



# Comments to the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions On Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

May 7, 2010

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## The Education Trust

Closing the gaps in opportunity and achievement, pre-k through college.

May 7, 2010

The Honorable Tom Harkin  
Chairman  
U.S. Senate  
Committee on Health Education Labor and Pensions

The Honorable Mike Enzi  
Ranking Member  
U.S. Senate  
Committee on Health Education Labor and Pensions

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Enzi:

No Child Left Behind has revealed many uncomfortable truths about our nation's schools. It's exposed too much mediocrity. It's laid bare painful and damaging achievement gaps. And it's shown that meeting the "proficient" level of performance in many states leaves young people far short of what they need for success beyond high school. This reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act offers us the opportunity to retain the law's insistence on gap closing and continual improvement for all schools and all groups of students, but also to fix its flaws. It is imperative that we raise our sights for what we expect of all of our students *now* because our economic health depends not just on creating more good jobs, but also on preparing Americans to fill them.

Our overall lackluster achievement and our achievement gaps cost our nation dearly. Last year, a McKinsey & Company report showed that achievement gaps are crippling our economy. The impact of these gaps, the study says, is roughly equivalent to a permanent national recession.

Conversely, improved educational outcomes yield big economic dividends. A recent OECD study suggests that educational improvements could produce enormous gains in our country's economic health, with dividends compounding far into the future. Indeed, the earnings of an American with a four-year degree are currently double those of someone who never finished high school. Even modest gains in learning, the study projected, could boost America's gross domestic product by \$40.6 trillion over the lifetime of a student born today. More substantial educational improvements yield even higher economic returns.

To fully realize these benefits, not to mention the huge social benefits that flow when we enable children to learn their way out of poverty, we will have to dramatically change the ways in which we "do school" in America. We will need new and higher standards, new and higher quality assessments, new and better ways to measure teacher impact on student learning, and new and richer supports for teachers. Designing and implementing some of these things will take years. But even as we build these systems and tools, we must immediately ratchet up the rigor and grow student learning faster. We don't have a moment or a child to lose.

Our comments focus on what Congress needs to do in this reauthorization to speed improvements for our students *immediately*, even as a new law presses for the quick but careful development of better and more sophisticated educational tools and approaches for the future. Presented in a set of seven short documents, our recommendations center on the essential elements for student success:

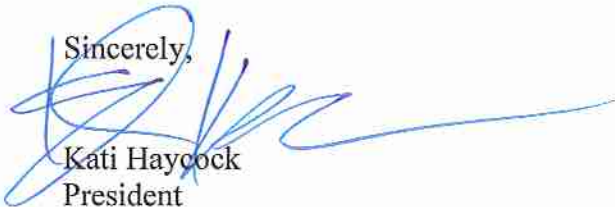
1. An accountability system that sets clear goals about improvement and gap-closing, but provides states with new flexibility, rewards success and quickly transforms troubled schools;
2. High standards and high-quality assessments;
3. Action to ensure equitable access to critical opportunities to learn, particularly effective teachers and leaders;
4. High-quality instructional tools to help teachers teach to the new, higher standards;
5. Equitable funding for all schools within a district;
6. Aggressive and appropriate mechanisms to turn around our lowest performing schools; and,
7. Public information and reporting so that there are no mysteries about the quality of our schools, teachers, and leaders.

These elements undergird the success of all students, but are of particular importance to low-income students and students of color—young people for whom education is the surest route out of poverty and our best weapon against racism.

American students absolutely can achieve at the highest levels. And we absolutely can close forever our achievement gaps. We should not pretend, however, that higher standards, better assessments, or improved accountability systems alone are enough to attain these goals. They won't even get us close. If we are serious about getting all young people ready for college and meaningful careers—and we must be deadly serious if we are to save our economic necks—we must justly align our resources (especially our human resources) with student need and provide the help our teachers need. Perhaps more important, our courage to take on even the toughest, most intransigent problems must match our vision for what our country can become.

We hope you find these suggestions helpful, and are happy to answer any questions you might have.

Sincerely,



Kati Haycock  
President



## ACCOUNTABILITY FOR RESULTS

### PROBLEM

*The best accountability systems in any field have a few things in common. They set clear goals for people to rally around—goals that are meaningful, challenging, and achievable. They provide regular information to guide the work. And they inspire people to aim higher, while providing them with support when they need help.*

This is just the kind of system we need in public education, where overall achievement is too low and gaps separating low-income students and students of color from their peers are far too big. The data speak for themselves:

- Under a third of our nation's fourth-grade students are proficient in reading. Another third lack even basic reading skills. Fewer than one in five low-income students are proficient; over half are below basic.
- One in four students who start ninth grade will not graduate four years later. Nearly 40 percent of African-American and Latino students will not graduate on time.

