



NATIONAL ALLIANCE OF BLACK SCHOOL EDUCATORS

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Executive Director

September 7, 2007

The Honorable George Miller
Chairman
Committee on Education & Labor
United States House of Representatives
2205 Rayburn House Office Building

Representative Dale Kildee
2107 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Howard P. McKeon
Ranking Member
Committee on Education & Labor
United States House Representatives
2351 Rayburn House Office Building

Representative Mike Castle
1233 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Honorable Committee Members,

On behalf of our President Dr. Emma Epps, Superintendent of Schools in Ecorse, Michigan and our 140 affiliates, we appreciate this opportunity to make further comments beyond our September 5th letter which include specific recommendations. Our organization of 4000 is comprised of a membership range of actors in the field education. Its structure is that of Commissions and Affiliates representing teachers, school board members, retired educators, Superintendents of Schools, Central office staffs, Administrators, Principals, Higher Education Faculty and Researchers. This provides rich opportunities for coordinated conversations and actions that speak directly to the needs of children of African descent. Before we continue with the remainder of our 5minutes...The National Association of Black School Educators (NABSE) commends you on conducting public business in the public. As the Congress moves forward on its reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, your precedent-setting action of providing America's citizenry with your thinking in a draft discussion document is powerful. We urge you to continue this transparency protocol throughout the process of reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965. We would like to direct our commentary today to three issues:

1. Title I funding; the anchor of the bill.
2. An accountability construct that allows for multiple sources of evidence, multiple indicators, and the potential for measurement of student achievement, performance and PROGRESS along a continuum.

3. The inclusion within the new bill of a pilot program of dual language specifically targeted to the poorer Title I schools.

Title I Funding and the Targeting of Resources

Is the Alliance concerned about Congress' commitment (many sessions ago) to fund special education at a 40% percent level. Of Course. Is the National alliance concerned about the school infrastructure and deteriorating school buildings? Of course. Is it concerned about teacher quality and class size? Of course. Is it concerned about parents and their role in this education equation? Is it concerned about N size, ELLs, SES ? Of course. Is the NABSE concerned about vouchers, block grants, and the fact that 30 percent of the new public charter schools in America are run by FOR PROFIT organizations? Of course. Is NASBE concerned about high school reform and about school improvement? Of course. However, the National Alliance of Black School Educators' burning and passionate concern is FULL FUNDING for Title I. Currently, Title I is only two percent (2%) of National k-12 spending.

It has been on 42 years since the Congress and the Johnson Administration moved to establish Head Start and Title I to help eliminate the large educational gaps that had long persisted among students from different socioeconomic levels in our society. The notion was bold and courageous because, at that time, no country in the world was in possession of proven strategies for quickly closing such gaps. Indeed, here in the United States, educators and policymakers did not yet have good national data on the extent to which academic achievement differed among groups. However, the data that were available suggested that children from less advantaged homes and communities and children without a rich construct of opportunity were experiencing much less academic success than they should or could. Congress and the President had the wisdom to make substantial new investments in the education of less advantaged children.

At the core of the NABSE's recommendations for the reauthorization and full funding of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) is the notion that parity and equity in student achievement, and excellence in educational attainment for all citizens is dependent on the equitable and adequate targeting of federal dollars based on need and on a substantial investment in other education-relevant recourses¹ that positively affect the educational experience of students. The popular press and much of the country's polity equate poor Black and Latino students only with urban communities. The reality is that a significant number of children of African descent attend schools in very poor rural communities. Of the current 300 African American Superintendents in the country, two-thirds head either poor rural or newly re-segregated school districts in suburban rings. Though we believe our recommendations will benefit every student in America, we speak specifically to the needs of poor students of African descent who reside in rural and inner-city America or in the recently re-segregated suburban

The stated purpose of the 1965 Title I Act includes the following:

In recognition of the special educational needs of low-income families and the impact that concentrations of low-income families have on the ability of local education agencies to support adequate educational programs, the Congress hereby declares it to be the policy of the United States to provide financial assistance to local educational agencies serving areas

with concentrations of children from low-income families to expand and improve their educational programs by various means (including preschool programs) which contribute particularly to meeting the special educational needs of educationally deprived children.

In short, Title I was designed to compensate for the disadvantages in children's economic status and deficiencies in learning associated with home, school, or community experience. Ladies and gentlemen, these disadvantages still exist today - 40 years later. We included in our commentary on September 5th a recommendation for a very specific formula change. We will not repeat it here but are including it in the written text.

We ask the Honorable Congressmen to explore and address funding in that section of Title I that addresses targeted grants and the finance incentive grants. Currently, these grants are determined by concentration of poverty. This, of course, is the right focus. However, we are as concerned as our colleagues in AASA about the ways in which concentration of poverty is defined. Currently, concentration of poverty is based on the number of poor students in a district or the percentage of poverty, whichever is higher. Thus, districts with lower levels of poverty often receive more Title I funding per student than smaller districts with much higher percentages of poverty. (There are 300-plus Black superintendents in this country. Of those 87% are leading poor districts of less than 50,000. The best example of small districts affected in this manner can be found in the Mississippi Delta.)

We strongly believe that the weighting based on the number of poor students should be eliminated from this definition. Instead, we believe that a school district's allocation should be based on *their* percentage of poverty. That way, all districts at the same percentage of poverty will receive the same amount per student.

We've been here before. During the sixties and early seventies, poor and minority communities (from the Delta in Mississippi, to the rural mountains of Vermont and New Hampshire, to the Appalachian communities in West Virginia, to the Urban Epic Centers of Chicago, New York City, Los Angeles, Houston and Birmingham) citizens were engaged in making their communities once divided and isolated whole, through various community actions and model city and school programs visible progress was being made and the horrible vestiges of segregation, isolation, and poverty were being chipped away.

