

① ESEA  
in framework  
of states running  
assessment systems

Sen-backlog  
project

# **Comments on Reauthorization of the 1964 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)**

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## **Description of the Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction**

The Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) is the state agency responsible for Washington's elementary and secondary programs. It is headed by an elected superintendent and provides resources, leadership, and assistance to Washington's 296 school districts and 2,100 public schools.

The superintendent works closely with the Governor, the State Board of Education, the Washington State Legislature, other state agencies, state postsecondary education agencies, other state education associations, business groups, and the general public.

## **ESEA Effectiveness**

The 1964 Elementary and Secondary Education Act has played an essential role in articulating and providing support for extending educational opportunities for disadvantaged children and youth. More recently, ESEA has provided leadership and resources for assisting state and local governments to initiate the educational reforms that are needed to ensure that all students are prepared for the requirements of the twenty-first century.

Education is a local function, a state responsibility, and a federal priority. The key federal roles include needs identification, educational research, national dissemination of knowledge and effective practices, and the ability to leverage and target resources for national priorities. The assistance and support provided by federal education programs has helped children with major challenges in their lives by giving them a chance to succeed despite the odds against their success.

Federal leadership has helped shape a consensus about desired student outcomes and the components of educational reform, and it has provided the *glue* that connects the complex U.S. systems of elementary and secondary education. As the United States and the world continue to move into the twenty-first century and its changing human capital requirements, the reauthorization of ESEA must be given a high priority and careful consideration.

The following paper is organized in three sections. These include general principles for reauthorization, program themes that should cut across all areas, and specific directions for ESEA programs.

## **Part I – General Principles for Reauthorization**

Four general principles should guide the reauthorization. These are discussed with the inclusion of a summary of a financial study that has been completed in Washington State. The principles include the following.

### ***Maintain a focus on educational reform.***

The 1994 reauthorization, Improving America's Schools Act (IASA), set out an ambitious challenge of educational reform. IASA and the Goals 2000 Act outlined the architecture for educational reform with state and local goals, standards, benchmarks, and assessments. Nearly all states have developed these structural components through effort and leadership and are implementing them with federal, state, and local funds.

The directions and structures of educational reform have been put in place, but a great deal of work remains to be done. Implementation work to be done must focus on professional development and capacity building. In Washington State we are excited about the opportunities and challenges of involving some 60,000 educators in extending their efforts and skills to provide enriched models of teaching and leadership so that our kids achieve their learning goals. A central concern is finding the most effective ways of meeting the needs of increasingly diverse students. There are also the needs of helping districts, schools, and communities find the best ways of utilizing resources and learning how to use technology effectively in the service of powerful learning for all children.

Our state is making progress, and it is important that we *stay the course* of the gains achieved. We are becoming smarter about how to move on paths of continuous improvement. Reauthorization must give state and local systems the time and resources needed for implementation of educational reform. This implementation is an essential task if students are to be prepared for the requirements of the twenty-first century.

***Articulate the collaborations, partnerships, and relationships that are necessary to produce a system of reform and effectiveness among and between all educational partners.***

An important issue is the need for collaborations and partnerships that can reduce the fragmentation of programs and provide the focus needed to increase student learning and achievement. There must be a balance between a common vision and the need for program flexibility. State standards and assessments provide an important framework and direction for improvements, but local schools continue to struggle to integrate federal and state programs with their visions of programs.

This fragmentation could be reduced considerably through more electronic communications, the development of models of how schools can integrate programs and guidance to states in the articulation of roles, and the development of common data systems.

***Provide assistance in updating equity concerns.***

Past equity efforts were focused on providing access for all students to learn. This remains a concern, but in addition, emphasis must be given to student outcomes. The federal role should continue to support children facing major challenges in their lives. This must include helping schools find ways of meeting the diverse needs found in most schoolrooms through challenging curriculum, more intensive instruction (including electronic resources), supportive learning environments, and preventive diagnosis and preteaching of those students experiencing difficulties.

In Washington State we are working to break the long accepted correlation between poverty and student achievement of excellence. This will be possible through systematic retraining and support of teachers, better use of research, the integration of electronic resources in the curriculum, the provision of out-of-school time programs, and work with parents and communities in expanding learning beyond the school environment.

***Provide resources for state and local capacity building.***

American education has traditionally recognized the various roles that need to be performed by federal, state, district, and local governments. Each level plays an important role and contributes to the overall strength of American education. While these roles need to be reexamined periodically, actions that undermine respective roles or reduce collaboration in seeking systemic change could easily weaken the system.

Two trends are under way across the nation. The first trend is that of devolution and moving more decision making to the school level. Nearly all Washington schools are involved in site-based decision making, and more and more attention is being given to providing schools with flexibility in their use of federal and state funds. OSPI is working on models of how to best combine and use available resources at both the school and district levels.

