

AMERICA'S EDUCATION CHALLENGE: EXCELLENCE FOR ALL STUDENTS

February 22, 1999

The Honorable William Jefferson Clinton
President of the United States
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

RE: Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)

During the 106th Congress, you have the opportunity to reauthorize the major set of elementary and secondary education programs, which will have an impact on preparing students for the 21st Century. We are committed deeply to assist in your deliberations on this legislation. Therefore, the undersigned organizations—representing parents, educators, elected officials, administrators, and advocates—have prepared the following statement as guidance to you, your Administration, and the United States Congress on this reauthorization.

We hope our statement of principles and goals will prove helpful as you undertake review and action on this primary vehicle of federal support for elementary and secondary education.

We share your commitment to excellence, opportunity and quality in education. We look forward to working with you to craft federal action toward those expectations. If you or your staff have any questions regarding this statement, please contact any of our organizations listed below.

Sincerely,

American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education
American Association of University Women
American Federation of School Administrators
American Federation of Teachers
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
Council of Chief State School Officers
Council of the Great City Schools
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of Federally Impacted Schools
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Association of State Boards of Education
National Association of State Directors of Special Education
National Education Association
National Parent Teacher Association
National School Boards Association
National Science Teachers Association

cc: The Honorable Richard W. Riley, Secretary of Education

AMERICA'S EDUCATION CHALLENGE: EXCELLENCE FOR ALL STUDENTS

Educating America's children and youth is the most important challenge facing our country today. Americans want and expect to have elementary and secondary education that is second to none. We want excellence in every school for every student through our unique education system, which offers free kindergarten through grade 12 schooling for all students supported by local, state, and federal government investments.

Our organizations—representing parents, educators, elected officials, administrators, and advocates—share the commitment to excellence in education and are prepared to work with President Clinton and the 106th Congress to craft federal action toward that expectation.

While localities and states have primary responsibility for education, the public understands and overwhelmingly supports the vital federal role in education. Through two centuries, we have acted together, through the federal government, to address national challenges. These actions have included accelerating learning for educationally disadvantaged children, providing students with disabilities access to education, and supporting local and state efforts to develop standards and improve educational expectations for all students. The challenges we face today demand that our nation build on these efforts and expands the federal investment in 21st Century education.

This statement expresses our commitment to work together with the U.S. Congress and the Administration to strengthen the dynamic local-state-federal education partnership for education improvement. Legislative action should center on accomplishing three goals:

- (I) Accelerated Achievement: Expanding the Opportunities for Students At Risk;
- (II) Excellence: Students Achieving Excellence through Proven Programs and Research-Based Practice; and
- (III) Quality: Strengthening Capacity for Quality Teaching and Learning for All Children.

We strongly encourage the President and the Congress to use these three goals to shape the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. We encourage also a continuation of the functions and resources of the Goals 2000: Educate America Act and the authority for the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) informed by these goals and closely integrated with the purposes and activities of ESEA.

Building on the Success of ESEA

Over the last four decades, the local-state-federal partnership has made a significant difference in promoting high quality education. The education of America's children is improving in the face of continued high rates of child poverty, more children coming to school with a native language other than English, insufficient opportunities for quality early childhood education, and a society with large pockets of unsafe neighborhoods.

To address these evolving educational needs and incorporate proven programs and research-based practices, five years ago Congress and the Administration reshaped the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. To better ensure that federal programs meet 21st Century challenges by advancing excellence and equity in America's schools, the following are now strengthened:

- Student achievement is increasingly the measure of "success" for the accountability of federal resources;
- Educators are better able to integrate federal resources to address local needs and goals to meet state and local standards for all students;
- Dollars are driven to the local level and targeted primarily to students and schools most in need of additional help;
- Parents are empowered to take a meaningful participatory role in their child's education and in their school's decision-making process;
- Educators can more efficiently take advantage of federal programs as a result of increased flexibility, including schoolwide programs, consolidated plans and applications, and a waiver process that seeks to protect the underlying purpose of the programs;
- Students are learning in safer and improved school environments with the addition of violence prevention to substance abuse programs; and
- Schools are collaborating with health, social service and community-based organizations to enable every child to come to school ready to learn.