Just as that began to work and was beginning to show some promise, progress was halted by voices that said that the "great society programs" were a waste and failure. A campaign was forged to carry out an agenda that really in fact blamed the victims, namely poor, disenfranchised families and communities.

Thus the discussion is not about whether Title I is a success or failure. That is another argument, another story and another construct where NABSE can respond quite compellingly that Title I has been a strong force in impacting the lives of the less advantaged socially, emotionally and academically. As Jack Jennings so eloquently stated in past articles in both *The Kappan* and *Education Week*, that while eliminating the achievement gap is a worthy goal – and we agree that it is – that this is not the stated purpose of Title I, nor the standard for marking its success. On another note, much has been made of the notion that "we've spent billions over 40 years."

For the school year 07-08 total appropriation for Title I-A granted for school districts was 12.8 billion an increase of less than 1 percent or 124 million over the previous years funding. Does money then matter for the poor? Does parity cost? You bet.

We believe that at a time when a significant number of citizens have enjoyed economic opportunity advantages, and at a time when the data demonstrate that a large number of our school children and their families remain far below the poverty line, that this is the time to address the recent findings which show that 20 percent of the schools with poverty levels of 50 to 74 percent have little or no Title I funds! This is the time to fully fund Title I.

Can't fully fund it in this cycle? Then we are requesting that all Title I funds be concentrated and targeted to the poorest children in the poorest schools in the poorest districts rather than diluting the funding as is the current practice with almost every district in the nation receiving some amount of Title I allocation.

A Comprehensive Model of Accountability (Multiple indicators and Multiple measures)

We are a member organization of the forum on Educational Accountability (FEA). We concur with premise put fourth by FEA on multiple indicators and multiple assessments. We believe that providing flexibility to state and local education agencies in developing assessments that can be validated and reliable as part of their state plan is simply the right thing to do. After all, the Constitution ultimately holds states responsible for the education of their citizens.

We will not repeat our recommendations here, which are available on www.edaccountabilty.org. However, it is important to adequately fund the states ability to determine how well their students are doing. It is as important to help states find out how "smart" are their students, as it is for Congress to continue funding smart bombs.

Multiple indicators of school performance in a strong accountability construct allow districts and states to move beyond equalizing test scores and to examine other indicators so that EDUCATIONAL EQUITY is approached. In a 21st Century, World Class, Educational System it is appropriate to examine structures and processes from other strong researched –based fields, for example:

- a) Multiple measures is the hallmark of good social-science research. Earl Babbie, in his book, The Practice of Social Research, notes, "...there is no single indicator that will give you the measure of the variable you really want" (p. 141). In this sense, no single indicator can adequately measure a student's academic performance or ability, but rather a multitude of indicators and measures should be employed too assure equity and excellence.
- b) Our nation's economic and employment system (Dow Jones, GNP) uses multiple measures to forecast, project and determine growth. Why is this not good enough for our Nation's Public Schools?

Most of America's College Admissions (Public and Private) are based on multiple measures. Why is this not good enough for our children, particularly the least advantaged?

Multiple forms of assessment and multiple indicators together will provide more opportunities and meaningful success, as well as help ensure that all children receive a comprehensive schooling aimed at educating the whole child.

The current adequate rate of progress requirements expect that those who start the race behind and who often have fewer resources (in effect, racers with weights attached) will reach the same level as those with great advantages. A system that expects reasonable, strong progress for all is what we need.

Pilot Dual Language Program

It is in the national interest to grow a cadre of citizens who are able to speak more than one language and who are versed in other cultures. That phenomenon is best served through language. We are requesting that there be a section included in the bill to fund at the elementary level a demonstration dual language program for a select number of the poorest Title I schools in each of the ten USDOE regions. It is imperative that poor students of African descent not be "left behind" in the move toward foreign language acquisition there is much research about the benefits of learning a second language. Some of that research indicates that learning a second language promotes cognitive flexibility and enhances academic achievement. Finally, dual language programs breaks down so many barriers because they allow students to embrace the world.

We recognize that the discussion draft only sends the train out of the yard and onto the tracks. We would like to see the train pull out of the station during this Congressional session.

We would be pleased to work with the committee and its staff at every stop along the way.

Sincerely,

Dr. Emma Epps
President

Dr. La Ruth H. Gray
Government Relations and Legislative Liaison to Board

APPENDIX 1

Miller, L. Scott, *An American Imperative: Accelerating Minority Educational Advancement*. Yale University Press. 1995

The National Alliance of Black School Educators adhere to the theoretical framework on education-relevance resources as explained by L. Scott Miller:

Education-relevant resources encompass the idea that the amount of educational resource varies from school to school across the country, and the amount of resources available from students' families varies even more. So, even a school with excellent resources may not be able to fully help some students. Education-relevant resources include:

- *Human capital* (the acquired knowledge, skills, and experience that a person has accumulated in his/her lifetime that can be a benefit to others through education);
- *Social capital* (the relationship and personal bonds that people share in addition to the networks, groups and communities that grow out of these relationships);
- *Health capital* (amount of access that a student has to quality health treatment, and the health conditions in which the student lives);
- *Financial capital* (the income and savings of the family of the student); and
- *Political capital* (how much society is committed to educating the students)

APPENDIX 2

References

Grissner, D.W., *Does Money Matter for Minority and Disadvantaged Students: Assessing the Empirical Evidence*. National Center for Research, Development in School Finance, Office of Educational Research and Improvement. (1997)

Jennings, John F., *Title I: Its Legislative History and Its Promise*. Phi Delta Kappan (2000)

Miller, L. Scott, An American Imperative: *Accelerating Minority Educational Advancement*. Yale University Press. 1995