Thankfully, we know these patterns can be changed because there are schools across the country that are educating all students, including low-income student and students of color, to high levels right now. Unfortunately, the current accountability system does not do enough to provide either the challenge or the support schools and districts need to make high achievement for all the rule rather than the exception.

The work states are doing to develop college and career-ready standards and assessments will go a long way toward clarifying where we want all students to be. But without strong accountability for actually getting students there, college and career-ready graduation will remain no more than a hollow promise for too many students.

### SOLUTION

Differences in state standards and assessments and their timelines for transitioning to new, higher ones mean that there will have to be differences in state accountability plans. But Congress should be clear that all state plans—both before and after the transition—must be built around common elements for what's being measured, what's being expected, and what's being done as a result.

### Measures

Educators, parents, and the public need a broad mix of data on schools, including data used to make accountability determinations and data that informs improvement efforts.

Accountability determinations should be based on the following:

- Statewide, summative assessments of reading, mathematics, and—at states' discretion—science and/or social studies; and
- Additional indicators of high school success, including graduation rates as codified in 34 CFR 200.19(b)(1) and entry rates into postsecondary education.

Success on these indicators should be evaluated by looking at both current-year achievement and changes in achievement over time, meaning individual student growth toward standards and/or school-level improvement.

There are many other important indicators for assessing school quality and informing improvement efforts that should be collected and reported. These include indicators like the following:

- Measures of school climate and safety;
- Student and teacher absences;
- Student, staff, and parent surveys; and
- Evidence of high school rigor, such as advanced course completion, early college-credit completion, and postsecondary remediation rates.

While these kinds of indicators do not have the reliability and validity necessary for inclusion in accountability determinations, they are instrumental for parents deciding what school is right for their child and for educators seeking to improve achievement.

### **Goals**

Accountability systems, both before and after the transition, must set aggressive but achievable stretch goals for all schools and districts. These goals must reflect the following:

- Increased achievement for all students;
- Substantial, sustained gap closing between groups of students; and
- Consistent progress.

Specifically, we recommend that Congress require states to submit to the Secretary accountability systems aimed at a clear target: reducing the percentage of students in each school not meeting standards by half, overall and by student group, within six years.

Our analysis suggests that this goal will result in annual improvement targets that are aggressive but within the range of what the highest-gaining schools are currently doing. And it will require bigger improvement targets for the student groups that are furthest behind, thus promoting gap closing.

For example, in Massachusetts, where overall average reading and math proficiency among elementary and middle schools was 58 percent in 2009, meeting this goal would require annual improvement of 3.5 percentage points. Currently, the top-gaining 10 percent of schools for students overall are improving over four percentage points annually.

The state's African-American students, who are currently at 37 percent proficient on average, would need to improve by about five percentage points annually. The top gainers for African-American students are currently improving by almost seven percentage points per year.

Of course, this goal will play out differently in different states. In Florida, where overall average reading and math proficiency among elementary and middle schools was 69 percent in 2009, meeting this goal would require annual improvement of 2.5 percentage points. This is less than the nearly 4 percentage points a year improvement the top-gaining 25 percent of schools for students overall are making now.

For Florida’s low-income students, who are currently at 62 percent proficient on average, this goal would translate into gains of just over 3 percentage points annually. The top gaining 25 percent of schools for low-income students are improving nearly 5 percentage points annually.

### **Incentives and Consequences**

Schools and districts that consistently meet or exceed their stretch goals should be rewarded with resources, recognition, and autonomy. These incentives can help create an environment in which schools and districts perceive accountability goals as something to strive for, rather than requirements they must meet to avoid punitive sanctions.

Schools and districts that do not meet their goals should face meaningful consequences. State accountability plans should detail how needs in these schools will be assessed, what supports they’ll be offered, and what consequences they’ll face if, after receiving support, they do not improve.

For persistently low-performing schools—and the districts they sit in—Congress must be clear that the status quo is unacceptable. These schools, and the students stuck in them, need big goals. To meet these goals, schools need conditions that will enable them to dramatically change how they operate. (See *Turning Around Our Lowest Performing Schools*.)

