OBAMA-BIDEN TRANSITION PROJECT

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Forum on
Educational
Accountability
February 2007

REDEFINING ACCOUNTABILITY:

Improving Student Learning by Building Capacity

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The Forum on Educational Accountability (FEA) is a working group of some of the national education, civil rights, religious, disability and civic organizations that have endorsed the Joint Organizational Statement on No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. The FEA has prepared the following report to promote the ideas in the Joint Statement, to provide concrete policy recommendations for implementing the principles of the Joint Statement, and to contribute to discussions about the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The Joint Statement itself has been signed by more than 100 national organizations.

This publication can be obtained online at www.edaccountability.org.

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Redefining Accountability:
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Introduction and Executive Summary

INTRODUCTION

The federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), the most recent version of the longstanding Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), offers a powerful goal for the nation: "to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging State academic achievement standards."

NCLB contains important, positive components: its goals of strong academic achievement for all children and closing the achievement gap, periodic assessment of student learning, and public reporting of achievement results (including reporting by subgroups). But its punitive approach must be changed. As stated in the Joint Organizational Statement on NCLB: *"Overall, the law's emphasis needs to shift from applying sanctions for failing to raise test scores to holding states and localities accountable for making the systemic changes that improve student achievement."*

This would enable schools, districts and states to focus on implementing the key changes needed throughout the educational system to improve teaching and learning rather than focusing, as now, on avoiding sanctions.

Broad consensus on the changes that are needed during reauthorization is starting to emerge. In October 2004, 27 organizations signed on to the Joint Statement; today that number has grown to more than 100 national education, civil rights, disability, religious and civic organizations that have agreed on the Statement's fundamental principles for restructuring the federal role in K-12 education. Building the capacity of schools to effectively educate all children and the capacity of families to support their children's academic learning should be the primary focus of a reauthorized ESEA. The new law should hold schools, districts and states accountable for implementing the essential systemic changes rather than continuing to hold them accountable for failing to reach arbitrary Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) testing targets.

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Over the last two years, many of the organizations that signed on to the Joint Statement have been crafting more detailed recommendations that build on the general principles, and they have now forged agreement on specific policies to be incorporated into the ESEA reauthorization. These policies fall into three distinct areas: professional development, family involvement, and accountability.

Note: The recommended policies and the changes they represent often are referred to collectively in this report as "the systemic changes." All of the recommendations are described in detail in the body of the report, but the most central ones are summarized in this Executive Summary.

Before getting to specifics, it is important to note four threshold concepts that underlie our recommendations for restructuring federal education law:

(1) Critical changes are needed in teacher and administrator preparation, and the Forum on Educational Accountability has identified those changes and submitted them to Congress. However, since educator preparation is governed by the Higher Education Act and this report is limited to the ESEA, those proposals are not discussed here.

(2) All students graduating from high school should be prepared to be active participants in our democracy, lifelong learners, and successful whether they are moving into the workforce or continuing in their education. To meet these goals, schools must provide all students with a coherent and intellectually challenging curriculum that includes critical thinking, problem-solving and high-level communication skills, and that ensures deep understanding of content.

(3) The systemic changes that we are proposing will require changes in how Title I funds are allocated and how districts use their own time and money, but the issue of resources goes farther than that. For states and districts to be able to implement the systemic changes, Congress must significantly raise NCLB's authorization levels and fully fund the law, without reducing expenditures for other education programs.

(4) To more fairly address the special educational needs of all low-income children, Title I funding needs to be provided for 100 percent of eligible children.

Finally, please note that this report complements another report the Forum on Educational Accountability is releasing on assessment this spring.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

I. Professional Development

To improve the capacity of teachers, administrators and parents to support student learning, the following seven recommendations must be implemented in Title I-funded schools nationwide:

1. Design and conduct district- and/or school-wide professional development that addresses the student learning needs identified by school staffs, so that all teachers will have the subject matter knowledge and pedagogical skills to effectively teach a challenging curriculum to diverse learners and foster a supportive learning climate.

