



American Association of School Administrators

**AASA Views on the Discussion Draft of the Reauthorization of
the Elementary and Secondary Education Act
Hearing of the House Education and Labor Committee
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**Testimony by Dr. Paul Houston, Executive Director
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Good morning. My name is Paul Houston and I am executive director of the American Association of School Administrators. We are the national association for school system leaders and I am here representing the nearly 13,000 public school superintendents who serve the nation's children.

The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act is always a cause for hope among school administrators. In the past, ESEA has focused on improving educational outcomes for low-income students.

AASA had many issues with the provisions of the last ESEA authorization. We felt so strongly that we opposed the bill. Many of the concerns we raised, sadly, proved prescient and we have seen schools and educators struggle with those provisions. During this cycle, we commend congressional staff and members for the transparency of the process and the professional courtesy shown to AASA staff and members by both majority and minority staff.

We are pleased with the modifications to the Rural Educational Achievement Program in the discussion draft. However, while the draft identifies important issues that need to be addressed in the reauthorization, such as multiple measures and growth, it does not fully resolve those issues. There is inconsistency between sections of Title I. There is increased complexity and confusion for AYP that make estimation of effects impossible. There are 14 new reports and analyses required of local school districts. In addition, there is conflict between IDEA and Title I, inappropriate assessment of English language learners and continuation of inappropriate provisions for 5,000 small and rural school districts.

We believe that problems exist in the discussion draft because the flawed assumptions underlying NCLB have not been adequately reexamined. Where I grew up, we learned that when you lean your ladder against the wrong wall, you end up painting the wrong house. Solutions based on wrong or inconsistent assumptions are not solutions at all—they are new problems.

What are some of these incorrect assumptions? One is that answers to educational questions should flow from Washington and from the Department of Education. There is no relief from the prescriptive nature of the current law. The discussion draft adds new prescriptive federal authority, such as how to calculate graduation rates and what measures beyond tests can be used

to judge schools. The changes make it impossible to estimate the effect on AYP, which must be addressed before implementation.

AASA believes that educators, who are closest to the issues and have the greatest experience working with children, should drive the solutions. Our country is strong and vibrant because of our system of federalism and because we have had a partnership among local communities, states and the federal government. The last ESEA reauthorization badly strained that partnership and new mandates emanating from Washington aren't likely to relieve that strain.

Other assumptions in NCLB that have not been fully corrected in the draft are:

- That annual standardized tests will ensure improvement in achievement;
- That one size fits all, and that there is no need to make exceptions for geographically isolated schools.
- That the best way to estimate achievement is through a single standardized test; and
- That the best way to motivate professionals to change their practices and policies is to discredit public schools and focus shame and punishment on teachers and administrators.

Another assumption that needs revision is that accountability models should focus on the information needs of federal and state policy makers. No one on this or any other panel would suggest that accountability should not be a part of educational improvement. But, AASA believes that the only way to get close to the unattainable goal of 100 percent proficiency is by focusing the accountability system on the information needs of teachers, principals and school system leaders. We have only the time and funding for one accountability system. If you want to get close to the 100 percent goal, put the information in the classroom, instead of in Washington.

Accountability is more than student achievement and student achievement is more than a test score. If America's children are to have any chance of success in a global market, they will need to be proficient in more than we can currently test. They need to be creative and curious, have a sense of adventure and be willing to challenge authority. Any system that reduces those skills or implies that only answering questions found in a bubble is a system that ultimately weakens America's competitive position and undermines the potential success of our children.

In conclusion, we are pleased with the direction, transparency and professional courtesy of the process. However, we would be hard pressed to support the draft. We urge Congress to take the time to get the assumptions right, make the bill internally consistent, eliminate the conflicts with IDEA and accommodate the realities of rural schools.