

**FROM THE
CLASSROOM TO
CONGRESS**

ESEA POLICY AT PLAY

October 2015

In mandating the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the federal government took bold action to increase opportunities for all American students through a clear commitment to a more equitable education. With the reauthorization of ESEA underway, and as teachers representing various districts and serving public school students across the country, we urge Congress to keep sight of its original purpose.

Milestones in Educational Equity



Brown vs. Board of Education requires public schools to educate all children, regardless of race.

1954



Congress adds to ESEA by incorporating new programs and titles, including for migrant children, and by passing the Bilingual Education Act.

1968



President Jimmy Carter signs a reauthorization of ESEA specifying that schools in which at least 75 percent of children are in poverty can operate "schoolwide" programs with their Title I funds.

1978

President George W. Bush signs the No Child Left Behind Act, which contains sweeping changes to the federal government's role in K-12 education by focusing on school success as measured by student achievement.

2002



1965

President Johnson signs the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as part of his War on Poverty.



1970

Congress amends the Title I program to ensure federal money is used to "supplement, not supplant" funds by states for low-income school districts.



1994

President Bill Clinton signs the Improving America's Schools Act, a renewal of ESEA that calls for states to develop standards and aligned tests for all students.



2011

President Barack Obama offers states the opportunity to apply for ESEA waivers whereby states must embrace standards for career and college readiness, teacher evaluation that incorporates student outcomes, and plans to turn around low-performing schools.



2015

WE HAVE A HUGE OPPORTUNITY to authorize legislation that advances educational equity and to level the playing field for students from traditionally underserved populations.

THE PROBLEM

For nearly a decade, teachers have been watching Congress fail to get any traction on legislation reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The fact that both the House and Senate have now passed separate reauthorization bills gives us hope, but the differences in the two bills means that Congress still has a lot of work to do.

As teachers, we have experienced how the current version of ESEA, a well-intentioned but poorly designed federal law like No Child Left Behind (NCLB), has failed to reflect the realities of the classroom and needs of our students. Now we have the chance to make sure that doesn't happen again—by promoting thoughtful, teacher-created ideas to our Senate and House congressional members on behalf of the students whom federal law must serve. We came together on behalf of our students to help our senators and representatives avoid the pitfalls of the past by promoting thoughtful teacher-created resolutions to the open questions that are still being debated.

Our classroom experiences drive us to seek not only school accountability for traditionally underserved students, but also the resources and opportunities to ensure all students are growing and achieving at their highest levels.

As this work moves forward, Congress has the opportunity to help reconcile the two bills in a way that closes educational opportunity gaps, so all students, no matter their ZIP code, race, or socioeconomic status, have access to a high-quality education. The first step is to let educator voices and real classroom experiences impact ESEA policy decisions at play.

RECOMMENDATIONS

DON'T DILUTE TITLE I DOLLARS FOR HIGH-POVERTY SCHOOLS.

- **Significantly increase Title I funding to drive targeted resources to high-poverty populations of students and to deny the portability of Title I funds.**
- **Maintain the “Maintenance of Effort” (MoE) provision, which requires districts that receive Title I funding to maintain approximately the same spending levels on education year to year.**

One of the most divisive issues under consideration in ESEA revision is the concept of Title I portability, also referred to as “financial backpacks.” Under the House bill language for Title I portability, the Title I grant funds for students living in poverty would follow the student to his or her newly selected public school rather than remaining in schools with high concentrations of poverty where funds are needed most.

There have always been discrepancies among United States schools based on the income level of the student body.

In the wake of *Brown v. Board of Education*, Title I was originally designed to help level the playing field by putting federal money in schools with the highest concentrations of poverty.

Title I grant funds for students from disadvantaged backgrounds are the anchor of ESEA and they were created to address barriers to student learning and achievement. The impact of poverty on resources to public schools in underserved communities cannot be understated.

States and districts are currently distributing Title I funds based on how many students from low-income families are in each school. The schools with the highest percentage of students who qualify to receive free or reduced-price lunch receive the majority of the federal money. Schools that have students living in poverty but operate in districts with lower overall concentrations of poverty may not receive Title I funds.

Portability, which would allow the money to follow the individual students to schools with lower poverty concentrations, completely alters the original intent of Title I. In order to provide equitable opportunities for students and schools most in need, we call on Congress to significantly increase Title I funding to drive targeted resources to high-poverty populations of students and to deny the portability of Title I funds.