2. Provide time for staff discussion and collaboration during the school day. Staff will be able to better address student needs if they have time for regular discussion about professional, instructional, curricular, and assessment-related issues.

3. Provide intensive induction and mentoring support for beginning teachers and provide mentoring for experienced teachers as well, to meet their individual professional development needs and promote their success.

4. Create and fill positions as mentor teachers/coaches, professional development specialists, curriculum developers, subject matter coordinators, literacy coaches, and other positions requiring specialized skill sets.

5. Provide intensive training for school staff on engaging and supporting families and communities so all can contribute to their children's behavioral development and academic achievement. Involve parents in designing and providing this training.

6. Provide training in instructional leadership skills for school administrators, teachers, and pupil services personnel so they can create supportive learning communities that will improve instruction, produce effective professional development activities, and engage families in their children's education.

7. Relieve districts of the requirement to spend any Title I funds on transfers or tutoring. Instead, require districts to spend at least 20 percent of their Title I funds on implementing the six professional development recommendations above, and require states to match that 20 percent amount for the same purpose.

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II. Family Involvement

Strengthening parent and community involvement in school improvement and the ability of parents to help their children succeed in schools is a second essential component of building capacity. To build upon, strengthen, and expand ESEA's current family involvement and support provisions, the following seven recommendations must be implemented:

1. Require schools and districts to engage parents and families in meaningful ways in school policymaking and reform, and promote attendance at other school-related activities.
2. Require every Title I-funded "high needs school" to provide literacy, family skills and other programs to families that will empower them to assist children's learning at home.
3. Require Title I "high needs schools" to provide adult mentors to assist low performing students if family members are not available.
4. Require public reports of school progress in implementing parent involvement and support policies.
5. Require the states and federal government to provide technical assistance to schools and districts in implementing ESEA's parent involvement and support policies.
6. Allocate 5 percent of Title I funding for schools and districts to implement fully the parent involvement and support provisions.
7. Provide for effective federal enforcement of ESEA parent involvement and support requirements at the state and local levels.

III. Accountability

To change NCLB's emphasis from a punitive model to one that supports systemic change that will lead to school improvement, Congress must:

1. Replace the current NCLB system of AYP and escalating sanctions for schools, districts, and states that receive Title I money with required implementation of the specific systemic changes identified in this report.
2. Require Title I-funded schools and districts to plan for systemic change by involving all stakeholders in the process of gathering information, conducting evaluations, and preparing brief implementation plans.
3. Require districts to assist all schools having particular difficulty implementing the systemic changes. Further, require districts to intervene in any school that fails to establish within a reasonable time frame (e.g., three to five years) a positive trend in learning outcomes. Trends will be identified using multiple assessment measures and will be based on rates of improvement attained by a substantial portion of current Title I schools.

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4. Require annual public reports at the district, state, and federal levels of all major actions taken to implement the systemic changes. Reports should note both obstacles encountered as well as steps taken to overcome them. In addition, require public reporting of disaggregated student assessment results that come from multiple sources of evidence.
5. Require provision of meaningful technical assistance and sufficient resources to implement the systemic changes.
6. Require states to be responsible for improving any Title I-funded schools that after five years fail to establish a positive trend in learning outcomes. State specialists or other means may be used.
7. Provide federal evaluations and monitoring to ensure proper state and local use of Title I and other ESEA funds.

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I. Professional Development

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA, currently the No Child Left Behind Act or NCLB) must be restructured so that its emphasis is no longer punitive but instead is on leading states and localities to take the steps necessary to dramatically improve student achievement. A principal means to accomplish this is to greatly improve and expand professional development opportunities for school staff. Professional development is central to the broader effort to create school environments that foster effective school communities, cultural sensitivity, and continuous improvement efforts for all schools, especially those identified as low performing. Congress, through the reauthorization of the ESEA, must require, as a condition for receiving funding, that Title I–funded schools nationwide implement the following six principles to improve the capacity of teachers, administrators, other school personnel, and parents to support student learning.

PRINCIPLES FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

1. Design and conduct district- and/or school-wide professional development that addresses the student learning needs identified by school staffs, so that all teachers will have the subject matter knowledge and pedagogical skills to effectively teach a challenging curriculum to diverse learners and foster a supportive learning climate.

