for the federal law in its next iteration. The second edition recommendations simply update the terminology and address current trends and priorities.

NAESP thanks the original committee's work in developing these recommendations and the NAESP Board of Directors for reviewing and approving the changes made to this version.

NAESP's Mission:

The mission of the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) is to lead in the advocacy and support for elementary and middle level principals and other education leaders in their commitment for all children.