Equally important for high-poverty schools is for Congress to maintain the “Maintenance of Effort” (MoE) provision, which requires states and districts that receive Title I funding to maintain approximately the same spending levels on education year to year. The MoE provision

is intended to ensure education funding is cut as little as possible in difficult economic times and that federal funding does not take the place of other money that should be coming from state and local budgets.

The MoE provision is important to promoting equitable resources because school funding models are dependent on significant resources at the local levels. This often results in only affluent communities having the capital to provide their children a fully resourced school. Without the MoE, dollars from the federal level may move, and no safety net is provided locally to remedy the significant loss of funding to communities who have no alternative to replace it.

STRENGTHEN SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY FOR TRADITIONALLY UNDERSERVED STUDENTS.

- **Maintain required annual statewide assessments for all students in grades 3-8 and once in grades 10-12.**
- **Continue to require and support interventions for schools that consistently fail to serve all groups of students (such as low-income students, students with disabilities, African-Americans, Latinos, and English learners) to ensure they are not allowed to continue failing generations of students.**
- **Allow states and local districts to determine the interventions they use, but their success should be tied to the success of all subgroups of students.**

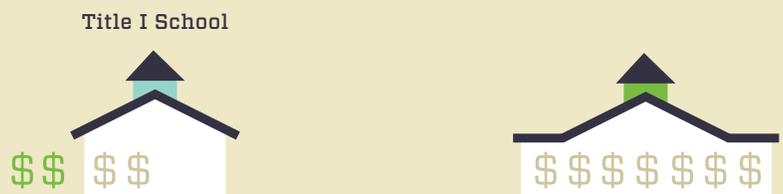
We need to ensure that subgroups of students are disaggregated when reported so that we don't lose sight of opportunity gaps that we need to close. Ensuring equal opportunity and improving student achievement necessitates a federal role in education. We join a coalition of civil rights groups in demanding strong school accountability in the revised ESEA.

As teachers, our job is to help ensure that all students, including students of color, students from low-income areas, students learning English, and students with disabilities have a high-quality education. We need to be able to see where improvements are needed and then target our resources toward those needs. In order to accomplish this,

Fig. 1 **Title I Portability**

1

Title I was created to support schools with great needs as a result of serving significant populations of low-income students.



2

Under the House bill language for Title I portability, the Title I grant funds for students living in poverty would follow the student to his or her newly selected public or charter school.



3

Schools with high poverty concentrations, where funds are needed most, would be left with fewer funds and resources.



“We need to remember the original intent of ESEA was part of the War on Poverty.”

Rich Johnson, Fifth grade special education teacher, P.S. 105, New York, NY

Congress needs to maintain required annual statewide assessments for all students in grades 3-8 and once in grades 10-12.

Having consistent and comparable student data is critical to monitor progress and to identify achievement gaps between groups of students. States, districts, and schools need to be able to assess where greater support is needed, and equally important, they also need to be able to shine a light where underserved students are doing well, so that practices can be replicated.

As teachers, we are committed to improving student achievement and closing gaps as quickly and effectively as possible. Because we need both the capacity and tools to support our commitment, we call on Congress to continue to require and support interventions for chronically low performing schools and schools that consistently underperform for any group of students to ensure they

are not allowed to continue failing generations of students. States and local districts should be able to determine the interventions they use, but their success should be tied to the success of all subgroups of students. This provision will help ensure that schools and districts are keeping sight of subgroups of students who are historically underserved and that leaders are developing interventions with quality evidence of success.

As teachers, we know that school accountability must be paired with support, and this support must be prioritized for schools who are identified by states as chronically low-performing and in cases where subgroups within schools are not meeting state-established goals. Congress must dedicate funding for school improvement activities and then direct local educational agencies to establish and execute evidence-based interventions and for low-performing schools established by the state.

ELEVATE TEACHING AND PROMOTE TEACHER LEADERSHIP.

- **Use Title II funds to support hybrid teaching positions that facilitate professional development and the collection and use of teacher feedback on both teacher evaluation and professional development programs.**
- **Incentivize a more equitable distribution of effective teachers by setting aside Title II funds to support districts that want to recruit or reward high-performing teachers to teach in hard-to-staff subjects or schools.**

Title II funds in ESEA, which are dedicated to training and supporting teachers, present an opportunity to create a new vision for the future of our teaching workforce. For the sake of our country and future generations, we need to re-envision opportunities for teacher development and leadership.