In a recent study<sup>1</sup> of the distribution of financial resources in Washington State, the following results were obtained.

- Washington has one of the more equitable funding systems in the nation. The funding gap between the wealthiest and poorest districts in Washington is relatively small because of the following: (1) the high share of funding provided by the state, (2) the additional amount of federal and state funding provided to students with special educational needs (bilingual, special education, and so on), and (3) the limits that the state has placed on raising local revenues. Federal and state categorical program funds make up the differences in local resources between the poor and wealthier districts.
- District spending patterns are about the same, regardless of the amount of funding available or the size of the district. About 60

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<sup>1</sup> Washington Joint Legislature Audit and Review Committee. *K-12 Finance Study*. December 1998.

percent of *activity* expenditures are spent on instruction with 30 percent on instruction support and support services. About 10 percent is spent for building and district administration and common services. *Program* expenditures tend to be similar with a tendency for the largest and highest spending districts spending less on instruction and more on compensatory instruction and support services.

- Districts have varying levels of students with special needs such as those receiving bilingual, vocational, or special education; poor students; and those qualifying for the state Learning Assistance Program for poor students. The smallest districts (under 1,000 students) tend to have the highest per pupil spending levels and generally have higher levels of students with special needs. Special education students tend to be distributed fairly evenly among all districts.
- Districts that have higher expenditures per student have lower student-staff ratios. The higher the per pupil spending level, the lower the student-staff ratio. This applies to teachers, support staff, or classified staff.

The Washington experience suggests that dollars are getting to the schools and that federal dollars are a strong factor in providing equity for students in poorer schools.

About 90 percent of funds reach local schools with 5 percent providing district support. Districts provide critical infrastructure and support for schools. The functions of business management, personnel recruitment, assessments, nutrition, record keeping, transportation, levy management, special education, etc., free school personnel to focus on school programs. Districts also play a critical role in the development of technology systems. They handle the procurement of basic telecommunications hookups and procurement of software.

Some schools could assume greater responsibility for more program functions, and small pilot studies would be useful. What is needed before any large-scale changes are local capacity building/management improvement activities. No local school administrator has the time or expertise to handle a full complement of organizational functions.

The second trend that is occurring is the growing importance of state and district activities. Educational reform is structured around state standards, benchmarks and assessments, and accountability plans. The role supporting districts, schools, and communities to meet these challenges falls largely to the states. Regional and state networking and partnerships provide incentives for coordination and sharing of experiences and learning.

The state administrative funds provided as part of federal programs have to be used to manage, monitor, and provide technical assistance to program grantees. The usual 5 percent state administrative cost is necessary to pay for a grant selection process (readers and preapplication assistance), for distributing funds, for monitoring (communications with grantees, ensuring documentation and implementation of grants), and providing technical assistance and training (travel to sites, training costs, release time, etc.). Administrative costs vary with the size of state program allocations, but administrative fees of 5 percent are modest when compared with overhead costs of 20 percent to 75 percent for nonprofit, profit, and postsecondary institutions.

States need financial and expert resources. Regional labs and centers are effective in their own environment, but they are not able to *tailor* research and technical assistance to meet the varying needs of states. Services provided by labs and centers are very helpful, but they are not adequate to meet the capacity building needs of educational reform. States need to provide focused systems of information, professional development, materials development and distribution, and other capacity building activities based on the unique needs of districts and schools.

Washington is now completing a statewide K-20 technology system that connects colleges, universities, community and technical colleges, districts, schools, and libraries. The state funds the basic backbone for the system, and local, state, and federal funds are providing school hookups and the necessary hardware. All postsecondary institutions and more than 35 percent of the districts are now on line for data and point-to-point video services. All districts and an estimated 70 percent of schools will be on line by July 1999.

These systems could not be installed as local initiatives due to the requirements of interoperability and utility type support. The cost savings are impressive. The statewide backbone has cost about \$60 million as compared to \$200 million if it had been done by each institution. The estimated system maintenance, operations and depreciation is projected to be \$30 million as compared to an estimated \$100 million for independent operations.

We are now learning how important the electronic system is to providing quality student programs and to an ongoing system of professional development for educators. Students now have access to on-line resources as well as the ability to interact with experts in the state, nation, or world. Washington's professional development system is beginning to include a menu of conferences, workshops, electronic programs, videoconferences, and regional networking. These and other statewide activities are essential to educational reform. State education agencies need resources for statewide capacity building efforts that are beyond the administration of grants.

I recommend that Title II and Goals 2000 funds be combined into a capacity building program for each state. Such a program might require a planning process with indicators to assure progress. States are willing to take greater responsibility and be accountable for educational reform, but they need resources and closer collaborations with federal agencies, other states, labs and centers, postsecondary research, business organizations, and other sources of expertise.



