

**WHY CONGRESS SHOULD REAUTHORIZE AND IMPROVE THE ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY  
EDUCATION ACT AND NCLB THIS YEAR**

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**PRIORITIZING TEACHING AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP QUALITY – ESPECIALLY FOR THE  
CHILDREN WHO NEED IT MOST**

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Thank you so much for the opportunity to provide testimony to the Committee on Education and Labor today on the crucial and timely topic of reauthorizing and improving the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and NCLB in order to drive high achievement for every student. As the Chief Executive Officer and co-founder of New Leaders for New Schools, I am pleased to share a perspective grounded in our current work with 400 public schools and school leaders serving 200,000 mostly low-income students in over 10 cities across the United States – including Baltimore, Chicago, Memphis, Milwaukee, Newark, New Orleans, New York City, Oakland, Prince George’s County, Sacramento, and Washington D.C.

**First, my colleagues and I embrace the nationwide goals of No Child Left Behind and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act – grade-level proficiency for virtually every student in reading and math -- as a crucial cornerstone of a quality education for every student.** We salute bipartisan leadership – including the crucial leadership of this committee – for embracing these goals for the nation. There is actually a groundswell of support for these goals from educators nationwide. For example, we have had 15 times more applications than slots from educators and leaders wishing to become urban principals driven by a belief that every student regardless of background can achieve at high levels and a sense of urgency and personal responsibility that we as adults must close the achievement gap. All of the “New Leaders” who began their training with us this summer have signed on to at least a six-year commitment and goals that (at a minimum) 90-100% of the primarily low-income students in the schools they lead will achieve grade-level proficiency in core academic subjects and that 90-100% of their high school students will be graduating by 2014. We are actively exploring adding a very small number of additional student success goals such as dramatically increasing the percentage of low-income students at advanced levels and enrolling and graduating from college.

Like so many other educators across our nation, these instructional leaders are working every day to translate the goals of these important national initiatives into reality in low-income, urban schools nationwide – school by school, classroom by classroom and student by student. In most of our cities, students in schools led by our New Leaders principals for at least two years are on average making faster academic progress than comparable students in the school system – with the single-most-improved school in cities such as Chicago and Sacramento led by New Leaders principals. But outperforming the norm is not enough. That’s why we are actively examining why only about 20% of New Leaders-led schools are

making the breakthrough gains needed to accomplish our goals of 90-100% student success within five years of a New Leader assuming the principalship.

But neither our progress nor our limitations can distract us from the goal of a high quality education for every student. After all, while there are many different methods for *how* to teach children to read effectively and independently by the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, our society and children cannot afford to question whether we should hold ourselves accountable for *whether* every child regardless of background learns to read effectively and independently by the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade.

I believe that the birthright to learn how to read, for example, shouldn't be a New York or Louisiana or California birthright – nor should it be a birthright only for a child who happens to be born in certain affluent communities. It should be an American birthright available to every child that walks in the door of any school in any of our communities anywhere across our nation. And yet today, a 3<sup>rd</sup> grader's ability to read, an 8<sup>th</sup> grader's ability to do algebra, and a 12<sup>th</sup> grader's ability to graduate from high school and choose a college or career is an accident of geography – usually due to family income and occasionally because a student happens to attend one of the tiny number of public (or private) schools where today we are achieving such successes with low-income students. The fact that these successes are happening in certain schools serving low-income students demonstrates that our children are capable of such success. The fact that taking these successes to scale is very hard, complex work – and that we don't have all of the solutions yet – should not diminish our commitment to our young people or our educators who are working tirelessly on what they rightly see as America's top domestic priority.

**Second, achieving these goals requires a massive, long-term, and bipartisan national commitment to success and quick action this year by this Congress to reauthorize and improve ESEA and NCLB.**

Achieving these goals also requires all of us to augment our institutional self-interests with a civic responsibility to candidly examine data and experience about our progress, our failures, and what it will take to succeed together.

Every generation faces a small number of imperative challenges and opportunities that will most affect whether we bequeath a stronger, fairer, and more successful society to our children and grandchildren. There is no greater challenge and opportunity for our generation than ensuring first-class, high quality public schools available to every student regardless of background, race, disability, native language, or income. Doing this and closing the achievement gap will require the same kind of generational, long-term commitments shown through the civil rights movement and our triumph over the Nazis. A close examination of data and experience shows we are dangerously far from achieving our goals (with for example a typical low-income 7<sup>th</sup> grader reading at the levels of a more affluent 3<sup>rd</sup> grader), but we have begun to make serious progress in some classrooms, schools and communities. A close examination of schools under NCLB shows some important strengths and limitations of NCLB as a tool to help all of our students succeed.

