

Alliance for Student Achievement

A Common Agenda to Improve the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)

Federal Education Goals – Federal goals for K-12 education should be broad and conceptual with incentives to the states to adopt the laws and rules necessary to meet the national goals.

- Federal education goals must promote a comprehensive curriculum even as basic competencies are stressed.
- The federal government must recognize that there are three critical factors in developing a well-educated child: 1) quality teaching, 2) proactive and positive parenting, and 3) individual effort by the student.

Special Education – The ESEA should recognize the individual needs of special education students and permit districts to assess their academic progress in a manner that is consistent with the student's Individual Education Plan (IEP).

- Students exempted from state tests by their IEP should not be required to take these tests to determine district or school success.
- Each student's IEP should determine how the student's progress is assessed for measuring school district accountability.
- Provide incentives for early educational interventions for students that are not thriving in the early grades and provide extensive training for teachers in the techniques of early identification of learning problems and the use of intervention strategies.

English Language Learners – The ESEA should recognize the temporary limitations of students who are not yet proficient in English.

- Test scores for students who speak English as a second language should not be applicable in determining school success until the student is English-language proficient.

Assessment Methodology – The ESEA should encourage school districts to implement formative and adaptive assessments that provide instant feedback to students, school staff, and parents to guide instructional decisions. It should also allow the inclusion of local measures.

- School success should be based on other measures contributing to student achievement and should assess continuous progress of the same cohort of students.
- Schools that miss achievement goals should receive assistance and support instead of penalties that do not improve student outcomes.
- Districts and/or schools should not be identified as missing AYP when one, or a few, subgroups of students are not showing evidence of proficiency.
- The ESEA and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) should be streamlined to reduce paperwork and allow educators to focus more on instruction.
- States should be permitted to use accountability systems based on growth models to judge performance. School districts should be permitted to substitute a local accountability system if the state determines the local plan more accurately measures the effect of instruction on students and is more useful in planning future instruction.

State Flexibility and Local Control Recommendations – The ESEA should allow states and school districts maximum flexibility in determining how to best achieve the goals established in the law.

- An independent board should be established to review states' requests regarding changes, waivers, and federal action on those requests and the U.S. Department of Education should be required to disclose rulings made on state plans and state requests for plan changes and waivers.
- Choice and supplemental service options should be offered to low-achieving students within the group that failed to meet achievement targets in the same subject for two or more years – not all students in the school.
- Sanctions for schools and school districts should only apply when achievement goals are not met by the same group on the same indicator for two or more years.

Funding – The ESEA should not create unfunded mandates for states and school districts.

- ESEA requirements should be directly linked to federal funding that covers the full cost of the mandates.
- If the funding is inadequate, the mandates included in the ESEA should be suspended until Congress and the Executive Branch fully fund the requirements.
- All plans, reports, audits and staffing mandates should be eliminated if they are not fully funded and not critical to improved achievement for students.

Highly Qualified Teachers – Every student should be taught by highly qualified teachers that understand their subject matter, teaching pedagogy, data analysis and the use of education-related technology.

- To be highly qualified, a teacher should be licensed by their respective state through a rigorous licensing system.
- States should be required to demonstrate that they have in place a high standard for the licensing of teachers and administrators.

Early Childhood Education – The educational success of every child will be enhanced through a strong societal and parental commitment to learning readiness prior to the child entering school.

- The federal government should provide a matching financial effort to states that require a full-day kindergarten program and quality early childhood learning opportunities.
- The need for early childhood education programming is especially critical for students living in poverty and students with English language learning needs.