These refinements and new, innovative programs enable parents and educators to employ ESEA as a vehicle to accelerate and replicate educational successes at the state and local levels and to provide equity and excellence for all students. These changes are making a difference. The proportion of high school graduates who take rigorous academic courses is up, including a percentage doubling of those who take biology, chemistry and physics. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) indicates long-term gains in math and science achievement, and the gains in reading and writing scores are smaller but rising as well.

Federal ESEA programs targeted to important national needs are demonstrating positive results. NAEP data indicate that targeted federal programs such as Title I have helped to narrow the achievement gap for poor and minority students. Teachers have taken advantage of the Eisenhower Professional Development program to help improve both their skills and knowledge base in math and science. Schools otherwise unable to connect to new technologies and to integrate educational technologies into teaching and learning have benefited significantly from federal technology assistance. After-school enrichment and academic enhancement programs through Title I and the 21st Century Community Learning Centers have extended the day to reinforce the basic skills and knowledge our children will need to succeed in life. Parental involvement in children's learning has been given more focus and importance through the requirements in federal programs such as Title I, helping to create more effective school-family partnerships.

The 1994 reauthorization of ESEA moved us in the right direction to accomplish the national interests in education for all students, particularly minorities, girls, and children with disabilities. It reinforced and reaffirmed the vital role of the federal involvement in advancing student achievement at the state, district and school levels.

Future Directions

Now, we must accelerate the pace of our progress. We must replicate successes in every urban, suburban and rural school. And we must increase program resources, particularly those of Title I, to assist the one-third of eligible students not being served. The bar has been raised in terms of expectations for America's students to compete in an ever changing global economy and society. Our members—parents, educators, locally elected officials, administrators, and advocates—are responding. We are committed to raising student achievement through rigorous standards, quality school leaders, teachers and other school staff, parent and community involvement in student learning, and safe and modern schools. Business and community leaders and policy makers are also committed. That commitment must now translate into more aggressive, responsive legislation.

The solid foundations for progress that were strengthened in 1994 must be sustained and enhanced. Congress and the Administration must now focus in this reauthorization on accelerating the pace of progress and replicating successes on a wider scale. The federal government also has a unique obligation to localities impacted by activities of the federal government. The national imperative is clear—high quality education in every classroom and for every student. The challenges to be met through ESEA are also clear: (I) Accelerated Achievement: Expanding Opportunities for Students At Risk; (II) Excellence: Students Achieving Excellence through Proven Programs and Research-Based Practice; and (III) Quality: Strengthening Capacity for Quality Teaching and Learning for All Children.

The ESEA can further enhance the ability of the nation's parents, teachers and educators to meet these three challenges by providing support for the following:

- Improving and implementing state and local academic standards for all students and aligning valid, fair assessments to the standards;
- Increasing the capacity of states, school districts and schools to implement proven programs and research-based practices, including adequate funding for evaluations of promising programs;
- Expanding opportunities for meaningful professional development for school leaders and school staff in subject matter, proven programs, research-based practices, parent involvement, and the use of curricula aligned to standards;
- Assisting beginning teachers and providing incentives to hire fully certified teachers and assign them to their area of certification;
- Establishing and maintaining smaller class size, modernizing schools, and improving school safety and learning environment; and
- Assisting schools to develop and sustain parent, family and community involvement in helping children learn, including parent education, extended school hours and outreach activities.

Our organizations recognize both the importance of the federal role and the importance of the current ESEA law in establishing solid foundations for continued educational excellence and progress. We urge Congress and the President to re-affirm their commitment to these goals by reauthorizing ESEA with important refinements and supplements which respond to local and state needs in helping all students reach high standards.

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National Challenges

I. ACCELERATED ACHIEVEMENT: EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS AT RISK

The greatest challenges face children who live in high poverty areas, who are migrant, who have a native language other than English, and who have disabilities. The difficulties faced by these children are often exacerbated by the lack of access to high quality early childhood education and school readiness programs. As a result, many of these children both start school behind and often fall even further behind their school peers. To close their achievement gap and enable them to achieve excellence, more is required in the way of parent and community education and involvement, school readiness, professional development, and resources, because these students must learn more each year than what would otherwise be expected. Title I and other targeted programs have been crucial for minority and at-risk students to close the gap between their achievement levels and those of other students.