## **Part II – Program Themes for Reauthorization**

I recommend four cross-program themes for ESEA programs. These would include the following.

### ***Early Prevention and Readiness to Learn***

Districts and schools need to be encouraged and rewarded for reaching out to young children and their families in supporting their readiness for school. Many national research reports have documented that the academic performance of students is strongly related to early stimulation and preparation for school. Congress needs to encourage collaboration among agencies so that encouraging joint proposals for funding reduces the fragmentation among Even Start, Head Start, and other early childhood programs.

The federal government has the opportunity to encourage states to use diagnostic assessments to gauge readiness to learn during the early years. In Washington State we require a second grade reading assessment where teachers listen to and assess individual children reading a passage. We found this experience to be very valuable in helping teachers identify early problems and convening school personnel to discuss common problems. The results are low stakes in that they are not reported to the state, but they are used for local planning. I would be happy to share further information with you.

### ***Excellence for All***

The emphasis of ESEA has been on meeting the needs of children facing major challenges in their lives. This emphasis must be retained. There is, however, the need for encouraging all students toward academic excellence. Gifted and talented students have been given little attention. These students come from all sectors of communities—affluent and poor, male or female, or majority and minority cultures.

We must build models and programs for high achieving and talented children from all walks of life. This task requires supporting professional staff in their efforts to meet high standards of excellence and expanding creative learning environments.

### ***Acceleration of Struggling Learners***

A variety of techniques are likely to be needed to bring underachieving children up to grade levels. One of the best answers for struggling students is preteaching. Some of our schools have a Sunrise School where bilingual and struggling students come in before school and receive the instruction for the day. When they receive the instruction with their classmates, they now can be the first to hold up their hands or demonstrate their learning in other ways. This provides not only a learning benefit but also a self-confidence benefit.

Other efforts such as after school, Saturday, or summer school experiences need to be encouraged. The experience of the Washington Reading Corps has demonstrated that even short-term interventions in the summer and throughout the year provide a significant benefit.

### ***Accountability and Continuous Improvement***

Strong state and local planning and accountability efforts need to be highlighted. States and districts are willing to assume greater responsibility for change if they are provided with resources (models, assistance, and funds) and can implement accountability programs with reasonable expectations and support. Washington State, as well as other states, is moving ahead with strong accountability programs.

Schools are willing to move ahead, but they also need information, additional time, and support in their roles as the *front line* deliverers of educational services.

Establishing milestones and indicators are needed to assist schools and districts. This is an area where research and model building are needed. Schools need tools to gauge the effectiveness of their programs and knowledge of the key components for bringing about continuing improvement.

The general goal of all ESEA programs must be to prepare all students for the requirements of the twenty-first century areas of living, learning, and working. This must move education from probability schools to possibility schools. Our education system was once based on the probabilities of the roles they would perform as adults. This is no longer operative. Our task must be to move all children to realize the possibilities of their individual knowledge, experience, and dreams and not depend on the probabilities of race, gender, social class, or disability.

## **Part III – Directions for ESEA**

### **Title I—Programs for Disadvantaged**

Some of the suggested directions for ESEA Title I include the following.

***Greater reliance on certificated personnel and well-trained, supervised noncertificated personnel.***

Well-qualified certificated and noncertificated personnel are essential in providing more individualized intensive services to students. Title I funds should be used more extensively to provide training, supervision, and evaluation of such services. Career ladders should be encouraged for paraprofessionals to attend college and use their experiences as part of their teacher preparation.

***Schoolwide programs should remain focused on the needs of poor children, although flexibility should be provided for schools not meeting the 50 percent poverty criteria.***

In general, the emphasis of schoolwide programs should be on schools with larger proportions of poor children. There are, however, situations and exemplary programs where schoolwide programs should be used with lower percentages of poor schools. An example is the waiver request of Seattle Public Schools to use schoolwide programs in eleven schools with a range of 35 percent to 50 percent of poverty. In this case, state funds also target lower poverty schools, and the combined funds can be used for greater impact. This could be met by Ed Flex waivers.

The priority for schoolwide programs is to assist schools to deliver high quality, challenging programs in ways that match the diverse learning styles found in most classrooms.

***Migrant Education program.***

There are over 30,000 migrant students enrolling and withdrawing from Washington State school districts every year. Title I Part C of Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 provides special funds to meet the unique challenges these children face throughout their education career. Greater emphasis should be placed on professional development, funds for summer programs, and cross-state reporting of programs.

***Full funding for all poor students.***

Currently, many (an estimated 1/2 to 1/3 of poor children) do not benefit substantially from Title I funds. Title I funding should be increased to meet the needs of more poor students.