### **Moving to New, Higher Standards and Assessments**

The transition to new, higher standards and assessments poses two big accountability-related challenges: (1) How can all states start aiming higher now so that students and schools are better-prepared when the new tools come online; and (2) What should accountability goals look like once the new tools are online?

To spur better preparation, we recommend that all states, as part of their accountability plans, provide information on how they will support schools through the transition.

- For all states, this should include information on how they plan to use both federal and state funds to develop and disseminate instructional tools aligned with higher standards. (See *Instructional Supports for Teachers*.)
- For states with standards and assessments pegged at such low levels that most students already meet them, an accountability goal of reducing the percentage of students not meeting standards for proficiency by half would lead to minimal improvement expectations, and students would be stuck waiting until the new, higher standards come online until their schools are pressured to move. Students cannot wait that long, so transition plans in these states should include plans to ratchet up accountability expectations on tools that are already available, such as the following:
  - Setting accountability goals for the percentage of all groups of students growing toward or performing at the “advanced” achievement level on current assessments;
  - Setting accountability goals for measures of college readiness that are already in place in a growing number of states, such as the ACT college-readiness benchmarks; or
  - Incorporating “modular” assessments of higher-level skills and thinking into the current assessment system.

Once the new, college and career-ready standards and assessments are fully implemented, we recommend the following:

- Leading states that moved fastest should be given flexibility to reset accountability goals for achievement on the new assessments, provided that these new systems reflect the elements of measuring what matters, gap-closing stretch goals, and meaningful incentives and consequences specified above.
- States that do not move to new standards and assessments until 2017-18 should be required to set accountability goals of a 10-percent reduction in the percentage of students overall and in each group not meeting college and career-ready standards annually. (For more information on time frames for adopting and implementing college and career-ready standards and assessments, see *Standards and Assessments*.)



## STANDARDS AND ASSESSMENTS

### PROBLEM

The current hodgepodge of state standards and assessments leaves students and educators without a clear vision of what they should be aiming for and the whole K-12 system without direction.

Standards for what students should know and be able to do vary dramatically from one state to the next, as does the rigor of the assessments that tell us whether students are meeting those standards.

Take, for example, North and South Carolina. In 2007, these neighboring states had similar percentages of students performing at the Proficient level on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in eighth-grade mathematics: 34 percent in North Carolina and 31 percent in South Carolina. But when it comes to these states' own assessments, the story is very different: 66 percent of students in North Carolina met their state's definition of "proficient" in eighth-grade math, while just 20 percent of students in South Carolina met their state's definition. This is an example of students with similar knowledge and skills receiving very different signals about acceptable levels of performance.

An even bigger problem is that state standards and assessments in most cases do not come close to signaling the expectations young people must be prepared to face once they leave high school and enter college and the workplace.

Nationally, more than four in ten young people need remediation when they enter postsecondary institutions. For African-American and Latino students, that number climbs to more than six in ten. And a majority of employers report that recent high school graduates entering the workforce lack basic skills in writing and math.

This disconnect between expectations in K-12, on the one hand, and the demands of college and the workplace, on the other, means we're failing in our responsibility to prepare young people to contribute to and benefit from our nation's economic, cultural, and civic health.

The state-led movement toward common college and career-ready standards and assessments is a big step in the right direction. But no clear plan currently exists that would help states make this movement a reality by actually adopting, implementing, and using these new tools.

### SOLUTION

Congress should provide support and incentives for states as they transition from current standards and assessments to new ones. It should also set a clear expectation for when all states, as a condition of receipt of Title I funds, must be using new standards and assessments that have been verified as college and career-ready.

College and career-ready standards and assessments can be part of an approved consortium or unique to a given state. Either way, the law must ensure that both two-year and four-year public colleges and universities certify that students who meet the standards will be assured placement in credit-bearing, non-remedial coursework upon admission.



For states that are ready to move quickly as members of consortia, we recommend the following time frame and incentives:

- 2012-13: Adopt college and career-ready content standards.
- 2013-14: Pilot assessments aligned with college and career-ready standards, and set performance standards (“cut scores”).
- 2014-15: First full administration of new assessments.
- 2015-16: Use new assessments for accountability determinations.

Early adopters should be eligible for grants to support statewide activities associated with the implementation of the standards once they verify to the secretary of education that they have adopted college and career-ready standards.

These leading states should also have the flexibility to reset accountability goals for achievement on the new assessments, provided that the new goals expect significant improvement for all students and gap-narrowing between groups.