To help students at risk achieve excellence and to accelerate and replicate success in turning around low-performing schools, the reauthorized ESEA must -

- a) Enable all eligible students to benefit from effective standards-based programs and services by providing sufficient, targeted federal resources for students with specialized needs such as low-income children, English language learners, immigrant children, and migrant children;
- b) Improve achievement of students at risk by effectively implementing accountability measures and performance requirements developed by states, localities and schools;
- c) Enhance the quality of teaching and learning for at-risk students by providing support for beginning teachers, as well as incentives to hire fully certified teachers and assign them to their area of certification;
- d) Intensify learning for at-risk students by enhancing professional development in proven programs and research-based practices, and by promoting collaboration and coordination among general, special, and vocational education through shared professional development and service delivery;
- e) Eliminate remaining barriers to meaningful parental education and involvement; and
- f) Enhance the success of at-risk students through preschool and transition programs, expansion of after-school and summer programs, linking education, health and social services, and supporting a safe and orderly school environment.

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COULD
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BE?

VII. EXCELLENCE: STUDENTS ACHIEVING EXCELLENCE THROUGH PROVEN PROGRAMS AND RESEARCH-BASED PRACTICE

Our global economy results in an ever more competitive international marketplace of goods, services, and ideas. The future of our economy, security, and quality of life is measured in international dimensions. The success of Americans as individuals and as a nation is dependent on our nation's ability to ensure that all students, including those at risk, achieve excellence in education and are prepared for global competition. The American people want the nation to work as a whole through the leadership and resources of the federal government to ensure that all schools have high standards, conduct reliable assessments of student progress toward those standards, and report results that assure public confidence in dollars well

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spent. The success of efforts to strive for excellence, such as school-wide reform and intensive professional development, depend in large part on federal investment in support of state and local standards, conduct of international and national comparative studies, and identification and dissemination of proven programs and research-based practices.

To ensure that states, districts, and schools have student expectations second to none and that all students benefit from improved instructional practice and standards-based reforms grounded in effective research and evaluation, the reauthorized ESEA must –

- a) Improve student achievement through the identification and dissemination of research-based instructional practices, and identification of proven models of school and classroom reform;
- b) Enable all states, local districts and schools to improve and implement standards and assessments, align curricula and professional development, and implement innovative, proven and comprehensive strategies;
- c) Expand the use of proven programs and research-based best practices in schools throughout the nation, particularly those with high concentrations of at-risk students;
- d) Promote development and use of sound and instructive assessments of student performance, valid comparisons of individual educational attainment, and quality reviews and evaluations to foster accountability of school, district, and state progress;
- e) Assist school leaders, teachers, and other staff to better address the individual needs of all children (particularly those associated with race, ethnicity, gender, and disability), to improve their ability to teach to higher standards, to more effectively use proven reform models and research-based instructional practices, and to maximize the use of technology; and
- f) Assist schools in developing and implementing meaningful parent involvement plans.

III. QUALITY: STRENGTHENING CAPACITY FOR QUALITY TEACHING AND LEARNING FOR ALL CHILDREN

Today, a key federal role is to assist teachers and administrators at the school, district and state levels in building their capacity to provide top quality education for all students. Capacity-building includes development of the internal expertise, infrastructure, and skills necessary for educators and parents to identify what works well and to implement those effective practices and programs. The American people advocate priority funding to accomplish these particular purposes. They also want the funds targeted to supplement local and state efforts; and they want good reporting and evaluation to assure accountability.

Students benefit from expanded capacity for quality teaching and learning, which includes support to implement standards-based curriculum and assessments; to provide professional development for teachers, school staff, and school leaders; to acquire and integrate advanced technology into instruction; and to address other targeted needs such as parental education and involvement. Expanded capacity also includes smaller class sizes and modern schools. Research shows that smaller classes, especially in the early grades, combined with a strong curriculum and professional development, increases student achievement by allowing teachers to provide individualized student attention and maintain classroom discipline. Historically, the federal government has met such needs in periods of crisis, such as shortfalls in science

and mathematics teaching. ESEA must continue to meet these critical needs by providing targeted programs to assist in state and local capacity-building

To provide states, districts and schools with the ability to expand and improve educational reforms and best practice for every student, ESEA reauthorization must support –

- a) Building state and local capacity to provide technical assistance and professional development to further student achievement and to connect to other providers of effective technical assistance
- b) Professional development in subject matter and to expand implementation of best practices by highly qualified teachers in all classrooms;
- c) Innovative recruitment programs to hire qualified new teachers to reduce class size and increase teacher/student quality contacts;
- d) Acquisition and effective use of learning technologies by local districts and schools;
- e) School modernization to provide a safe learning environment, reduce overcrowding, and connect to new technologies;
- f) Healthy students who are ready to learn and a safe school environment that is free of drugs and violence; and
- g) Training in parental and community education and involvement.