2. Provide time for staff discussion and collaboration during the school day. Staff will be able to better address student needs if they have time for regular discussion about professional, instructional, curricular, and assessment-related issues.

3. Provide intensive induction and mentoring support for beginning teachers and provide mentoring for experienced teachers as well, to meet their individual professional development needs and promote their success.

4. Create and fill positions as mentor teachers/coaches, professional development specialists, curriculum developers, subject matter coordinators, literacy coaches, and other positions requiring specialized skill sets.

5. Provide intensive training for school staff on engaging and supporting families and communities so all can contribute to their children's behavioral development and academic achievement. Involve parents in designing and providing this training.

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6. Provide training in instructional leadership skills for school administrators, teachers, and pupil services personnel so they can create supportive learning communities that will improve instruction, produce effective professional development activities, and engage families in their children's education.

In addition to establishing priorities for the focus of professional development initiatives within schools and school districts, it is important that we also establish the proper framework for effective and responsive implementation of such initiatives. Therefore, the federal government and states must:

a. Substantially increase the level of funding currently allocated to support professional development programs.

b. Significantly involve teachers, administrators and other key stakeholders in the selection (or design), implementation, and evaluation of the professional development initiatives to ensure that the needs of the school or school district are being addressed.

c. Ensure that the professional development initiatives are addressing the learning needs of students, particularly those students who have been identified as low-performing.

d. Ensure that professional development initiatives strengthen school and/or school district capacity to work effectively with families and communities to improve student learning.

For Title I to be truly effective and supportive of the professional development component, it must be fully funded, as called for in the Joint Organizational Statement on No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act (see Appendix). Because effective professional development in Title I schools is so important, we recommend that 20 percent of Title I money be allocated for this purpose as detailed in Section A.5., below, and that the states be required to match that amount.

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PROPOSED FEDERAL, STATE AND DISTRICT ROLES IN IMPLEMENTING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

To enable Title I schools to implement the six professional development principles, all levels of government, especially state departments of education, must greatly strengthen their capacities to assist those schools. To accomplish that, the roles of the U.S. Department of Education and state and local authorities should be restructured as follows.

A. Federal Role

1. Statutory and regulatory language related to the six professional development principles will apply only to those schools that receive Title I funding, unless specified otherwise below.

2. All Title I-funded schools must implement, at a minimum, professional development principles 1 and 2.

3. Professional development funds will go primarily to the districts. Districts will allocate the funds to Title I-eligible schools in the district, so that schools—including high schools—with the highest poverty and lowest achievement (hereafter, referred to as "high needs schools") receive priority.

4. The federal government will no longer require districts to spend Title I funds on supplemental education services or on providing transfers to another school. Rather, providing such services will be an allowable use of Title I funds.

5. No less than 20 percent of ESEA Title I funds flowing to districts will be used to carry out these six principles for professional development. ESEA funding sources for this 20 percent may include:

   - new funds directed to professional development;
   - funds currently dedicated to ensuring qualified teachers, since the deadline for compliance with that provision will occur prior to reauthorization;
   - current ESEA professional development funds, including funds required to be used for professional development by "high-needs schools";
   - funds presently mandated for transportation and/or supplemental services; and
   - a portion of the funds that are sent to states to assist schools "in need of improvement."

6. The federal government shall allocate a portion of the 20 percent of Title I funds set aside for professional development to states to strengthen their capacity to provide technical assistance to enable districts to carry out the six professional development principles.

7. The federal government will monitor, evaluate, and report annually to the Congress and the public on states' provision of assistance to districts for professional development. Monitoring and

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evaluation will focus on ensuring that the assistance goes first to districts with the largest share of Title I-eligible students, that the states implement professional development principles 1-6, and that the state assistance is effective.

8. The federal government shall provide $5-10 million of additional funding in the educational research budget for ongoing independent research to assist states and districts to overcome obstacles to successful implementation of the six principles of professional development.