For all other states, including those that use standards and assessments developed by consortia and those that develop their own, we recommend the following time frame:

- 2012-13: Provide Congress and the Department of Education with a date certain by which they will adopt college and career-ready content standards.
- No later than 2016-17: Submit to the Department of Education the college and career-ready assessments—either consortia or state-developed—that the state will use.
- No later than 2017-18: Use new assessments for accountability determinations.

States in the second group of adoptors should be eligible for grants to support statewide activities associated with the implementation of the standards once they verify to the secretary of education that they have adopted college and career-ready standards. However, these grants should be less generous than those provided to early adopting states.



## ENSURING EQUITABLE ACCESS TO EFFECTIVE TEACHERS AND LEADERS

### PROBLEM

Effective teachers and leaders are critically important to the effort to raise achievement and close longstanding gaps between groups. Abundant research evidence now makes it absolutely clear: Children who have three or four strong teachers in a row will soar academically regardless of their racial or economic background, while those who have a sequence of weak teachers in a row simply fall further and further behind.

America has many wonderful teachers. But they are not evenly distributed across different schools and districts. Low-income and minority students—the very students who could benefit most from our very best teachers—are typically taught by a disproportionate share of our least able teachers. This teacher quality gap contributes mightily to our achievement gap.

In an effort to reverse these patterns, current ESEA provisions require that states measure, report on, and close any gaps in the rates at which poor and minority students are taught by out-of-field, inexperienced, or uncertified teachers. However, in the absence of consequences, many states have failed to accurately measure and report this information; even fewer states (or districts) have acted on the data in a meaningful way. Inaction on this front is among the primary reasons we're not closing the achievement gaps at a faster rate.

We're closer than ever to implementing systems that measure teacher effectiveness in terms of how much students grow academically. But states and school districts will need time to develop “value added” and other measures of effectiveness in a fair and accurate way.

Low-income and minority students, however, should not have to wait until these systems are perfected to receive better teachers. A newly authorized ESEA should push states toward developing and using value-added systems as a significant part of teacher evaluations and as the main marker of progress in closing the teacher-quality gap. In the meantime, the law must require states to use the best teacher-quality measures available to them *now* to provoke meaningful, significant action on teacher equity.

### SOLUTION

Congress should establish aggressive timelines and powerful incentives for states to implement value-added assessments—and other measures of growth in student learning in non-tested grades and subjects—as the predominant measures of teacher quality. However, given the complexity of growth calculations, the importance of getting them right, and the difficulties inherent in measuring growth in untested subjects, we must acknowledge that transitioning to a system fully reliant on student-growth data will take time.

And while states develop these systems, Congress should ensure that states and districts are collecting and using the best research-based measures now available to assess teacher quality and to identify and act on inequities in teacher access. Specifically, Congress should require states to do the following:

- **Collect data on teacher quality** to determine within-district and between-district patterns of inequity between high-poverty and low-poverty schools and high-minority and low-minority schools.
  - States should use the current provisions to measure whether poor and minority students are taught disproportionately by out-of-field, inexperienced, or uncertified teachers.
  - Alternatively, states could develop a combined measure, such as a teacher-quality composite or index. This combined measure should include only indicators that research has shown to affect student achievement, such as whether a teacher is a novice or a veteran, whether a teacher has ever failed a licensure exam, and whether secondary school teachers hold majors or minors in the subjects they teach.
  - States should include measures of teacher effectiveness based on student-achievement data, and these should become a larger component of tracking and measuring access, as these data become more widely available.
  
- **Establish annual goals** for equitable teacher assignments so that low-income students and students of color get a fair share of the strongest teachers and are not saddled with a disproportionate share of the weakest. In addition, states should assign specific progress goals to each school district. We recommend setting a goal of eliminating inequitable distribution of teacher quality within five years.
  
- **Report data** by school and district annually to district leaders. States should create a public dashboard that reports teacher-quality data. This dashboard could include measures beyond those listed above. Additional measures could include the number of teachers in each category of the evaluation instrument or the rate of teacher absences.
  
- **Hold states and districts accountable** for making real progress toward their established annual goals. In the instances where districts and states do not demonstrate progress in providing equitable access to quality teachers, there should be repercussions. These consequences should include the following:
  - Requiring districts to spend Title II money exclusively on addressing inequities among their schools;
  - Requiring districts to give priority in the hiring process to schools with low teacher-index scores and to protect these schools from voluntary and involuntary teacher transfers not approved of in writing by the school's principal;
  - Rendering states and districts making inadequate progress ineligible for all competitive grant funds under the control of the U.S. Department of Education; and
  - Requiring the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights to investigate teacher-assignment practices in states and districts with significant school-to-school and district-to-district variation in their teacher-quality index scores.