***Professional development is needed at all levels.***

Schools, like most organizations, are struggling to keep all personnel up-to-date with research and changes in educational practice. This is a continuing task that is often not funded or implemented in effective ways. Strategies that are needed include time for planning and learning, the use of mentor teachers or teachers on special assignment to coach and work with other teachers, and the alignment of state, district, and local professional development programs. This must be part of a capacity building effort at the district and state levels.

***Assessment and accountability must be fully implemented.***

Most states have developed structures for continuing assessment and accountability of Title I programs. These must continue to be monitored and implemented. Greater attention needs to be given to classroom assessments that can help teachers strengthen the curriculum on a timely basis.

***Comprehensive school reform programs should be continued.***

The Porter-Obey or Comprehensive School Reform program is a positive program. This needs to be continued as one alternative for Title I programs. There is need for the development of models for the integration of programs to meet the varied needs of students found in most schools. Adaptations are needed for most comprehensive programs.

**Title II—Programs**

Title II or Eisenhower programs need to emphasize state capacity building with Goals 2000. This program should include the involvement of intermediate agencies, districts, and postsecondary institutions that can develop integrated systems of capacity building. This should encourage and support state and regional systems of information dissemination, professional development, technical assistance, and school district planning activities.

**Title III—Technology for Education**

The primary goal of educational reform is to increase the quality and quantity of student learning and achievement. The effective use of educational technology provides a major strategy for achieving this goal. The problem to date is that educational reform and the use of educational technology are on separate tracks. Much activity and resources are going into both areas, but they are seldom related to each other in ways that can achieve significant improvement in classroom teaching and learning. The current application of the Innovation Challenge Grant Program is designed to create rapid successes through infusing enriched funding into a few school districts. It does not easily support larger cooperative efforts across districts and states. By expanding the Innovation Challenge Grant program to include larger projects of national scope, the same goals can be achieved on a much larger scale.

ESEA should expand the scope of the Education Technology Innovation Grant so those larger projects of national scope can be included. The funding authorized in this account should be increased by at least \$200 million annually to accommodate these larger projects. These projects should be specifically designed to: (1) identify and develop curriculum resources that are aligned with state academic standards and assessments and make these available for all states; (2) use emerging technologies to enhance the quality of professional development for teachers, administrators, and other schools staff; and (3) develop policies for leadership, planning, funding, and capacity building that support the use of technology to enhance student learning. Adding a budget category and increased funding for larger cooperative efforts between states to provide curriculum, training, and capacity building in the Innovation Challenge Grant program will increase resources and be beneficial for all of our states. In addition, this will support the important objective that all state systems have of increasing the effective and efficient use of technology in educational reform and significantly improving student learning.

#### **Title IV—Safe and Drug Free Schools**

The Safe and Drug Free Schools program plays a key role in supporting learning climates and activities that historically were not considered as part of the academic curriculum. These supportive learning environments are a critical first step or precondition if many students are to be successful in academic activities. Reauthorization should emphasize research-based prevention efforts, the requirement of measurable outcomes, and the adherence to the U.S. Department of Education's Principles of Effectiveness.

#### **Title V—Promoting Equity**

The Magnet Schools program has served a major role in providing assistance to desegregating districts. At this point in time, the program needs to be open to all districts wishing to develop high quality schools for integrated, diverse populations of students.

### **Title VI—Innovative Education Program Strategies**

This is one of the most flexible local programs. While grants should be administered by SEA's, this program needs to be used to encourage local creativity, adaptation, and general capacity building efforts.

### **Title VII—Bilingual Language, Language Enhancement, and Language Acquisition**

The current pattern of national funding leads to the awarding of grants to the districts with good grant writing skills that may not have the highest levels of needs. This program should be expanded and administered by states to target the needs in a more effective way.

### **Title VIII—Impact Aid**

In a state like Washington where federal land holdings and installations play a dominant role in many districts, Impact Aid remains an essential funding resource for many districts. Efforts to consistently reduce the program create major planning and continuity problems for federally impacted districts.

### **Conclusion**

Research consistently indicates that while many actions can produce improvements in schools, the two major ways of investing in and supporting continuous improvement in schools are to: (1) increase the education and professional development of educators and to provide educators with time and models and (2) provide assistance for restructuring and aligning learning activities using a common focus and vision.

ESEA provides the major federal funding resource for local schools and communities. Funds are well used to provide greater opportunities for children facing major challenges in their lives, but they also establish a framework for the continuing improvement of schools for all children. The implementation of federal program guidelines and procedures is a learning



process that requires time and effort to achieve. Maintaining some level of stability and focusing on the most critical needs would do the most for American schools.

I ask that these be given primary considerations in the reauthorization process. States, districts, and schools are working hard to move educational programs to the levels required by profound changes in our society. We thank federal decision-makers for their assistance and look forward to the time when world class schools are provided for all students in Washington State and in the nation.