B. State Role

1. Notwithstanding ESEA Section 9527(a), to receive ESEA funding states shall match at least the federal allocation for professional development—the 20 percent portion of Title I to be used for that purpose—so that the combined available amount will equal at least 40 percent of the state's Title I allotment. States will allocate these funds to districts according to the general Title I funding formula.

2. States shall assure the federal government that they will fully implement, monitor, and evaluate district implementation of the professional development requirements.

3. State support for professional development may be provided through a variety of means such as:

   - use of state education department staff;
   - establishing regional centers within states;
   - reliance on the federally funded Regional Labs and Research Centers;
   - facilitating voluntary collaboration among districts or with higher education institutions or professional organizations;
   - large-district efforts;
   - hiring turnaround specialists; and
   - contracting out.

4. States shall aggregate and summarize the information that they receive from the districts and report to the U.S. Department of Education on state and district implementation of the professional development requirements. States may establish appropriate reporting requirements for school districts in preparing data for the U.S. Department of Education and the public. The information shall address the specific initiatives being undertaken to implement the professional development requirements and the impact of such initiatives on student achievement. To the extent feasible, any additional requirements should be incorporated into existing reporting requirements.

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C. School District/Local Funding Authorities Role

1. The school district shall make effective and efficient use of the federal and state allocations for the purpose of implementing the six principles for professional development.

2. The school district shall describe how it will implement the professional development principles and prioritize and allocate the funds to support professional development opportunities for instructional staff and administrators, giving priority to staff assigned to "high needs schools," and it shall implement that plan.

3. The school district shall establish and expand effective partnerships and collaborative relationships with colleges, universities, or state-supported centers to ensure that instructional staff and administrators have access to research-based professional development opportunities.

4. The school district shall publicly report each year on its progress in implementing programs to carry out the professional development requirements, including obstacles encountered and the steps taken to overcome them, and on the impact of such programs on student achievement. To the extent feasible, any additional reporting requirements should be incorporated into existing state reporting requirements.

D. Local Schools Role

1. Local schools receiving Title I funds shall implement programs to meet the requirements of Principles for Professional Development 1 and 2. Such schools already implementing the requirements of the first two principles shall work to implement the requirements set forth in Principles 3 through 6.

2. Local "high needs schools" receiving Title I funds for professional development under these provisions shall, in addition to addressing Principles 1 and 2, implement Principles 3 through 6.

3. Local schools subject to Section D.1. or D.2. shall provide information to districts annually about their implementation of the professional development requirements, including practices, needs, obstacles encountered and steps taken to overcome them, and successes. School reports will discuss the impact of their program implementation on student achievement.

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II. Family Involvement

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

In addition to making professional development significantly more effective (See Section I), a second key means for dramatically improving student achievement is to enhance family support for student learning at home and at school. More than 35 years of research has proven the positive connection between parent involvement and student success. Schools with well-structured, high quality parent and family involvement programs see better student grades, higher test scores, and higher graduation rates, as well as a decrease in drug and alcohol use and fewer instances of violent behavior. In addition, these family involvement programs are linked to higher teacher and administrator morale and increased job satisfaction.

Parent involvement is a cornerstone of ESEA. In fact, parents are mentioned over 650 times in the law. The law requires schools and districts to develop programs that build parent involvement and assist parents to partner more easily and readily with the school to support their children's academic progress (ESEA, Title I, Section 1118). These programs include written parent involvement policies, school-parent compacts, and opportunities for parents to participate at the school, give input into school programs, and gain knowledge and skills to support their children's education. The law also encourages schools and districts to increase adult literacy efforts and to maximize family support resources by partnering with community agencies.

Current provisions have not been implemented effectively. The shortage of parent involvement programs and activities is disappointing. School professionals want more parent involvement but have few tools to accomplish this. Most parents would like to be more involved, but they are largely unaware of their rights and opportunities under the law. In addition, the parent involvement provisions of ESEA, unlike many other provisions, lack the force to compel implementation by states, districts, and schools.

