

## STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES

### ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY EDUCATION ACT (ESEA) REAUTHORIZATION 2010

An Open Letter to President Obama, Secretary Duncan, and Members of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives:

The 2010 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) reauthorization process comes on the heels of an intense year of federal, state, and local education action spurred by President Obama's Race to the Top initiative. Like No Child Left Behind (NCLB i.e., ESEA reauthorization 2002), Race to the Top has generated controversy proportionate to the major changes it has ignited in state and local education policies.

**We the undersigned believe that even though neither is perfect, ESEA 2002 (NCLB) and Race to the Top are both landmark education reforms that have moved the country's education goals and policies in a markedly positive direction. As a result, our school systems have initiated and intensified efforts to:**

- Develop and adopt "college and career ready" standards linked to valid tests that comprehensively and accurately assess what students know and can do;
- Insist that all students – regardless of race, ethnicity, family income, first language, zip code, or disability – meet high academic standards;
- Close achievement gaps *and* opportunity gaps;
- Provide all teachers with the preparation and professional support they need to teach children to high standards in each of the subjects they teach;
- Ensure that every child has a skilled, knowledgeable, and effective teacher and that every school has an effective leader; and,
- Intervene decisively in low-performing schools and, in the case of *chronically* failing schools, convert them to charter schools, place them under new management, partially or fully reconstitute them, or shut them down and allow students to enroll in other high-performing public schools of their choice.

The last ESEA reauthorization, otherwise known as "No Child Left Behind" (NCLB), was signed into law in January 2002. Even under the quickest possible legislative scenario, the next reauthorization will occur almost a decade after the last. In turn, **the upcoming reauthorization will likely guide federal policy for the next seven to ten years. Therefore, we must be as deliberate, thorough, and forward-looking as possible in this reauthorization.**

Accordingly, we advance the following principles, which we believe any ESEA reauthorization should embody:

### **Accountability**

- All student achievement data should be disaggregated (i.e., measured and analyzed) by race and ethnicity, gender, disability status, migrant status, English proficiency, and economic status.
- State accountability systems must hold all students to the same high standards and use the same assessments for all students as part of those accountability systems.
- States must set annual, measurable, and ambitious goals for the academic performance of all students and for closing achievement gaps between: 1) economically disadvantaged students; 2) students from major racial and ethnic groups; 3) students with disabilities; and 4) students with limited English proficiency, as compared to their non-disadvantaged peers.
- States and school districts set goals to narrow, and ultimately close, high school graduation gaps.
- Accountability systems that lower the bar for subgroups of students as a function of their history of disenfranchisement are unequivocally unacceptable.
- Accountability systems should be based *only* on outcome variables (e.g., high school graduation rates and state or national test scores). Mixing outcome data with input variables (e.g., “school climate” or “parent involvement”) will confound accountability systems and mask student performance and achievement gaps.
- Graduation rates should be measured according to the common metric set out in section 200.19(b) (1) of Title 34, Code of Federal Regulations (updated in 2008).
- “Growth-to-standards” models that evaluate student progress and relative gains over multiple years toward an ultimate common goal are acceptable and encouraged. “Growth-to-nowhere” models under which there is no ultimate, absolute standard that a student is expected to achieve in a specified time do a disservice to all and are unacceptable.
- Every state must be required, by a specified date, to have accountability systems based on both absolute performance and improvement.
- Accountability systems should include both positive and negative consequences based on where schools and districts stand on both measures. Schools or districts that are “stuck” – both low-performing and low-improving – should be targeted for the most intensive interventions. Schools and districts that do well on both should be recognized for their success.

### **Public Information and Transparency**

- Transparency is paramount. Parents have a right to know their children’s current and expected level of achievement. Parents and the public have a right to information about the performance of every school as compared to schools at the local, state, and national level and about the qualifications and performance of school personnel.
- The only factor that should limit access to data is the privacy of individual students. Proprietary data that cannot be accessed by the public simply because it is managed by a private company has no place in a public school system.

- A uniform, one or two page reporting form on student achievement and teacher quality data for each school, district, and state must be made accessible on each school district and state website, and be compiled and made accessible by the U.S. Department of Education on its website. These forms should present material in an easy-to-understand format so that they are accessible to the widest possible audience.

### **Teachers and School Leaders**

- ESEA’s current “High Quality Teacher” designation should be replaced with a more specific, finely-tuned definition that will prevent states from allowing poorly qualified and ineffective teachers to remain in the classroom.
- The new ESEA should stop using NCLB’s Highly Objective Uniform State System of Evaluation (HOUSSE) as a metric for teacher subject matter knowledge. Subject-matter qualification will be based *only* on performance on state subject matter exams or attainment of a college academic major in each subject taught.
- HOUSSE has been completely discredited as a measure of teacher subject-matter knowledge and skills. Similar efforts to cobble together variables such as professional development hours and other indices with a dubious relationship to student achievement will be no better and should not be considered.
- States and school districts must develop valid measures of teacher effectiveness that make meaningful differentiations between effective and ineffective teachers and that use multiple measures that include student achievement data as a significant factor in determining teacher effectiveness, along with other measures such as observations of teacher practice by objective raters.
- Require the use of a comprehensive set of research-based input metrics for teacher hiring and evaluation, *at least* until primarily outcome-driven teacher effectiveness evaluation systems, including those that evaluate the performance of teacher training programs and their graduates, are better developed and fully implemented.
- Decisions pertaining to teacher placement, advancement, pay, and tenure should be based on teacher quality and effectiveness.
- Elaborate, clearly define, and enforce federal teacher equity laws, such as in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA): “The State will take actions to improve teacher effectiveness and comply with section 1111(b)(8)(C) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended (ESEA) (20 U.S.C. 6311(b)(8)(C)) in order to address inequities in the distribution of highly qualified teachers between high- and low-poverty schools, and to ensure that low-income and minority children are not taught at higher rates than other children by inexperienced, unqualified, or out-of-field teachers.”
- Eliminate forced placement of teachers by school districts; require that principals have autonomy in hiring teachers.
- Set aside a significant portion of federal professional development funds for states, local education authorities (LEAs), and non-profits that implement and/or expand proven and effective practices in the preparation and professional development of teachers and future school leaders.
- Ensure that all professional development dollars are used in accordance with a reauthorized ESEA that encourages the equitable distribution of teachers and increases the effectiveness of teachers in high-poverty, high-minority schools and the lowest performing schools.

