

ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION REAUTHORIZATION AND US DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION DISCUSSION OF SBE ACCOUNTABILITY INDEX**BACKGROUND**

In March 2010, the Obama Administration unveiled A Blueprint for Reform, a proposal for Elementary and Secondary Education (ESEA) Reauthorization. ESEA, which was called No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in its most recent iteration, has been up for renewal since 2007. The blueprint has spurred a series of Congressional committee hearings, public debates, and news coverage. The goal of the administration is to keep what was positive about NCLB – the requirements to disaggregate assessment data to measure achievement gaps – while addressing the major criticisms of the existing law. The proposal intends to eliminate the ‘perverse incentives’ in NCLB, which encouraged states to lower standards and focus on test preparation.

Blueprint Elements:

- Replace the goal of ‘all students proficient by 2014’ with a focus on career- and college-ready students with a soft 2010 deadline. States would adopt new standards and set performance targets against the standards. The focus would be on improvement and growth, not just overall performance.
- States would adopt **career- and college- ready standards**, such as the Common Core Standards Initiative. Receipt of federal competitive grant funds would be contingent upon adopting new standards.
- Retain requirements to **test annually** in reading and math, but allow states to assess academic performance in additional subjects and measure additional factors such as school climate. Data would be transparent and public, as under NCLB.
- **Intervention in struggling schools:** The bottom five percent of schools must choose one of four turnaround models (Transformational, Turnaround, Restart, or Closure). The next five percent would be on a warning list and the state would have flexibility in determining research-based interventions. States would take aggressive action with schools that have the highest achievement gaps. States would take over Title I spending in schools that do not turn around within three years.
- Allow states **flexibility in intervening** with schools that do not meet achievement targets. States would provide different support for schools that, under old AYP rules, missed AYP in one area versus schools that did not meet the bar in multiple areas.
- Eliminate the NCLB mandate that struggling schools offer **school choice** and **supplemental educational services**, draining resources from already struggling schools.
- High-poverty schools, districts, and states that show success in **closing achievement gaps** would be recognized and rewarded with additional funding (“Reward” schools). Schools, districts, and states would be subject to consequences for lack of improvement (“Challenge” schools).
- States would ensure that effective teachers are **equitably distributed** among schools with high concentrations of high- and low- income students.
- Eliminate current **“highly qualified”** teacher requirements. States would create their own definitions for “effective teachers,” “highly effective teachers,” “effective principals” and “highly effective principals” using student performance as a major factor. Teacher and principal evaluation would be based on student performance. Formula funding (such as Title

- II) would continue as long as states are improving teacher and leader effectiveness.
- States would monitor the effectiveness of **teacher preparation programs** and invest more in programs with strong outcomes for students.
 - Expanding high performing **charter schools** and autonomous public schools.
 - **English Language Learners (ELL)**: states would create new criteria for identification of students as ELL, determining eligibility, placement, and duration of support. States would evaluate the effectiveness of ELL instructional programs and provide information on achievement of ELL subgroups.
 - Additional funds would be available through competitive grants to states. Multiple smaller programs would be rolled into these projects or eliminated (e.g. Reading is Fundamental, Mathematics and Science Program).

Support is widespread:

Overall, the blueprint has been received positively by the Council of Chief State School Officers, National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE), National School Boards Association (NASBA), the Alliance for Excellent Education, and other policy groups. The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction has issued a set of legislative recommendations, many of which are aligned to the blueprint themes. Congress is generally supportive of the themes of reauthorization and attempts to remedy long-standing problems with NCLB. Specifically, these stakeholders are generally supportive of the move toward common core standards to ensure that students are college- and career- ready, elimination of school choice and tutoring, elimination of the requirement that all students are proficient by 2014, and the use of growth models to look at student performance from year to year.

Some concerns expressed:

The National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) oppose linking teacher evaluation to student achievement. They argue that teachers have too much responsibility and not enough authority. Only teachers' unions have expressed overall opposition to the blueprint.

- **NASBE, NASBA, Senator Patty Murray, and others** are concerned about linking Title I funding to adoption of common core standards.
- Multiple stakeholders have expressed concern about the move to making more funds available on a **competitive** basis rather than formulas. Senator Murray has discussed concern about Title II funds in particular.
- **Rural** schools and districts may not have the staff capacity to compete for funds. Evaluating teachers and principals based on a very small number of students is problematic.
- Questions have been raised about the effectiveness of the four **turnaround school models** and the research (or lack thereof) behind them.

POLICY CONSIDERATION

Given the changing landscape regarding standards, high-stakes outcome assessment, and Race to the Top competition which is currently underway, the State Board of Education will need to monitor changes closely and consider postponing major policy decisions such as revisions to the school improvement plans and other elements of the reauthorization process until it has been finalized.

EXPECTED ACTION

Congress is expected to take action on ESEA Reauthorization in 2011, although the timing is difficult to predict.

Side-by-Side Guide to Reauthorization

The Obama administration's blueprint for reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act seeks to retain assessment, accountability, and other features of the existing law while offering states and school districts greater flexibility.

No Child Left Behind Act

- Teachers must be "highly qualified," meaning they demonstrate subject-matter proficiency and meet state certification requirements.
- States set their own academic standards.
- Perennially struggling schools can choose from a range of improvement options, the most popular of which is a broad category called "other methods of restructuring."
- The law requires all students to reach proficiency on state tests by the 2013-14 school year.
- There is no clear distinction between schools that miss achievement targets because all of their students are struggling vs. those that are having trouble with a particular subgroup of students, such as students in special education.
- Schools that miss achievement targets for two years in a row must let students choose another school, including a charter school. And those that miss targets for three years must offer students extensive tutoring.
- Student performance is measured using "status models," which compare different cohorts of students to one another.
- Schools that make strides in closing the achievement gap don't get any sort of special reward.
- States primarily rely on reading and mathematics tests to gauge student progress, although states must also test their students in science in specific grade spans.
- Students are tested in reading and math in grades 3-8 and once in high school.
- Student data are disaggregated by racial- and ethnic-minority group, as well as by special populations, such as English-language learners.

ESEA Renewal Blueprint

- States would have to come up with a definition of "effective teacher" and "highly effective teacher" based in part on student outcomes.
- States would have to adopt college- and career-ready standards, such as those being drafted by the Common Core State Standards Initiative.
- Struggling schools would have a list of four very specific options for turning around low-performing schools. In nearly all cases, the school's principal would have to be removed.
- A goal would be set making all students college- and career-ready by 2020, but that isn't a hard and fast deadline.
- Schools that are persistently low-achieving would be subject to a different set of interventions than those that miss achievement targets for one or two subgroups of students.
- Schools that don't meet achievement targets wouldn't automatically have to offer public school choice or tutoring.
- Student performance would be measured using "growth models," which look at individual student progress from year to year.
- Schools that make strides in closing the achievement gap would be rewarded with money and flexibility.
- States may choose to assess students in subjects other than reading and math, such as foreign language and history, and make those tests part of their accountability system.
- Students would be tested in reading and math in grades 3-8 and once in high school.
- Student data would continue to be disaggregated by racial- and ethnic-minority group, as well as by special populations, such as English-language learners.

SOURCES: U.S. Department of Education, *Education Week*