Moreover, adult literacy and parenting/family skills programs for parents of students in "high needs schools" are sorely lacking. These programs would equip parents with the skills to more effectively support their children's learning at home. If parents are unable to provide such support, schools would make available adult mentoring or other programs to provide stability, assistance, and positive role models for academic learning.

To implement effective programs of parent involvement, adult literacy, parenting/family skills, and adult mentoring, the law must dramatically increase the funding allocated for parent involvement from 1 percent to 5 percent of Title I funds.

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The Forum on Educational Accountability makes the following core recommendations to strengthen and expand ESEA's current family involvement provisions:

1. Require schools and districts to engage parents and families in meaningful ways in school policymaking and reform, and promote attendance at other school-related activities.
2. Require every Title I-funded "high needs school" to provide literacy, family skills and other programs to families that will empower them to assist children's learning at home.
3. Require Title I "high needs schools" to provide adult mentors to assist low-performing students if family members are not available.
4. Require public reports of school progress in implementing parent involvement and support policies.
5. Require the states and federal government to provide technical assistance to schools and districts in implementing ESEA's parent involvement and support policies.
6. Allocate 5 percent of Title I funding for schools and districts to implement fully the parent involvement and support provisions.
7. Provide for effective federal enforcement of ESEA parent involvement and support requirements at the state and local levels.

SPECIFIC POLICIES

For ESEA's parent involvement policies to be effective in supporting student learning, the following provisions must be adopted in the ESEA reauthorization:

A. Broader Parental Attendance and Involvement

1. Schools' and districts' written parent involvement policy shall:
    - Be developed with the assistance of parents with an equal role and involvement to school personnel in the planning process;
    - Describe how the school will provide opportunities for meaningful parent involvement in the decisions that affect children and families, including school policies, practices, reform issues, and goals;
    - Describe how the policy connects to the school's educational goals; and
    - Annually be assessed and, if appropriate, revised by the school and submitted to the district for approval, with resubmission to the state for purposes of research, analysis, and reporting.

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2. Congress shall provide incentives for states, districts, and schools to include greater numbers of parents in ongoing, meaningful dialogue about improving schools and increasing parent involvement.

3. Schools and districts shall use multiple communications tools, such as web sites, e-mail, newsletters, telephone calls, home visits, cable TV shows, district publications, and other public relations tools to reach out to parents and inform them about their rights and responsibilities under ESEA. All information provided to parents through these outreach efforts and in any other formats must be easy to understand and should, to the maximum extent feasible, be provided in all the languages used by parents of students served by the school or district.

4. States, districts and schools shall provide opportunities to increase internet access and training for parents.

B. Strengthening the Capacity of Parents and Families to Support Academic Learning

1. All Title I-funded "high needs schools" shall offer adult literacy and family skills programs to family members to help them motivate and support their children with schoolwork and to encourage them to meet high academic standards.

2. All Title I-funded "high needs schools" shall offer adult mentoring or other programs that provide individualized support and motivation for children whose parents are unable to provide stability, structure, and positive role models for pursuing academic achievement.

3. In addition to building their own capacity, schools, districts, and states shall provide opportunities for independent, grassroots, or community-based organizations to participate in parental involvement programs at the school and district level through a designated application process for service providers.

C. Public Reporting of Schools' Implementation of Parent Involvement Policies and Other Information

1. All schools receiving Title I funds shall submit to their districts annual information on their implementation of parent involvement policies, plans, and practices, including obstacles encountered and steps taken to overcome them, successes, and the impact of carrying out such policies. Information may include parent survey results and the number of parents attending school improvement meetings and workshops, volunteering, observing in classrooms, and participating in adult literacy and family skills classes.

2. Each district receiving Title I funds shall aggregate and summarize the school information (See Section II.C.1.) and report it annually to the state. These reports shall include evaluation of the extent to which each school has complied with the parent involvement requirements.

3. Each state receiving Title I funds shall aggregate and summarize the information required by Section II.C.2. from the various districts and report it annually to the U.S. Department of Education. Each state shall also include copies of the full report submitted by each district. These reports shall include

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evaluation of the extent to which each district has complied with the parent involvement requirements.

