



**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS**

*Serving All Elementary and Middle Level Principals*

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**REACTION TO THE  
MILLER-MCKEON DISCUSSION DRAFT OF THE  
REAUTHORIZATION OF THE  
ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION ACT (ESEA)**

**Statement of**

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**Education and Labor Committee  
United States House of Representatives**

**September 10, 2007**

Chairman Miller, Ranking Member McKeon, and members of the committee:

Good afternoon. I am Mary Kay Sommers, principal of Shepardson Elementary School in Fort Collins, Colorado and president of the National Association of Elementary School Principals. Thank you for the opportunity to represent NAESP's membership of nearly 30,000 elementary and middle level principals in providing testimony on the committee's discussion draft of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) reauthorization bill. I request that the full statement be included in the hearing record.

NAESP appreciates very much the care that the committee has taken to solicit and review input from the gamut of education stakeholders. Mr. Chairman, your heartfelt commitment to education and that of your committee colleagues is evident, and we are grateful for the long months of staff and member work that have gone into the creation of the discussion draft. Even though we don't expect to see all of our recommendations incorporated in the reauthorized ESEA, we appreciate that we've been heard and our views have been considered.

Because principals are engaged in all aspects of the work of schools, NAESP is interested in all 1,036 pages of the discussion draft. Due to time constraints, however, my testimony will focus largely on some key provisions in Titles I and II. Over the next several days, NAESP will provide the committee with additional suggestions for specific legislative language changes, and we will continue to do so throughout the reauthorization.

On behalf of our nearly 30,000 members, I regret being unable to rate the discussion draft as “Proficient.” While, the draft bill proposes some positive changes to the law, such as the use of growth models and consideration of multiple measures, we are disappointed to see that it retains core provisions, most notably a reliance on high-stakes testing and unreasonable requirements regarding the assessment of students with special needs. NAESP does not support these core provisions because we believe them to contradict our aims as chief architects of learning within our school communities, and in fact, believe them to be harmful to children.

The assessment and accountability provisions in Title I gauge student and school success through the use of a flawed system. As in current law, standardized test scores are raised to a level of importance that education research and practice indicate is unwarranted. This devotion to making high-stakes decisions on the basis of test scores produces an incomplete and therefore inaccurate picture of the quality of educators and schools. NAESP has a longstanding position against high-stakes assessment practices, stated in the *2007-2008 NAESP Platform*, which is available on our Web site ([www.naesp.org](http://www.naesp.org)). Our resolutions on overall assessment practices and the appropriately limited use of standardized tests have been in place for decades and reaffirmed many times since their creation. Copies of these two resolutions are attached to my written testimony.

## MULTIPLE MEASURES IN ASSESSMENT

Although we are pleased that the draft bill includes some provisions for the use of multiple measures in assessment, it falls short. There are many academic and nonacademic factors that affect student progress, and the draft language overemphasizes “achievement” defined primarily in terms of test scores. The discussion draft ignores the many other contributors that promote or inhibit learning, such as test anxiety and emotional fatigue.

NAESP recommends that the committee eliminate the 85 percent weight given to standardized test scores at the elementary level for measuring AYP and allow additional indicators for elementary schools to use in multiple measurement systems. Such other factors that affect learning could include changes in rates of student and teacher attendance, changes in number of discipline referrals, class size, level of parental involvement, and the results of school climate surveys. We also strongly believe that such nonacademic factors as the availability of physical and mental health care, nutrition, and other student and family support services should be factored into the determination of school quality and student progress. This is not about avoiding accountability; it’s about addressing the needs of the whole child and making sure that all is done that should be done to help every student succeed without penalty or fear of failure.

## ASSESSMENT OF SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS

We are very disappointed that the draft bill does little to change the assessment requirements for students with disabilities in current law and codifies the U.S.

Department of Education's regulations relating to students falling into the "one percent" and "two percent" categories. Requiring students with disabilities to be assessed on their chronological grade level, rather than the grade level at which they are taught, is neither an appropriate nor a reasonable measure of achievement. My fellow principals and I have been dismayed by the distress that forced grade-level testing elicits in many students with disabilities.

Imagine this scenario. I have watched a young boy who has many factors that are legitimately impacting his learning and he qualifies for special education. I'll call him José. I have never seen a child who struggled so hard and made such gains in his learning. His motivation never ceased, nor did his smile and incredible positive, caring attitude. José is well-liked by all of the students and the staff. Watching him take these tests each year is one of the most painful experiences we've ever had. Unlike many adults, José will persist in attempting to read each word and work each problem when the testing level is nearly 4 years ahead of him. His courage and tenacity to work hard are indeed the qualities we would want every child to have. Last year it took him the whole day, and 35 minutes after school, to complete one 55-minute exam. He refused offers to stop. He wanted to finish. The good news is that he made great growth; the bad news is that he finds he is still Unsatisfactory. There is no doubt in my mind that José will be one the most productive citizens who will make this world a better place and who will infect others with his positive zest for living and caring about others.

Now, imagine this scenario. In 2008, José continues to work hard, harder than most students. Only this year, his test is designed at his level and a bit beyond to see what all he has learned, how well he has accomplished his IEP goals. Imagine the look on that face that says, “Someone really cared enough to make changes in this test so I could truly do my best and feel proud of all the learning I’ve done this year.”

My worst fear as José moves into Junior High School is that his frustration will exceed his ability to persist. What have we taught him then?