*Fast reauthorization will help renew and signal broad, bipartisan commitment to crucial ESEA and NCLB goals that most of you share -- and to build on important strengths in the legislation.* For example, we continue to see too many people reject the proposition that virtually every student regardless of background can learn and achieve. We see too many people who quietly believe that a low-income child or child of color has less innate capacity to learn and achieve than their affluent or white peers. We see too many others who believe children regardless of background might have the capacity to succeed but that we don't have the capacity as adults to unlock that potential given all of the obstacles. Those beliefs persist in face of evidence from classrooms and schools to the contrary. And these beliefs represent some of the most

pernicious and dangerous obstacles to our success. Reauthorizing ESEA and NCLB will demonstrate to educators, families, students, and others that the commitment to these goals – success for every student, holding schools and systems accountable for student progress, a laser-like focus on closing the achievement gap -- transcends any particular party, President, or Congress.

*Fast reauthorization will also address some agreed-on inadequacies in current law in order to better equip our students and educators to achieve our shared goals.* For example, current law does not make possible a universally available, high quality “growth model” where schools could be accountable for the rapid progress of actual (and all) students toward proficiency and above as opposed to the performance of a group of students just below the proficiency line one year compared to another group of students the previous year. Current law fails to focus adequately on scaling up what’s working or how school systems and others can help build the capacity and tools of educators to achieve these goals – and especially in the lowest-income and lowest-achieving schools. And current law does not invest or focus adequately in high-quality assessments and accountability systems to prevent an excessive focus on (or create a glass ceiling of) test-preparation and basic skills.

*It is my belief that other real, but solvable, disagreements among education advocates shouldn’t keep Congress from building on these strengths and addressing these and other inadequacies.* Failure to act this year likely means that students will wait at least three more years for recommitment to these goals and improvement of capacity and strategies to achieve them. Three years is a long time in the life of a child. And it is a long time in a nation with urgent and important goals for educators, students, families, policymakers and others to accomplish by 2014. Given these moral imperatives and our experiences and data, I believe it is of utmost importance that Congress reauthorizes the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and NCLB this year. The leadership of Chairman Miller, Congressman McKeon, and this committee have been and will continue to be absolutely crucial to make this happen.

***Third, the evidence suggests that Congress should place a laser-like focus on supporting and investing in quality teaching and school leadership – especially in low-income urban and rural communities – to achieve our nationwide goals for student success.*** The evidence is very clear: the greatest in-school factor affecting student achievement is the quality of teaching in a student’s classroom. And the second greatest factor is the quality and effectiveness of the principal. And while the evidence suggests that NCLB has very much helped to focus our nation, school systems, and schools on the achievement gap, it has not yet adequately equipped our teachers and school leaders to effectively solve it.

Studies have shown a difference of 50 percentile points among students who have had more effective teachers compared to those with less effective teachers over the course of three years. And studies have shown that nearly 25 % of the in-school factors affecting student achievement can be attributed directly to the quality and effectiveness of the principal. This is second only to the effects of teacher instruction -- which is shaped by the way our most effective principals select, manage, and develop their teachers. And because principals select, train, manage, support, evaluate and teachers -- and set the culture for the school - - a teaching quality strategy can’t be successful without an effective principal strategy.

The bottom line: *the quality and effectiveness of school teachers and principals matters a lot to the future of our students and to the future of our nation.*

In a world where there are no shortcuts to school success, a serious focus on supporting quality teaching and school leadership provides no silver bullet. But systematic efforts to drive the quality and effectiveness of

our nation's teachers and principals may be one of our most pragmatic and significant opportunities to offer our neediest students better support to help them reach high standards of excellence.

*Translating this simple insight into effective policy and scalable practice is no easy task, and Chairman Miller and Congressman McKeon have thankfully made this a powerful priority in the draft discussion bill. Enacting the ideas embedded in the Miller-McKeon draft legislation would make a dramatic contribution to the capacity of our schools in our neediest communities to accomplish your goals for student success.*

For example, I applaud the draft legislation's focus on:

-- *Attracting and retaining our most effective teachers and school leaders in our highest-need schools.* The bill would provide crucial incentives to increase likelihood that effective teachers will remain in or come to high-need schools. As this week's Time Magazine notes, Chairman Miller provided crucial leadership along with Representatives Melancon and Jindal (as well as from Senators Landrieu, Kennedy, and Cochran) to ensure that Congress provided similar incentives in New Orleans and other communities hit hard by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. It's making a difference in New Orleans and elsewhere. The focus on systems changes to attract and hire teachers and school leaders can make a big impact.