4. The U.S. Department of Education shall promulgate regulations within 180 days of passage of this Act.

5. The U.S. Department of Education shall aggregate, summarize, analyze, and evaluate the state information, including whether the states are adequately supporting schools and districts in implementing the parent involvement provisions of ESEA. The Department shall report the results to Congress annually.

6. All reports required by Sections II.C.1, 2, 3, and 5 shall be made publicly available at the same time that they are submitted to the designated recipient and, wherever possible, in electronic form on a publicly accessible web site.

D. Federal and State Technical Assistance on Parental Involvement

1. Federal Technical Assistance

   The U.S. Department of Education will establish and operate a Parent Involvement Assistance office to provide leadership and technical assistance, including best practices, to states on issues related to parent involvement, especially focusing on how to effectively implement the parent involvement provisions of ESEA. The Department will monitor the implementation of those provisions at the state level.

2. State Technical Assistance

   Every state receiving Title I funds will establish and operate a Parent Involvement Assistance office to provide leadership and technical assistance, including best practices, to districts, schools, parents, and other interested parties on issues related to parent involvement, especially focusing on how to effectively implement the parent involvement provisions. States will monitor the implementation of those provisions at the district and school levels. States shall utilize the data collected in Section II.C. to target technical assistance efforts to schools and districts most in need of assistance in implementing the provisions. Each state also shall provide a means for concerned citizens to inform the state office of Parent Involvement Assistance of any disagreements with a district's report.

3. The U.S. Department of Education shall:

   a. Develop a document that outlines and details all provisions and requirements of ESEA which pertain to parent involvement;

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b. Develop a parent involvement handbook for use by administrators, teachers, and parents, which shall include practical tools, ideas, and resources for effective implementation of the parent involvement provisions of ESEA;

c. Widely disseminate both the summary of legal requirements and the handbook described above to all public, private, and religious K-12 schools in the country, including those that do not receive Title I funding, and to community-based, parent, and faith-based organizations;

d. Widely disseminate the findings from Department-funded research on effective parent involvement; and

e. Publish all information related to parent involvement in a style that is easy to understand.

4. The U.S. Department of Education shall make these publications available on its web site.

E. Enforcement

1. The U.S. Department of Education shall issue regulations for addressing non-compliance by states with the provisions of this section.

2. If a school or district is found to be out of compliance with the provisions of this section for two consecutive years, the state Parent Involvement Assistance office shall, in consultation with all the relevant parties, including parents in the affected school or district, determine the steps necessary to effect compliance. If the state determines that this can be done through technical assistance, the state shall be responsible for providing appropriate technical assistance to the school/district. If the state determines that technical assistance would not be sufficient to remedy the noncompliance, the state shall be responsible for the operation of the parent involvement program.

F. Funding

1. No less than 5 percent of ESEA Title I funds flowing to each district shall be used to carry out the Act's parental involvement requirements. Each district shall use no less than two-fifths of that amount to implement the programs in Section II. A. above; no less than two-fifths to implement the programs in Section II.B.1. and 2. above; and up to the remaining one-fifth to carry out Sections II. C., D., and E. above.

2. Funding provided for Parent Information and Resource Centers (Title V, Part D, Subpart 16), currently the only source of federal funding that is intended solely to help schools and communities meet the requirements of parent involvement under the ESEA, shall be increased from about $40 million to $150 million.

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III. Accountability

INTRODUCTION

NCLB, the most recent version of ESEA, offers a powerful goal for the nation: "to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging State academic achievement standards."

While the Forum on Educational Accountability strongly supports the goal of raising all children to academic proficiency, NCLB's current accountability system for attaining that goal is misdirected. Its accountability system consists essentially of "punishment for failure": Title I-funded schools that fail to reach arbitrary AYP testing targets are subjected to an escalating series of sanctions that are not based on any scientifically-based research evidence.

A sanctions-based approach assumes schools already have the capacity to improve and that the specified sanctions scheme would significantly improve education. However, neither is true. Title I schools and districts generally do not now have the resources and capacity to make the necessary improvements, and NCLB's piecemeal, mechanistic, escalating sanctions have not and will not produce significantly improved student learning.