### **Interventions and Incentives**

- Dramatic school change is possible. Analyses by the Education Trust indicate that at least a quarter of the schools that were categorized as low-performing several years ago are now among the highest gaining in their respective states.
- What is lacking is not the knowledge of *how* to transform a failing school, but the political will to *do* so.
- There are school transformation interventions – short of restructuring – such as those that involve focused and sustained high-quality professional development targeted to improve student achievement, and/or those that expand high-quality learning time for students via extended day, weekend, and summer programs, which have shown the potential to transform some low-performing schools.
- We embrace the Administration’s recent push under the School Improvement Grant Program and Race to the Top to compel *increasingly intensive* interventions in low-performing schools.
- *Persistently* low-performing schools *necessitate* fundamental changes in staffing and leadership, including reconstitution, conversion to a charter school, restart, or shutdown. After other approaches have been tried and have failed, these are the only viable options with a reasonable probability of success.
- Federal funds for reform-oriented instructional approaches such as supplemental tutoring, expanded learning time (including after-school, extended day and school year), teacher training, and charter school management should, to the greatest extent possible, be based on their quality and be awarded via competitive grants or sub-grants to public, non-profit, and other non-governmental entities with a proven record of success.
- Specifying the type of intervention is necessary, but not sufficient. Monitoring the progress of interventions and instituting stronger reporting requirements for more intensive monitoring of persistently failing schools is absolutely essential.

### **Resource Adequacy and Equity**

- The federal government’s traditional role in education has been to intervene on behalf of groups of students that have been ill-served or shortchanged by state and local education systems (e.g., students from low-income families, racial and ethnic minorities, recent immigrants and non-English speakers, students with disabilities, and children of migrant workers). It is paramount that the federal government continues to play this role.
- The next ESEA must have a stronger focus on improving both the adequacy *and* the equity of school funding by states and local school districts.
- States and school districts must make public the distribution of state and local funds according to the proportion of minorities and low-income students in every individual school.
- Under ARRA, LEAs were required to report school-by-school per-pupil expenditures to state education agencies (SEAs) by December 1, 2009, and for SEAs, in turn, to report this information to the U.S. Department of Education by March 31, 2010. This timeline should be adhered to as closely as possible and the data scrutinized for accuracy and integrity. In the past, such data has glossed over school-by-school inequities in intra-district school funding. To avoid this problem, this data should be reported *annually* on a school-by-school, per-pupil basis.

- Loopholes in provisions of federal law that are intended to require comparable and equal student funding across schools within a district should be closed, and mechanisms should be put in place to require a baseline level of comparable per-pupil funding in each school within a district. Title I funds should add value to the educational programs of each school rather than fill in budget gaps created by school district inequities in the distribution of human capital and other educational resources.
- The distribution of federal education funding via Title I and other programs should be targeted to the neediest children living in the neediest school districts, attending the neediest schools. Schools in the two highest poverty quintiles should receive a greater proportionate share of Title I and other federal education dollars than they do currently.
- The federal government should – through legislative and administrative action – use corrective remedies and incentives to boost overall school funding and bring funding for high-poverty and high-minority schools and districts on par with those that serve more advantaged students.

We applaud your leadership on increasing education funding and promoting reform in the first session of the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress. We look forward to continued work with you to revise and amend ESEA to further our shared goal that *every* child has access to a high quality education.

Sincerely,

Citizen Schools (<http://www.citizenschools.org/index.cfm>)  
 Citizens' Commission on Civil Rights (<http://www.cccr.org/template/index.cfm>)  
 Civic Builders (<http://www.civicbuilders.org/>)  
 Colorado Succeeds (<http://www.coloradosucceeds.org/>)  
 Connecticut Coalition for Achievement Now (ConnCan) (<http://www.conncan.org/>)  
 Democrats for Education Reform (<http://www.dfer.org/>)  
 Education Equality Project (<http://www.educationequalityproject.org/>)  
 Education Reform Now (<http://www.edreformnow.org/>)  
 Hope Street Group (<http://www.hopestreetgroup.org/index.jspa>)  
 Mass Insight Education and Research Institute (<http://www.massinsight.org/>)  
 The Mind Trust (<http://www.themindtrust.org/>)  
 National Council of La Raza (<http://www.nclr.org/>)  
 Parent Revolution (<http://www.parentrevolution.org/>)  
 Rhode Island Mayoral Academies (<http://www.mayoralacademies.org/>)  
 Rodell Foundation of Delaware (<http://www.rodelfoundationde.org/>)  
 State of Black Connecticut Alliance (<http://stateofblackct.org/>)  
 Texas Institute for Education Reform (<http://www.texaseducationreform.org>)  
 UNCF (United Negro College Fund) (<http://www.uncf.org/>)