



Discussion Draft

Principles for Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

Introduction

The *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA), first passed in 1965 and most recently reauthorized in 2001 under the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB), is the primary federal legislative funding source for U.S. K-12 public education. It is intended to address discrepancies in funding and academic outcomes between advantaged and disadvantaged students. Standards, assessments and school accountability provisions were first introduced in 1994. Each subsequent version has introduced new programs, and ESEA now provides about \$25 billion annually to schools and districts across the country. ESEA is long overdue for reauthorization, and many of the changes made as part of NCLB, including provisions intended to strengthen teacher quality and hold schools accountable for results, must be revisited.

Guiding Principles for Reauthorization of ESEA

To assist states with NCLB implementation issues that should have been addressed through reauthorization, the U.S. Secretary of Education announced in September 2011 a process for states to apply for waivers from certain NCLB provisions. This approach, which has included tying approval of waivers to new federal requirements, has led to a patchwork of complex education policies that lack consistency from state to state. Relying on waivers from the U.S. Department of Education is not the appropriate way to drive education reform. Instead, Congress must use the reauthorization of ESEA to address these issues.

Business Roundtable member CEOs believe that Congress must focus on ensuring all students graduate from high school with the tools necessary to succeed in college and careers. To accomplish this, we believe the following principles must guide the reauthorization of ESEA:

Set Clear Expectations: States must take the lead in setting clear expectations for what students in each grade need to know in order to graduate from high school ready for a career and prepared for college, without the need for remediation. These expectations, reflected in challenging academic standards, must build upon those required under current law – which includes standards for math, reading and science – that are

internationally benchmarked and aligned with both college entrance requirements and the skills employers need.

Define Goals for Success: States must establish rigorous, realistic, annual goals to ensure all students – regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, economic status, first language, disability or community in which they live – are meeting the state-established challenging academic standards and graduate from high school. States must also analyze school progress annually toward meeting those goals. Current law requires schools ensure 100 percent of students are proficient in math and reading by 2014. Although laudable, many believe this unrealistic target resulted in states lowering their standards to demonstrate progress toward this goal. Setting goals is critical toward both short- and long-term success, but a single federally defined target must be replaced with allowing states to establish rigorous goals that focus on raising academic performance, closing the achievement gaps and improving college and career readiness among groups of students.

Measure Progress: States must understand where they are today regarding the performance of all students. States should measure progress toward meeting their education goals by assessing all students. These statewide assessments should be conducted, at a minimum, annually in grades three through eight and at least once in high school for math and reading; as well as once per grade span (elementary school, middle school and high school) in science. These assessments must be state-led, valid, reliable and aligned to the state’s academic standards. At the secondary level, they should also assess whether students have met college and career readiness standards and enter college without needing remediation. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) must continue to serve as a gauge to determine the relative rigor of individual state assessments.

Ensure Reliable Data Are Available for Parents, Teachers, and State and Local Policymakers: The federal government has a role in ensuring that states make their data widely available through school, district and state report cards that clearly define progress toward meeting the following state-established goals.

- Parents should be entitled to have the clear and understandable information necessary to make sound educational decisions, including information to compare the relative success of schools toward meeting academic achievement goals. Parents should be able to get timely answers to straightforward questions every year a child is in school. For example:
 - Is my child on track to graduate from high school ready for a career, the military or college without needing remediation?
 - Is my child performing at grade level in reading, math and science?
 - Are the teachers in my child’s school qualified and effective?

- Teachers should be entitled to timely information from assessments, so results can help improve teaching and learning.
- States must build accountability systems that reward schools and districts that successfully meet their improvement targets by providing them with increased flexibility from regulations and expanding proven practices that:
 - Ensure districts and states take action in schools that consistently miss improvement targets for any group of students, including expanding options for students to attend higher-performing public schools of their choice – including public charter schools; and
 - Incorporate student assessment data as one of several measures to evaluate teacher effectiveness, while ensuring data for individual students remain appropriately protected.