May you and this committee consider being the “ones who really cared” to make a difference for José and others similar to him.

NAESP recommends that the committee allow progress made toward achievement of the IEP goals to count toward the student and school’s AYP and allow the IEP team to determine the appropriate assessments for students with disabilities. The IEP team includes parents, school staff, and others with a legitimate interest in the student’s education, all working collaboratively to establish goals and plans that are suitable to the student’s education level, standards-based, and rigorous in design. We appreciate the fact that the committee has, with respect to modified assessments, applied the appropriate authority to the IEP team and believe that authority should be extended to include other decisions about the academic assessment of students with disabilities.

Clearly, there are other important provisions in Title I, but I'll move now to Title II in order to respect time limitations. NAESP will provide additional written comments on the full draft bill later this week.

NAESP has a strong interest in the preparation, recruitment, and professional development of educators. We are pleased to see in Title II an increased call for principals' professional development and encourage the committee to make even more of the allowable uses of professional development funds mandatory. By including a specific reference to principals in the title of the Teacher and Principal Quality state grants, the committee is signaling an interest in helping principals receive professional development that addresses their unique role, and we appreciate that. Providing mentoring to new principals and ongoing, high-quality professional development throughout one's career is the best way to move toward what all schools need: an excellent principal who is armed with the best and most current skills and knowledge to function effectively as an instructional leader and school building CEO.

I have had several opportunities to mentor prospective principals so they can better understand the different skills and knowledge they will need in this role. They have been amazed at the complex nature of the position, the variety of human and technical skills, and the need for situational leadership. I also am aware of the high turnover and the increasing difficulty in finding qualified educators to serve in this critical leadership position.

I must express our strong concern, however, about the provisions in Title I that seek to establish in federal law a definition of an “exemplary, highly qualified principal.” Of course we all want schools to be run by principals who are qualified and who do exemplary work, but creating such a federal definition raises a number of concerns. First, the determination of educator qualifications and quality is a state and district responsibility and should remain so. School, district, and state personnel are those who best know the complex work of principals and understand the situational context and needs of each school within each school district. It would be unwise and counterproductive for the federal government to interfere with local authority in taking on this additional responsibility.

Another major problem with creating a federal definition or label is naturally inherent when describing principal quality. Although the list of criteria in the discussion draft includes significant characteristics and knowledge that principals should have, most of the criteria would be difficult to assess. We believe this dilemma would inevitably lead to a practice of defining principal quality and effectiveness largely or fully on the basis of test scores. Our opposition to the high-stakes use of test scores has been articulated already, so I will only reiterate that it is an important and longstanding position of NAESP. For the same reason, we do not support so-called “pay for performance” plans or bonuses for educators that are based fully or in large part on test scores.

We believe that the most effective way to move toward the important goal of having all schools led by exemplary principals is to make sure that principal preparation programs



are of the highest quality and offer the most current, research-based education and training. Likewise, states and districts need support to establish and implement effective principal recruitment, mentoring, and professional development opportunities that are available to all principals throughout their careers.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman, Mr. McKeon and members of the committee, for this opportunity to advocate for children through the voice of preschool, elementary and middle level principals.

***FROM NAESP PLATFORM 2007-2008, National Association of Elementary School Principals:***

**EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT**

**Assessment**

NAESP believes that, for assessment information to be valid and useful, educational standards specifying what students are expected to know and be able to do must be clearly defined through a broad-based consensus process before assessment procedures are developed.

Assessment focused on student performance has as its primary purpose the advancement of student learning and the improvement of instruction. This process must be fair, flexible, and authentic in that it reflects the students' demonstration of competence. The procedures utilized must be valid and appropriate representations of the expectations placed on students. NAESP recognizes that assessment is an integral part of curriculum and instruction, which includes the teaching and learning of test-taking skills. NAESP encourages the alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to maintain a balance between teaching and formal assessment.

The assessment process must involve educators in its design and use, and include procedures that ensure accessibility, data analysis, continuous review, and improvement. Test results must be accessible and reported in an understandable, timely manner within the context of other relevant information affecting the school.

NAESP urges its members to become involved in state and local activities establishing the design and implementation of assessment processes. ('92, '94, '01, '06)

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**Standardized Tests**

NAESP believes children have diverse abilities and learning potential that should be identified and developed. Educators, parents, and children need multiple, fair, and effective assessment opportunities that can be used for determining the needs of children in order to design appropriate instruction.

NAESP opposes the use of standardized test scores as the sole criterion to measure student performance; to rate, grade or rank school effectiveness; to allocate funds; or to take punitive measures against schools and/or school personnel.

NAESP recognizes that some uses of standardized testing are detrimental to education.

It is imperative that the limitations of standardized tests are clearly understood by decision makers:

1. Standardized tests, by design, generate data that are valid for specific purposes.
2. Interpretation and use of the data must be limited to those purposes.

Therefore, multiple, non-discriminatory, and longitudinal measures must be employed if the data are used to:

1. Make educational decisions for each student;
2. Adequately assess the achievement level of student subgroups; or
3. Monitor student progress and/or program effectiveness over time.

NAESP also believes that, in reporting assessment results to the public, explanations of the proper interpretations of the data must be included.

NAESP urges principals and their local, state, and national associations to use assessment data to improve instruction and help students learn.

NAESP also urges principals to actively educate policy-makers and the public about the proper interpretation and use of standardized test data. ('72, '76, '85, '89, '97, '01, '02, '07)