-- *Ensuring more school-level instructional support and feedback – including through master teachers, mentor teachers, teacher residencies and more.* We have learned that professional development is a crucial investment to support our teachers and principals, and the most effective professional development is usually school-based and ongoing as opposed to one-shot sessions outside of the school.

-- *Improving the preparation of aspiring and novice teachers and school leaders in high-need schools.* Investing in teacher and school leader residencies, merit-based selection models, and ongoing coaching and support can help ensure the next generation of well-prepared teachers and school leaders for high-need schools and communities.

-- *Ensuring greater transparency and focus by states and school systems on the fair distribution of resources for teachers and school leaders in the highest-need schools.* Conditioning Title II aid on state progress toward ensuring quality and effective teachers in our highest-need schools is an important idea. And it is very important in ensuring that high-need schools have at least their fair share of experienced and effective teachers and instructional leaders – and it is critical that more resources and professional development be available in our high-need schools given that most of our highest-need schools tend to have the most novice teachers.

-- *Investing in and scaling what's effective.* This legislation includes important and innovative support to identify what's working in driving dramatic student achievement gaps and provide additional resources to help those successful efforts serve more students. Rarely do successful efforts get recognized and scaled. This legislation would do that, explain and share what's working, and build greater capacity among effective school systems and educators to continue their work and serve more students. I appreciate the leadership of Chairman Miller as well as Representative Carol Shea-Porter on this important effort.

It is not easy to balance the urgency of the need for effective principals at scale (especially in our highest-need schools) with the need to ensure that these reforms are implemented in a deliberate, high quality way. Too often, powerful ideas are lost to inadequate knowledge about how to bring ideas to scale, limited capacity, and well-intentioned but poorly planned implementation. As we consider solutions and strive to meet the urgent educational needs of children as quickly as possible, we must both identify how the federal government can be most effective in this work and recognize the current need for more research and

development as well as learning on how to gain clearer knowledge, build capacity, and quickly scale effective efforts. This legislation manages to strike the right balance between these priorities – including providing the kind of R &D that would be supported in human capital efforts through a number of innovative, competitive grant programs.

***I have three major recommendations for improving this legislation.*** *First, I recommend that the Miller-Melancon-Jindal RENEWWAL legislation be incorporated into this reauthorization to ensure additional support to ensure effective teachers and school leaders in New Orleans and other communities hit hard by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. I also recommend that reauthorized ESEA and NCLB provide New Orleans and these communities with crucial support to help rebuild and modernize school facilities – and work with others in Congress to amend the Stafford Act to remove bureaucratic obstacles that currently require FEMA to only fund the rebuilding of low-income schools to atrocious pre-Katrina standards. This is an opportunity to modernize and rebuild school buildings to post-Katrina standards of excellence not pre-Katrina standards and specifications that went hand-in-hand with the historic poor performance of the New Orleans schools.*

The next 12 months represent a crucial inflection point for the city of New Orleans and other communities hit hard by these hurricanes – and the fate of the public schools will be a crucial factor affecting the success of these communities. This year is the crucial time to ensure that these communities have the teachers, school leaders, and investment in facilities they need to succeed. This year is when the direction of these schools and communities will be set for years and decades to come.

*Second, I recommend streamlining the provisions on performance measures to ensure transparency and accountability on a small set of important, measurable outcomes such as high school graduation rates, college enrollment, and improved success on AP and IB assessments without reducing accountability and support for reading and math proficiency.* I think that a solution can be found that ensures a focus on this broader set of rigorous student success outcomes that matter to students, business, and our society without diminishing crucial accountability and support for reading and math proficiency. I'd be happy to discuss ideas for doing this after the panel has finished providing testimony. These differences can be reconciled. I strongly encourage you not to let the vital, speedy reauthorization of ESEA and NCLB be slowed by what are truly solvable differences on these issues.

*Third, I recommend instituting a greater investment and focus on the evaluation and performance-orientation of many of the human capital initiatives in the discussion draft of Title II.* In my view, the competitive grant programs outlined in this legislation can provide important R &D for how to ensure successful teaching at greater scale. But they will only maximize their intended impact if there is:

- a rigorous evaluation of all programs funded by these initiatives,
- continued funding for only those programs that demonstrate progress in student achievement, and
- a research plan and strategy for reviewing the findings across programs to ensure that there are lessons learned and recommendations for an even broader focus on human capital that can inform the next ESEA reauthorization 6-7 years from now.

Thank you again for the opportunity to share these perspectives and recommendations with you. My team and I are happy to work with you and your staff in any way that might be helpful to inform your continued deliberations on this vital topic. Thank you for your leadership on these issues – your speedy work on the reauthorization of ESEA and NCLB can make a profound impact on our children, schools, and nation.