If the reauthorization fails to address the critical issue of equitable access to strong teachers, there's little reason to believe that other reforms embedded in a new law will have much impact on the achievement gap. And that's an outcome our children and our nation can ill afford.



## TURNING AROUND OUR LOWEST PERFORMING SCHOOLS

### PROBLEM

For far too long, we've tolerated intolerable schools. In response to persistent low performance, states and districts have generally chosen to do the minimum—providing money and tinkering at the margins, rather than implementing comprehensive, systematic, and effective approaches to school improvement.

California provides a good example of what happens when states consistently avoid making tough choices. Of the 188 lowest performing schools the state recently identified for the School Improvement Grants program, approximately 70 percent had been on previous school-improvement lists and had already received millions of dollars from multiple school-improvement programs.

Manual Arts Senior High School in Los Angeles, for example, has been a low performer for decades. From 2003 to 2009 alone, the school received approximately \$11.77 million in school-improvement funds. But in 2009, only 4 percent of its students were proficient in Algebra I, and only 14 percent were proficient in English language arts. This is not because there is something wrong with the students; other schools get similar students to much higher levels of achievement. Rather, this decades-old failure suggests that responsible officials in this district, not to mention other California districts with persistently low-performing schools, have not been willing to do the deep and systematic top-to-bottom overhaul necessary for these schools to provide the kind of education that we expect for all children.

Unfortunately, California is hardly unique. As a result, thousands of young Americans continue to attend schools that don't even provide them with minimal academic skills, much less the rigorous preparation they need to succeed in college or a meaningful career.

### SOLUTION

Successful improvement efforts combine high challenge with high support. Congress must demand that the lowest performing schools in each state get both.

#### Support

Having the right staff at turnaround schools is absolutely critical, as is giving that staff the ability to make the big changes necessary to raise achievement. Improvement efforts that do not start with strong principals empowered to make important staffing and instructional decisions will not succeed.

We recommend that, as a condition of receiving Title I funds, states and districts commit to the following for their lowest performing schools:

- Require that principals have a demonstrated track record of achievement for all groups of students in their previous schools.
- Give these schools hiring priority from an unrestricted applicant pool, ensure they are not disproportionately staffed with novice teachers (unless this is part of a principal's intentional staffing strategy), and protect them from involuntary and voluntary teacher transfers that are not approved in writing by the school's principal.
- Provide principals significant autonomy over the school's budget, staff assignments, scheduling, and instructional program.

Further, even the strongest principals and teachers cannot turn around a school all by themselves. Too often, troubled schools are struggling precisely because they are not receiving support from their districts. Therefore, a precondition for an investment of improvement funds must be specific, meaningful commitments from the district about how it will support school turnaround efforts. For example, districts should commit to continuity of building leadership as long as a school is making progress. They should also commit to allowing new principals to bring effective administrators and teachers with them, and to move weak performers out. Similarly, states receiving funds must pledge to do their part to ensure the success of participating schools.

### **Challenge**

Support must be accompanied by strong accountability for meeting aggressive stretch goals.

Elementary and middle schools should show meaningful improvement on statewide summative assessments in the first years of improvement efforts. Examples of appropriate goals include the following:

- Reduce the percentage of students not reaching the proficient achievement level by 10 percent per year; or
- Close by half the distance between the school's proficiency rate and the state's average proficiency rate on statewide summative assessments within two years. For example, the average 2009 reading proficiency rate at elementary and middle schools identified on Washington State's School Improvement Grant application was about 44 percent, while the statewide proficiency rate was nearly 71 percent. To halve the gap between their own performance and the state's, these schools would need to improve by about an average of 7 percentage points per year.

For high schools, where movement on key indicators such as assessment results and graduation rates may take two to three years, goals should include the following:

- In the first two years, significant and substantial progress on critical "leading indicators" such as attendance, disciplinary events, credit accumulation, and college-going activities like completion of applications for admission and financial aid; and
- In the third or fourth year, substantial and regular improvements in assessment results and graduation rates.

Schools that meet these goals should continue operating with significant flexibility and support. Schools that do not meet their goals for three consecutive years should be removed from their district and placed under state control. States may manage the schools directly, create a "recovery district" or turnaround zone, turn the schools over to non-profit management, convert them to charters, or close them all together.

