



Great Public Schools for Every Child

STATEMENT OF

NEA PRESIDENT REG WEAVER

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
EDUCATION AND LABOR**

ON THE

**MILLER-MCKEON DISCUSSION DRAFT OF THE
REAUTHORIZATION OF THE ELEMENTARY AND
SECONDARY EDUCATION ACT**

September 10, 2007

Chairman Miller, Ranking Member McKeon, and distinguished Members of the Committee, on behalf of the 3.2 million members of the National Education Association, thank you for inviting us to speak with you today about the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

When I came before you in March at the outset of this process, I expressed our members' hope that this ESEA reauthorization would finally offer an opportunity for a renewed, broad, and bold national discussion about how to improve and support public education. I shared with you that I had appointed a very thoughtful and diverse committee of our members to help outline what, in our view, would be a positive reauthorization of ESEA. They worked for over two years—hearing from experts, digesting volumes of research, and listening to practitioners across the country—to come up with not just recommendations about how to change AYP, but substantive, thoughtful recommendations about how to define and create a great public school for every child.¹

Simply put, this reauthorization is and should be about more than tweaking the No Child Left Behind portions of ESEA. It should be a comprehensive examination of whether federal policies follow what the research says about how children learn and what makes a successful school.

Mr. Chairman, in July you indicated that No Child Left Behind as it has played out in the field is not fair, not flexible, and not funded. We agree. So, this is the opportunity for a major course-correction. As we speak, our ESEA Advisory Committee, as well as our members and affiliates, are still analyzing the Title I draft just released last week to determine what the proposed changes would mean in their state and district systems and, more importantly, whether they will improve America's classrooms for our students. And, these same members and affiliates will also begin analyzing the 601 pages for the remaining titles released just days ago. We will use those analyses to inform this Committee about the impact of the proposals across the country.

It is important that you all understand that our members care deeply about this process and its outcome because they have lived for more than five years under a system that was crafted without enough of their input and that has proven to be unworkable and in too many cases has had negative, unintended consequences. They are counting on a thoughtful process this time and a bill that recognizes more than just the technical flaws with the statute, but the conceptual and philosophical flaws of the current test-label-punish theory of education reform.

¹ ESEA: *It's Time for a Change! NEA's Positive Agenda for ESEA Reauthorization*, <http://www.nea.org/lac/esea/images/posagenda.pdf>.

The bottom line is this: While we applaud the Committee for identifying most of the problematic provisions of the current law, we do not believe the Committee's first discussion draft of Title I adequately remedies them.²

We are pleased that the draft includes the concepts of growth models and multiple measures in an attempt to get a more accurate picture of student learning and school quality. These provisions, however, are inadequate, as the accountability system the Committee envisions still relies overwhelmingly on two statewide standardized assessments. This does not give real meaning to the growth model and multiple measure concepts and defies the advice of assessment experts across the country, some of whom are here today.

For example, shouldn't we truly value the percentage of students taking Advanced Placement or honors courses not only as an indicator of the number of students receiving a more challenging educational experience, but also as some indication of areas where access to these curricular offerings is limited? We do not believe that prescribing a limited list of measures that states can use and not allowing them to propose other indicators in crafting meaningful accountability systems is in keeping with measurement experts' guidance about multiple sources of evidence. We do not believe this represents greater fairness or flexibility. Rather, it represents more one-size-fits-all prescription from the federal level.

Again, this reauthorization for us is about more than fixing AYP and other provisions that have been problematic; it's about recognizing that providing a quality education to every student takes more than a measurement system. It's about sending a message to students that they are more than just test scores. We should care as much OR MORE about whether a child graduates after receiving a comprehensive, high-quality education as we do about how he or she performs on a standardized test. We should be sending a message to educators that the art and practice of teaching is and must be about more than test preparation. If the only measures we really value are test scores, rather than some of the other indicators of a rich and challenging educational experience and set of supports provided to students, then we will have missed the mark again about adequately serving and educating all children. We will have avoided yet again the more difficult discussion of what services AND outcomes are important for all stakeholders to be held accountable.