Importance of Action

The American people expect elementary and secondary education second to none in the world. Our organizations, together with the American people, expect the federal government, in collaboration with states and localities, will meet this challenge. The principal vehicle for federal action is the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. It has been previously revised and improved to better meet the nation's evolving needs. Our organizations urge this process of enhancing the federal role and investment be continued by adhering to the principles put forward in this statement. Our organizations encourage Congress and the Administration to strengthen ESEA which benefits all children, and not diminish its impact by adopting voucher programs. Our recommendations promote the foundations of the federal role in ESEA, while also making important refinements and supplements which take advantage of changes in technology, research on learning, and pedagogical approaches.

The American people know our security and quality of life, both as individuals and as a nation, are now determined by our ability to meet the challenge of ensuring all students achieve excellence in education. This challenge demands enhanced federal support in the education of our nation's children through both revisions of ESEA and other supporting education legislation, as well as expansion of resources. There is no acceptable alternative.

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Future Directions

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The solid foundations for progress that were strengthened in 1994 must be sustained and enhanced. Congress and the Administration must now focus in this reauthorization on accelerating the pace of progress and replicating successes on a wider scale. The federal government also has a unique obligation to localities impacted by activities of the federal government. The national imperative is clear—high quality education in every classroom and for every student. The challenges to be met through ESEA are also clear: (I) Accelerated Achievement: Expanding Opportunities for Students At Risk; (II) Excellence: Students Achieving Excellence through Proven Programs and Research-Based Practice; and (III) Quality: Strengthening Capacity for Quality Teaching and Learning for All Children.

The ESEA can further enhance the ability of the nation's parents, teachers and educators to meet these three challenges by providing support for the following:

- Improving and implementing state and local academic standards for all students and aligning valid, fair assessments to the standards;
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- Expanding opportunities for meaningful professional development for school leaders and school staff in subject matter, proven programs, research-based practices, parent involvement, and the use of curricula aligned to standards;
- Assisting beginning teachers and providing incentives to hire fully certified teachers and assign them to their area of certification;
- Establishing and maintaining smaller class size, modernizing schools, and improving school safety and learning environment; and
- Assisting schools to develop and sustain parent, family and community involvement in helping children learn, including parent education, extended school hours and outreach activities.

Our organizations recognize both the importance of the federal role and the importance of the current ESEA law in establishing solid foundations for continued educational excellence and progress. We urge Congress and the President to re-affirm their commitment to these goals by reauthorizing ESEA with important refinements and supplements which respond to local and state needs in helping all students reach high standards.

National Challenges

I. ACCELERATED ACHIEVEMENT: EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS AT RISK

The greatest challenges face children who live in high poverty areas, who are migrant, who have a native language other than English, and who have disabilities. The difficulties faced by these children are often exacerbated by the lack of access to high quality early childhood education and school readiness programs. As a result, many of these children both start school behind and often fall even further behind their school peers. To close their achievement gap and enable them to achieve excellence, more is required in the way of parent and community education and involvement, school readiness, professional development, and resources, because these students must learn more each year than what would otherwise be expected. Title I and other targeted programs have been crucial for minority and at-risk students to close the gap between their achievement levels and those of other students.

To help students at risk achieve excellence and to accelerate and replicate success in turning around low-performing schools, the reauthorized ESEA must -

- a) Enable all eligible students to benefit from effective standards-based programs and services by providing sufficient, targeted federal resources for students with specialized needs such as low-income children, English language learners, immigrant children, and migrant children;
- b) Improve achievement of students at risk by effectively implementing accountability measures and performance requirements developed by states, localities and schools;
- c) Enhance the quality of teaching and learning for at-risk students by providing support for beginning teachers, as well as incentives to hire fully certified teachers and assign them to their area of certification;
- d) Intensify learning for at-risk students by enhancing professional development in proven programs and research-based practices, and by promoting collaboration and coordination among general, special, and vocational education through shared professional development and service delivery;
- e) Eliminate remaining barriers to meaningful parental education and involvement; and
- f) Enhance the success of at-risk students through preschool and transition programs, expansion of after-school and summer programs, linking education, health and social services, and supporting a safe and orderly school environment.