States and districts that do not have a positive track record with turnaround—those, in other words, that don't enable most or all of the schools identified as persistently low performing to successfully meet their accountability goals—should not be eligible for any federal competitive funding.

### **Learning What Works**

Finally, we will never build a robust set of best practices related to school turnarounds unless we learn what is working and what is not. Congress should require and invest in regular, rigorous evaluations of school-improvement efforts.



## FUNDING FAIRNESS

### PROBLEM

Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) provides billions of dollars every year for additional educational services and supports for low-income students to help them achieve at high levels. But the program isn't working as Congress planned.

For Title I to have the intended impact, higher poverty schools must first receive as much in *state and local funding* as do lower-poverty schools. In fact, ESEA contains a “comparability” provision that requires a school district receiving Title I funds to give its higher poverty schools resources that “are at least comparable” to what its wealthier schools receive.

However, the law contains several loopholes that render this requirement all but meaningless, allowing unfair district budgeting practices to create within-district funding gaps that shortchange high-poverty schools.

In 2007-2008, New York City spent an average of \$16,745 per student in state and local dollars at its wealthier (non-Title I) elementary schools. Nearly half of the district's 500 lower-income schools received less than this amount, often substantially less. For example: A school in the Bronx serving 573 students, 96 percent of whom are low-income, received only \$14,504 per student in state and local dollars—\$2,241 less than the average spent at wealthier schools. This adds up to \$1.3 million in lost revenue for that school.

And New York City is far from alone. Researchers have examined data from school districts across the country, finding repeatedly that district budgeting practices favor those schools serving the fewest poor children.

Where do these gaps come from?

- **Teacher salaries** are a key driver of spending differences between schools. But most school districts allocate *teaching positions* to schools rather than actual *dollars*. Consequently, a school that has a first-year teacher with a bachelor's degree is considered to have received the same resource as a school with a 15-year veteran who earned a master's.

Of course, these teachers' paychecks aren't the same. District salary schedules reward experience and advanced education, so the school with the veteran receives more money than the school with the novice—even though they look the same on the books. Since high-poverty schools, on average, employ teachers with less experience and fewer advanced degrees, they are systematically shortchanged by these practices.

- But salary differences are far from the only source of inequities in school budgets. **Non-salary gaps** may arise for a variety of reasons. For example, low-poverty schools may receive additional funds for magnet or gifted programs. What's more, districts often face pressure to “equalize” resources across all schools, so when restricted funds (such as Title I) provide additional services



for high-poverty schools, a district sometimes allocates more state and local dollars to pay for extra services in the more affluent schools.



How does this happen under current law?

- **Demonstrations with no data:** ESEA currently gives districts multiple options for demonstrating compliance with the comparability provisions, none of which actually requires comparable expenditures in Title I and non-Title I schools. For example, a district can simply provide an assurance that it has a district-wide salary schedule and policies aimed at equivalence in staffing and instructional resources among schools. Almost every district can point to such plans, but they don't prove that funds have been equitably distributed between their schools.
- **Teacher salary loophole:** Even in the best-case scenario in which a district shows that its per-student expenditures are equivalent in Title I and non-Title I schools, another loophole in the law renders these data virtually meaningless. The law directs districts to exclude the differences in teacher salaries based on years of experience when making these comparisons, ignoring the all-too-common pattern of disproportionate numbers of less-experienced, lower-paid teachers working in high-poverty schools.
- **90 percent doesn't mean equal:** Current regulations consider Title I schools comparable if their state and local expenditures are equal to at least 90 percent—not 100 percent—of the average for non-Title I schools. Ten percent may not sound like much to some, but this loophole allows gaps of nearly \$1,700 per child in New York City to go unnoticed. In a school with 500 students, that translates to a shortage of more than \$800,000 per year.

## SOLUTION

To ensure that Title I funds serve their intended purpose, these federal dollars should come with a demand for real funding fairness at the state and local level. Congress should amend ESEA to ensure that the *only* way a district can demonstrate comparability—and thereby qualify for federal funds—is to produce data showing that it spends at least as much from state and local dollars in each of its Title I schools as it does in its non-Title I schools.

To get this right, the law must make two things clear:

- Teacher salaries count. School-level expenditures must include actual teacher salaries, including differences based on years of experience.
- Equal means equal. Per-student expenditures in every Title I school must be at least 100 percent of the average expenditures in non-Title I schools—not 90 percent, as in current regulations.