We should all keep in mind that the original purpose of ESEA was to attempt to remedy disparities in educational opportunities and resources for poor children. To that end, we have been hopeful that this reauthorization finally would address the fundamental truth that real education accountability is about shared responsibility to remedy intolerable opportunity gaps.

Again, as I stated in March, if one of our goals is to remedy achievement and skills gaps that exist among different groups of students in this country, we cannot do so without also addressing existing opportunity gaps. Why is it that 50 years after *Brown vs. Board*, and after 30 years of litigation in 44 states to address equitable and adequate educational

² We have previously provided the Committee with detailed comments about the Title I discussion draft.

opportunities and resources, policy makers at all levels still seem unwilling to do anything but point fingers and avoid the responsibility to tackle this insidious problem, which continues to plague too many communities and students? This is about more than disparities in per pupil spending across states, within states, and within districts; it's about disparities in the basics of a student's life—disparities in the learning environments to which students are subject, disparities in the age of their textbooks and materials, disparities in course offerings, disparities in access to after-school help and enrichment, and yes, disparities in access to qualified, caring educators.

Given the fact that so many Title I students are not fully served due to current funding levels and historically haven't been, we have been hopeful that THIS reauthorization would mark an opportunity to address these inequities from a *policy* standpoint, not just an appropriations standpoint. It's past time to stop pointing fingers about whose responsibility it is to address opportunity gaps. It's time to force a dialogue about how to *share* in that responsibility.

In a preliminary reading of the remaining titles of the Committee's ESEA reauthorization discussion draft,³ we find an entirely insufficient focus on the elements of our *Positive Agenda* that would truly make a difference in student learning and success. These include early childhood education, class size reduction, safe and modern facilities, and a real attempt to infuse 21st century skills and innovation into our schools to ensure that public education in this country is relevant and engaging to students in the changing, inter-dependent world. We can find no significant discussion of the fact that teaching and learning conditions are one of the two main factors (low salaries being the other) that continue to create the teacher recruitment and retention problem, particularly in the hardest to staff schools.

Instead, there are more mandates and even more prescriptive requirements. This will detract from the essential element of public education: good teaching and learning. More mandates aren't magically going to make kids read at grade level or perform math on grade level. Tweaks to the measurement system won't ensure that students perform any better on assessments. Good teaching practice, involved parents and communities, and engaged students will do that.

We are gravely disappointed that the Committee has released language in Title I and Title II that undermines educators' collective bargaining rights. This is an unprecedented attack on a particular segment of the labor community—the nation's educators. Time and time again, our members in bargaining states don't simply negotiate about money, they negotiate about the very conditions that impact teaching AND learning. In almost every circumstance, those conditions—class sizes, professional development, collaborative planning time to name just a few—have a direct impact on students.

Finally, let me address a point about which there should be no mistake. NEA cannot support federal programs—voluntary or not—that mandate pay for test scores as an

³ We will provide a detailed analysis of the remaining titles of the Committee's draft by the Committee's September 14th deadline.

element of any federal program. Teachers aren't hired by the federal government; they are hired by school districts. As such, the terms and conditions of their employment must be negotiated between school districts and their employees. To attempt to enact any federal program that mandates a particular evaluation or compensation term of a contract would be an unprecedented infringement upon collective bargaining rights and protections.⁴ This is offensive and disrespectful to educators.

We are not able to support the Title I or Title II discussion draft as currently written. We are hopeful that the Committee will take the time to get this right. In essence, we urge you not to rush to mark up a bill that would lead to yet another set of unintended consequences.

In closing, I want to emphasize that our members are not afraid of those who hurl accusations about what's in their hearts every day when they teach and care for our nation's students. Our members are united and will stand firm in our advocacy for a bill that supports good teaching and learning and takes far greater steps toward creating great public schools for every child.