Too often we feel that professional development opportunities are disconnected from the needs of students and teachers. Congress can support high-quality professional development by encouraging Title II funds to be used to support hybrid teaching positions that

facilitate professional development and the collection and use of teacher feedback on both teacher evaluation and professional development programs.

Research shows that one reason why successful teachers leave the classroom is due to lack of leadership opportunities. We call on Congress to allow Title II funds to be spent on hybrid teaching positions where strong teachers have opportunities to both teach and lead. This kind of teacher leadership supports the growth and development of other educators in their schools or districts.

In order to help elevate the teaching profession and to better serve students who are traditionally underserved, Congress can help to incentivize a more equitable distribution of effective teachers by setting aside Title II funds to support districts that want to recruit or reward high-performing teachers as shown by a multi-measure evaluation system including but not dominated by student achievement data to teach in hard-to-staff subjects or schools. We need to change the predictable trajectory of students who attend high-poverty schools by drawing the most skilled teachers to these areas.

CONCLUSION

We have so much more work to do—even five decades after *Brown v. Board of Education*—to ensure that all children have access to excellent educational opportunities. The constitutional right of every child to a high-quality education inspires us to both lead in our schools and to contribute our ideas outside of our classroom. We believe that bipartisan collaboration in Congress will ensure that a new ESEA will serve all children and prioritize support for students from disadvantaged communities. As teachers, our hope is for the adoption of a modern ESEA that ensures opportunity for each and every student in America.

“It makes the most sense for schools to use the talent we already have in our schools rather than to spend additional funds on external human resources.

Strong teachers need and deserve opportunities to facilitate job-embedded professional development and teacher evaluations.”

Michelle Youngblood Jarman,

Eighth grade literature teacher, Eagle Rock Junior/Senior High School, Los Angeles, CA

THE 2015 EDUCATORS 4 EXCELLENCE TEACHER ACTION TEAM ON THE ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION ACT

Anthony Hernandez

*Third grade teacher, Global Academy,
Columbia Heights, Minnesota*

Rich Johnson

*Fifth grade special education teacher, PS 105,
New York, New York*

Misti Kemmer

*Fourth grade teacher, Russell Elementary School,
Los Angeles, California*

Maya Kruger

*Fifth grade teacher, College Prep Elementary School,
St Paul, Minnesota*

Ben Mackenzie

*Ninth and twelfth grade English/Language Arts teacher,
FAIR School, Minneapolis, Minnesota*

Lynn Osborne Simmons

*Special education teacher, Marie Sklodowska Curie
Metropolitan High School, Chicago, Illinois*

Christine O'Neil

*Eighth grade science teacher, Blackham School,
Bridgeport, Connecticut*

Freeda Pirillis

First grade teacher, Agassiz Elementary, Chicago, Illinois

Stephanie Plachy

*Sixth grade English Language Arts teacher at Evergreen
Middle School for Urban Exploration, New York, New York*

Lexie Woo

*Fourth grade special education teacher, The Dorothy Bonawit
Kole School, New York, New York*

Michelle Youngblood Jarman

*Eighth grade literature teacher, Eagle Rock Junior/Senior
High School, Los Angeles, California*

This report, graphics, and figures were designed by Kristin Redman, Tracy Harris, and Tessa Gibbs at Cricket Design Works in Madison, Wisconsin.

The text face is Bembo Regular, designed by Stanley Morison in 1929. The typefaces used for headers, subheaders, figures, and pull quotes are Futura Bold, designed by Paul Renner, and Vitesse, designed by Hoefler & Co.

For far too long, education policy has been created without a critical voice at the table—the voice of classroom teachers.

Educators 4 Excellence (E4E), a teacher-led organization, is changing this dynamic by placing the voices of teachers at the forefront of the conversations that shape our classrooms and careers.

E4E has a quickly growing national network of educators united by our Declaration of Teachers' Principles and Beliefs. E4E members can learn about education policy and research, network with like-minded peers and policymakers, and take action by advocating for teacher-created policies that lift student achievement and the teaching profession.

Learn more and share this paper at Educators4Excellence.org/ESEA.