These changes are proposed in the “ESEA Fiscal Fairness Act” (H.R. 5071), introduced last month by Representative Chaka Fattah (D-Pa). A number of civil-rights and education-reform groups have issued a joint statement in support of the bill:

**Center for American Progress Action Fund**

**Children's Defense Fund**

**Citizens' Commission on Civil Rights**

**Civic Builders**

**Democrats for Education Reform**

**Education Equality Project**





**Education Reform Now**

**The Education Trust**

**Hope Street Group**

**League of United Latin American Citizens**

**Mass Insight Education and Research Institute**

**The Mind Trust**

**National Council of La Raza**

**National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators**

**National Indian Education Association**

**National Urban League**

**The New Teacher Project**

**The Schott Foundation for Public Education**

**United Negro College Fund**

With these fixes, Title I would become a much stronger tool. Indeed, it would strengthen the hand of courageous leaders and advocates, prompt action in communities where it is sorely needed, and ultimately ensure that schools get the money they need and our most vulnerable students get the opportunities they deserve.



## INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORTS FOR TEACHERS

### PROBLEM

When standards-based reform got underway in the United States, the main tasks were divvied up. States would assume responsibility for setting standards, developing assessments, and designing accountability systems. Local school districts, schools, or individual teachers themselves would be responsible for deciding *how* to help students reach the standards.

The theory behind this division of labor was a good one, but it has worked out horribly in practice. Why? Because most districts simply don't have the wherewithal to develop high-quality aligned curricula, lessons, or the diagnostics or tests teachers need.

Lacking this guidance and support from their districts, teachers—especially those new to the profession—are essentially teaching in the dark. These teachers are spending hours at night, after teaching all day and grading student work, attempting to divine from vague standards documents (or worse, from the test) what they should be teaching the next day and making up how to teach those things from scratch.

As a result, there's huge classroom-to-classroom variation in what students are taught and to what level. And absent clarity about what they should expect, the evidence is overwhelming that teachers in high-poverty and high-minority classrooms almost always expect less. Not surprisingly, those students perform considerably lower on end-of-year tests than they would have had their teachers been clear on the need to aim higher.

### SOLUTION

As states move toward new college and-career ready standards, Congress must not make the same mistake twice. Instead of leaving teachers on their own to make the leap from the abstract world of standards to the more concrete challenges of instruction, Congress should do the following:

- Set aside the necessary dollars for consortia of states to build the tools teachers will need to begin teaching to the new standards. The funds would allow groups of states to work together to develop high-quality pre-K-12 curriculum frameworks; an aligned collection of teacher-support materials; and diagnostic and benchmark assessments or assessment modules closely connected to the curriculum materials. The result would be an “open source” set of high-quality teaching tools available to states and districts across the country.
- In addition, as individual states take action to adopt the new standards, Congress should immediately make available to them additional funds—separate from and in addition to funding to develop the required teaching tools—for state-level activities that promote the transition to the new standards and the adoption and use of the new teaching tools.
- Finally, districts that adopt the new tools should be provided with additional funds, perhaps through a “Title II, Part B,” in order to provide professional development to teachers on the new tools. Although we have recommended that the Title II funds of districts that are not making progress on ensuring equitable access to strong and effective teachers be restricted to activities

for promoting teacher equity, Title II B funds should not be so limited. However, in districts with significant teacher-equity gaps, Title II B-funded activities should focus on schools with disproportionate shares of newer, weaker, or less effective teachers.

## Details on the Tools

The frameworks developed by state consortia using these funds should have the following features:

- Organized grade-by-grade, pre-K-12, and specific as to what topics should be addressed in each of the school year's semesters.
- Sufficiently specific, well-sequenced and coherent, such that the content in one grade builds coherently and logically on the content of the previous grade and that students who transfer among school districts in the state will encounter roughly the same content as they move from school to school and district to district.
- Sufficiently detailed and rigorous to ensure that by the end of twelfth grade, students will have the content and skills to be ready for college and the workplace.
- Limited to addressing the essential, core content that is to be taught in each grade and subject, generally aiming to guide from 60 percent to 80 percent of instructional time;
- Appropriately balanced between breadth and depth.
- Sequenced to include cross-disciplinary intersections (e.g., the literature framework covers slavery in the same grade/semester as does history/geography) so teachers can work together to deepen student understanding.