⁴ We have attached to this testimony a more detailed explanation of our views regarding professional pay for educators.

APPENDIX



Professional Pay for the Profession of Teaching

July 23, 2007

The profession of teaching should offer a brilliant and rewarding field for professionals committed to the success of their students. Unfortunately, today's teachers still struggle with fundamental needs. Too often, teachers barely make ends meet, find insufficient support for quality professional development and are inconsistently compensated for assuming additional, demanding responsibilities.

Compensation systems must be designed to firmly establish teaching as a respected profession and improve student learning through improved teacher practice. A comprehensive pay system must support factors shown to make a difference in teaching and learning—the skills, knowledge, and experience of classroom teachers.

NEA supports key strategies that can meet these goals. Congressional leadership can accelerate the advancement of the profession of teaching and improve conditions for student learning through the actions outlined here.

1. Express support for improved starting salaries.

We know that quality teachers are the key to providing Great Public Schools for Every Student. In order to attract and retain the very best, we must pay teachers a professional level salary. We must ensure a \$40,000 minimum salary for all teachers in every school in this country. While that is primarily a state and local government responsibility, Congress can express support for this minimum salary in the ESEA reauthorization.

2. Through congressional action, take advantage of the flexibility of salary schedules now in place to offer incentives for teachers to gain additional skills and knowledge and for taking on challenges and additional responsibility.

Compensation systems now have the flexibility to accommodate some immediate changes. Congressional action that takes advantage of what is already in place will make more of a difference, faster, than trying to reinvent the system.

NEA recognizes the need in many jurisdictions to bargain (or mutually agree to, where no bargaining exists) enhancements to the current salary schedule. NEA already supports many ideas to enhance the single salary schedule. Congressional support for diverse approaches could spur needed change and enable local school districts to tailor action to their specific educational objectives.

NEA supports:

- Incentives to attract qualified teachers to hard-to-staff schools.
- Incentives for the achievement of National Board Certification.
- Incentives for teachers to mentor colleagues new to the profession.
- Incentives for accepting additional responsibilities such as peer assistance or mentoring.
- Additional pay for working additional time through extended school years, extended days, and extra assignments.
- Additional pay for teachers who acquire new knowledge and skills directly related to their school's mission and/or their individual assignments.
- Additional pay for teachers who earn advanced credentials/degrees that are directly related to their teaching assignments and/or their school's mission.
- Group or school-wide salary supplements for improved teacher practice leading to improved student learning, determined by multiple indicators

3. Include in the ESEA reauthorization a competitive grant program that provides funds on a voluntary basis to states and school districts to implement innovative programs such as those listed in item two.

ESEA offers the opportunity to provide incentives to strengthen the profession of teaching. In constructing those incentives, NEA believes that federally-supported programs will be most effectively implemented when teachers have the opportunity to understand them and option to embrace them. Therefore, any such federal program for compensation innovations must require that such program be subject to collective bargaining, or where bargaining does not now exist, subject to a 75 percent majority support vote of the affected teachers.

4. NEA opposes federal requirements for a pay system that mandates teacher pay based on student performance or student test scores.

There are innumerable reasons for steering away from such schemes: tests are imperfect measures; student mobility in a given district or classroom might be high, skewing the system; test scores are not the only measure of student success; single year test scores do not measure growth. In addition, a federal mandate that requires test scores or student performance as the element of a compensation system undermines local autonomy and decision making.

To be clear: NEA affiliates at the local and state levels are open to compensation innovations that enhance preparation and practice which drive student performance. NEA underscores that in those circumstances, local school administrators and local teacher organizations must work together to mutually decide what compensation alternatives work best in their particular situation. The federal government can play a role in providing funds to support and encourage local and state innovations in compensation systems, but the federal government should leave the specific elements to be decided at the local level.

For additional information contact:

Bill Raabe, Director, Collective Bargaining and Member Advocacy

BRaabe@nea.org