



The Education Trust



While we, like Secretary Duncan, believe that Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) should be reauthorized this year, we also believe that getting it done right is as important as getting it done fast.

We have grave concerns about the methodology used by the U.S. Department of Education to estimate the percentage of schools that will, in the next few years, fail to make AYP. We would urge the department to be far more careful with data in the future. But that's not the main issue here.

National and international assessments like NAEP, TIMMS and PISA all tell us that far too many of our schools are serving far too many of our students poorly, particularly low-income students and students of color. It would be easy to create an accountability system that obscured this fact. Indeed, Congress could pass a law tomorrow that deemed every school in the country spectacular. But that wouldn't help meet the needs of our employers who are struggling to find qualified workers. It wouldn't help us compete against countries with better educated students. And it wouldn't change the learning outcomes for a single American student.

The bedrock goal of this reauthorization must be to vastly and rapidly increase the number of our children who are equipped with the skills and knowledge that they need and that we need them to have. Doing that requires providing educators with the tools and incentives that they require to serve all of our children—most especially those who have been shortchanged by our schools—much, much better. Among the most essential elements of a new law are:

- Increased flexibility for states and school districts so that they can better meet their responsibilities to schools and the public;
- An accountability system that sets improvement goals for all schools and demands *more* improvement from the students who are farthest behind;
- Improvements in supports and evaluation systems for teachers and policies that ensure that all of our students get a fair shot at being taught by strong teachers;
- Better and more information for parents and the public so that they can be active partners in the effort to improve their children's schools; and
- Policies that will set failing schools right or shut them down quickly.

Our tradition as Americans is to face our problems squarely and address them forthrightly. Going forward, ESEA policy should hold with that tradition. And that means recognizing that when the problem is that our children aren't learning enough, the correct response is to accept responsibility and teach them better.