VII. EXCELLENCE: STUDENTS ACHIEVING EXCELLENCE THROUGH PROVEN PROGRAMS AND RESEARCH-BASED PRACTICE

Our global economy results in an ever more competitive international marketplace of goods, services, and ideas. The future of our economy, security, and quality of life is measured in international dimensions. The success of Americans as individuals and as a nation is dependent on our nation's ability to ensure that all students, including those at risk, achieve excellence in education and are prepared for global competition. The American people want the nation to work as a whole through the leadership and resources of the federal government to ensure that all schools have high standards, conduct reliable assessments of student progress toward those standards, and report results that assure public confidence in dollars well

spent. The success of efforts to strive for excellence, such as school-wide reform and intensive professional development, depend in large part on federal investment in support of state and local standards, conduct of international and national comparative studies, and identification and dissemination of proven programs and research-based practices.

To ensure that states, districts, and schools have student expectations second to none and that all students benefit from improved instructional practice and standards-based reforms grounded in effective research and evaluation, the reauthorized ESEA must –

- a) Improve student achievement through the identification and dissemination of research-based instructional practices, and identification of proven models of school and classroom reform;
- b) Enable all states, local districts and schools to improve and implement standards and assessments, align curricula and professional development, and implement innovative, proven and comprehensive strategies;
- c) Expand the use of proven programs and research-based best practices in schools throughout the nation, particularly those with high concentrations of at-risk students;
- d) Promote development and use of sound and instructive assessments of student performance, valid comparisons of individual educational attainment, and quality reviews and evaluations to foster accountability of school, district, and state progress;
- e) Assist school leaders, teachers, and other staff to better address the individual needs of all children (particularly those associated with race, ethnicity, gender, and disability), to improve their ability to teach to higher standards, to more effectively use proven reform models and research-based instructional practices, and to maximize the use of technology; and
- f) Assist schools in developing and implementing meaningful parent involvement plans.

III. QUALITY: STRENGTHENING CAPACITY FOR QUALITY TEACHING AND LEARNING FOR ALL CHILDREN

Today, a key federal role is to assist teachers and administrators at the school, district and state levels in building their capacity to provide top quality education for all students. Capacity-building includes development of the internal expertise, infrastructure, and skills necessary for educators and parents to identify what works well and to implement those effective practices and programs. The American people advocate priority funding to accomplish these particular purposes. They also want the funds targeted to supplement local and state efforts; and they want good reporting and evaluation to assure accountability.

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and mathematics teaching. ESEA must continue to meet these critical needs by providing targeted programs to assist in state and local capacity-building

To provide states, districts and schools with the ability to expand and improve educational reforms and best practice for every student, ESEA reauthorization must support –

- a) Building state and local capacity to provide technical assistance and professional development to further student achievement and to connect to other providers of effective technical assistance
- b) Professional development in subject matter and to expand implementation of best practices by highly qualified teachers in all classrooms;
- c) Innovative recruitment programs to hire qualified new teachers to reduce class size and increase teacher/student quality contacts;
- d) Acquisition and effective use of learning technologies by local districts and schools;
- e) School modernization to provide a safe learning environment, reduce overcrowding, and connect to new technologies;
- f) Healthy students who are ready to learn and a safe school environment that is free of drugs and violence; and
- g) Training in parental and community education and involvement.

Importance of Action

The American people expect elementary and secondary education second to none in the world. Our organizations, together with the American people, expect the federal government, in collaboration with states and localities, will meet this challenge. The principal vehicle for federal action is the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. It has been previously revised and improved to better meet the nation's evolving needs. Our organizations urge this process of enhancing the federal role and investment be continued by adhering to the principles put forward in this statement. Our organizations encourage Congress and the Administration to strengthen ESEA which benefits all children, and not diminish its impact by adopting voucher programs. Our recommendations promote the foundations of the federal role in ESEA, while also making important refinements and supplements which take advantage of changes in technology, research on learning, and pedagogical approaches.

The American people know our security and quality of life, both as individuals and as a nation, are now determined by our ability to meet the challenge of ensuring all students achieve excellence in education. This challenge demands enhanced federal support in the education of our nation's children through both revisions of ESEA and other supporting education legislation, as well as expansion of resources. There is no acceptable alternative.