The teacher-support materials to be developed must meet the following guidelines:

- Be consistent with the framework adopted by the consortia.
- Explain the core ideas that must be conveyed and why the sequence matters, as well as how these ideas connect with the ideas and materials taught earlier and later.
- Identify what teachers need to know in order to teach the material and suggest resources for teachers who need to refresh their knowledge in particular areas.
- Provide specific teaching ideas for most topics in the framework, including fully developed teaching units and lesson plans with specific student assignments for use by novice teachers, as well as less fully developed ideas and units for expert teachers.
- Provide recommended teaching materials—including maps, worksheets, and charts—ready for use as overheads, handouts, and so on.
- Provide specific ideas for ongoing assessment and review activities.
- Identify domain vocabulary, drawn from the content framework, that is essential for students to learn.
- Include recommend readings and resources for students and for teachers, including books, electronic materials, and more.

Together with the new assessment modules, these tools will help teachers connect the dots within the standards-based system—standards at each grade-level tied to expectations for performance and linked to assessment items, tests, lessons, curriculum frameworks, and even course syllabi.

Without such resources, schools and districts will be unable to build the consensus and capacity to align their work with state expectations. College and career-ready standards alone—despite all the hoopla that has surrounded their development—are unlikely to leverage the improvements in student achievement that our country so badly needs.



## PUBLIC INFORMATION AND REPORTING

### PROBLEM

If parents are to engage effectively with their children's schools, they need to be well informed. Similarly, if we are to ignite and sustain community engagement in schools, all community stakeholders need timely and reliable information on which to act.

As the result of NCLB requirements, all states have developed school report cards. But many are not comprehensible, comprehensive, or easily accessible.

### SOLUTION

Congress should require states to collect key indicators of student achievement and of the opportunities students have to learn. Further, Congress should require that this information is widely available to educators and the public through regular reports that are clear and straightforward. All data should be reported in ways parents can easily compare the performance of their child's school with others in the district and the state; parents should be able to compare their district to others in the state as well.

### Data Used for Accountability Determinations

States should publicly report the accountability determination of every school and district every year. States also should report all data they use to make these determinations, overall and for each student subgroup. These reports should include but not be limited to the following:

- Participation rates on each subject of the state assessment;
- Student performance by proficiency level on each subject and grade of the state assessment;
- Changes in achievement over time (individual student growth toward standards or school-level improvement) as applicable; and
- High school indicators, including graduation rates and postsecondary entry rates.

### Additional Data to Understand School Quality and Support Improvement Efforts

The data used in making accountability determinations provides powerful information about student achievement and attainment. But it does not come close to providing all the information necessary to assess school quality and make decisions about how it can improve. States should collect and publicly report other important indicators such as the following:

- Student and teacher attendance rates;
- Measures of school climate, such as school safety and disciplinary incidents;
- Student, staff, and parent surveys; and
- Measures of high school success and college readiness (disaggregated by student subgroup), including the following:
  - College and career-prep course-taking patterns and success rates;
  - Freshman on-track rates;
  - Percentage of students taking dual-enrollment courses and earning college credits;
  - Percentage taking the ACT or SAT and average scores;

- Participation in college-going activities, including FAFSA application completion; and
- College-remediation rates.

### **Data on School Improvement Efforts**

To gauge whether the resources and energy being directed toward the lowest performing schools are translating into positive outcomes for students, states should provide the following for each school identified as persistently low performing under the accountability system:

- Descriptions of the interventions for each school and
- Goals that have been set for each school and progress in meeting those goals.

### **Data on Teacher Quality and Equity**

Good information on teacher quality is critical to ensuring that low-income students and students of color have access to their fair share of the strongest teachers. States should ensure that a publicly reported teacher-quality dashboard exists for every school and district. These dashboards should include the following:

- Indicators used in making determinations about between-school and between-district teacher equity; in addition to being reported at the individual school and district level, these indicators also should be reported in the aggregate for schools and districts serving the highest and lowest proportions of low-income students and, separately, students of color:
  - The percentage of novice teachers,
  - The percentage of out-of-field teachers,
  - The percentage of uncertified teachers, and
  - Teacher effectiveness based on student-achievement data where available.
  - States may choose to use a composite or index of indicators that research has shown to affect student achievement. In these states, data for each indicator in the composite as well as the overall composite score should be reported.
- Indicators used in making determinations about between-school and between-district teacher additional important teacher data, such as:
  - The number of teachers in each category of the evaluation instrument and
  - Rates of teacher absences.

### **Data on Funding Equity**

To provide information on how schools are funded and whether those funds are being distributed equitably, states should report the following expenditure data by school and district:

- Total expenditures per student and
- Per-pupil expenditures of state and local funds, including actual teacher salaries used to determine funding comparability across schools within the same district.