

WHAT DOES ESEA FLEXIBILITY MEAN FOR YOU?

ESEA flexibility provides a voluntary opportunity for states to be released from certain requirements of NCLB. In exchange, states will lead efforts to raise standards so they focus on college and careers, help teachers and principals focus on teaching and learning, and improve all schools, especially the lowest-performing schools and schools with the largest achievement gaps. Further, schools now labeled as “in need of improvement” under NCLB will be more fairly judged through a focus on student and school progress.

The benefits of ESEA flexibility include:

FOR PARENTS: Accurate and descriptive information about their children’s progress and honest accountability that recognizes and rewards success and – where schools fall short – targeted and focused strategies for the students most at risk.

FOR STUDENTS: A system that measures student growth and critical thinking to inspire better teaching and greater student engagement across a well-rounded curriculum.

FOR TEACHERS: A collaborative learning culture where teachers can target instruction towards the needs of students and offer a well-rounded curriculum. Fair and responsible evaluations that are based on multiple measures including peer review, principal observation, and classroom work.

FOR PRINCIPALS: Greater flexibility to tailor solutions to the unique educational challenges of their students and recognition for progress and performance.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

BECOME FAMILIAR with your school’s current performance status under NCLB, and how that might change under ESEA flexibility.

FIND OUT how your state will seek input and collaboration at the local level on its plan, and familiarize yourself with your state’s current accountability system.

ATTEND a local school board meeting or a local PTA meeting to discuss plans for the future and how you can get involved.

WORK with your school and district on implementing effective learning plans to serve struggling students and help them get back on track.



BRINGING
FLEXIBILITY & FOCUS
TO EDUCATION LAW:
LOOKING BACK AND MOVING FORWARD



ESEA: A LOOK BACK

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) provided our country's first broad assurance of equal access to public education for all children. ESEA has been reauthorized—revised and renewed by Congress—seven times, most recently at the end of 2001 by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). ESEA reauthorization usually occurs every five years; however, NCLB has governed elementary and secondary education for nearly a decade, and Congress has yet to act to fix some of the law's flaws.

NCLB maintained the original overarching goal of ESEA—providing a level playing field for schools serving disadvantaged students. It challenged states to set education standards and increase school accountability. It also exposed achievement gaps between poor and minority students, students with disabilities, English learners, and their peers. However, the unintended results of NCLB's strictest requirements are now hindering further school reforms and innovations.

STATES ARE ALREADY RAISING THE BAR

Over the past few years, states and districts have initiated groundbreaking reforms and innovations to accelerate the achievement of their students. Across the country, states are adopting college- and career-ready standards, developing new assessments aligned to those standards, and creating next-generation accountability and support systems. Many states are also moving forward with reforms in such areas as teacher and principal evaluation and support, turning around low-performing schools, and expanding access to high-quality schools.

Many of these innovations and reforms, however, were not anticipated when NCLB was enacted nearly a decade ago. NCLB for the first time helped shine a bright light on low-performing schools and achievement gaps, yet it inadvertently encouraged some states to set low standards, failed to recognize or reward growth in student learning, and did little to elevate the teaching

profession or recognize effective teachers. States, districts, and schools have been pleading in various ways for relief from NCLB. They have asked repeatedly for changes that would more clearly show where schools need drastic help, and where they need support in only one or a few areas, while holding tightly to the commitment of school and student accountability.

While waiting on Congress to reauthorize ESEA, the U.S. Department of Education, under the leadership of Secretary Arne Duncan, is responding to state and local requests for flexibility from certain parts of the current law. This flexibility will enable states and school districts to move forward with significant reforms that are designed to increase the quality of instruction and improve academic achievement of all students. States that choose not to request flexibility under ESEA, or that don't have a solid plan for improvement, will still be bound by current law.

