

PSEA's Summary for ESEA Reauthorization

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In the coming months, Congress will begin the process of reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, otherwise known as No Child Left Behind. PSEA and NEA will be actively involved in this process. NCLB's one-size-fits-all approach is not working and is placing burdensome mandates on teachers and support professionals that prevent them from delivering a rich, comprehensive curriculum. We believe that great public schools are a basic right for every child, and that education employees must be provided the training, tools and resources to get the job done.

Our priorities for changes to NCLB include:

Accountability that rewards success and supports educators to help students learn

The current adequate yearly progress structure is flawed in the sense that there are multiple means to fail, yet only one way to meet AYP. It is an all-or-nothing system that fails to recognize the fact that students learn at varying rates or that there are students at a specific disadvantage, most notably Limited English Proficiency and special education students, who are more likely to have difficulty achieving at grade level on standardized tests. Accountability should be based on multiple blended measures, and schools/school districts should be provided with sufficient time and resources to meet these requirements.

In addition, NCLB places too much emphasis on punishing schools and not enough emphasis on providing schools with guidance and support. Moreover, none of these sanctions has been proven to be effective. When NCLB is reauthorized, sanctions should be replaced with support systems such as enhanced and comprehensive technical assistance from state and federal agencies, state and federal assistance in developing and revising improvement plans, and increased federal funding for recipients to implement such plans.

Use and promote proven means to increase student achievement and performance

As schools continue their push to achieve the increasing requirements of AYP, it is important that policymakers give them the proper tools to aid in their work. Smaller class sizes and community/parent involvement are both proven methods to increase student achievement. Specifically, Congress should restore the Class Size Reduction program that was in place prior to NCLB, the goal of which was to provide an optimum class size of 15 students. Additionally, while parent and community involvement is difficult to legislate, Congress can foster it by funding initiatives such as adult and family literacy, parenting classes, and community engagement programs.

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Quality educators in every classroom and school

Congress should increase states' flexibility to define "highly qualified" teachers. Specifically, we believe that any educator who has met the licensure/certification requirements set forth in his or her respective state should be deemed "highly qualified" pursuant to NCLB. The fact is that one size does not fit all, and it is difficult for a cookie-cutter approach from the federal level to be realistically implemented in a uniform manner in all states. We can speak to Pennsylvania's certification program, which requires individuals to meet high standards and complete a rigorous and thorough course of study. The current NCLB requirements place unnecessary hoops for teachers and paraprofessionals to jump through to achieve the "highly qualified" status required by NCLB. Furthermore, USDOE's scattershot approach to approving state plans for HQ status has left more than a few states with limited or no time to meet these unrealistic and ineffective standards. States are left to wonder why approaches approved in one state are not approved in other states. In the end, we seek common sense and uniform implementation of these standards.

Resources to ensure a great public school for every child

Congress and the president have yet to live up to their promise to provide the necessary resources for states and school districts to implement the provisions of No Child Left Behind. No matter how sound the policy contained in any law is, if the funds are not available, how can states and school districts be expected to comply? In reality, the lack of federal funds has put increased pressure on states and local taxpayers to fill the gap, which, ultimately leads to an erosion of services for our students. We strongly encourage you to support the full federal funding of No Child Left Behind. Funding for schools must be adequate, equitable, and sustainable. If education is to be the great equalizer, then all students must have access to the same resources and high quality programs.