NCLB's accountability system for schools and districts needs to be redirected. Instead of labeling and punishing Title I-funded schools and districts for failing to meet AYP requirements, all Title I-funded schools and districts should be provided the tools and resources needed to implement the systemic changes proposed in this report. They would then be held responsible for implementing the systemic changes that improve academic performance, as well as for generating significant and sustained growth in student learning.

These changes principally involve extensive improvements in professional development, leadership, and family involvement, which have been described in previous sections of this report. If the recommended improvements are made in inputs and processes, then the outputs (student learning) will improve. Shifting the focus of NCLB from an almost exclusive reliance on test scores to the issue of providing critical educational improvements is fundamental to this proposed accountability system.

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This report relies on certain important and generally applicable accountability tools that encourage and support public schools, districts, and states to implement these systemic changes and thereby produce the desired outcome: sustained student learning gains. Part A of this section describes these accountability mechanisms. Part B explains what specific processes states and localities should go through to implement the systemic changes and to intervene where schools or districts are confronting serious obstacles.

This is a three-stage process:

1. Title I-funded schools and districts must gather information, conduct evaluations, prepare implementation plans in true collaboration with all stakeholders, and begin to implement the required systemic changes, using technical assistance as needed.

2. For those schools that are having particular difficulty implementing the changes, districts must intervene to the extent necessary to enable them to carry out the changes; in this stage, all other Title I-funded schools are to complete implementing the required changes, with technical assistance as needed.

3. For schools or districts that, notwithstanding prior interventions, have been unable to implement the changes, or having done so fail to develop a positive learning trend five years after the start of implementation of their school plans, the state must take ultimate responsibility to intervene. Districts are expected at all times to take whatever steps are necessary to develop the common vision, high expectations, leadership, collaboration, strong and coherent curriculum, and other conditions needed for high-performing public schools, whether or not these steps are explicitly mandated by the required systemic changes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Broadening the Concept of 'Accountability'

ESEA should rely on the following general accountability mechanisms to induce localities and states to implement the required systemic changes in a timely manner. It is important to understand these mechanisms because they create a powerful accountability structure even before more targeted accountability requirements are added in Part B.

1. Replace the current NCLB system of AYP and escalating sanctions for schools, districts, and states receiving Title I money with required implementation of the specific systemic changes identified in this report.

2. Require annual public reporting at the district, state, and federal level of all major actions taken to implement the systemic changes, including obstacles encountered and steps taken to overcome them. Require reporting of disaggregated student assessment results from multiple sources of evidence.

3. Establish meaningful technical assistance and sufficient resources to implement the systemic changes.

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4. Set aside specific portions of Title I funding to implement those changes.

5. Provide federal evaluations and monitoring to ensure proper state and local use of Title I and other ESEA funds.

6. Allow states and districts to lose federal Title I funds, as permitted under current law, for failing or refusing to implement the required systemic changes.

B. Implementation Procedures

ESEA also should include the following mechanisms to ensure schools, districts, and states take responsibility for implementing systemic changes and improving student learning:

1. To increase the likelihood of successful implementation and to provide more precise public accountability, the following steps shall be taken at each Title I-funded school:

    a. Each school or district on its behalf shall: gather and evaluate information on the school's needs and prepare, in collaboration with parents, teachers, and other school staff, a brief plan tailored to the needs of the specific school. The plan shall describe the major steps to be taken to implement the systemic changes needed in that school to close achievement gaps and improve student learning. This plan shall be finalized within a reasonable time after enactment of the ESEA reauthorization (e.g., no more than one year after reauthorization, provided that this deadline may be extended for no more than an additional year after enactment if such additional time is needed for the U.S. Department of Education to issue regulations). The plan will then be implemented promptly (e.g., within three months).

    b. Each school or district on its behalf shall annually prepare and make widely available, in a manner easily understandable to the community, parents, and school employees, a report describing the specific steps taken to implement the systemic changes. Such report shall include obstacles encountered, actions taken to overcome them, and the results of continuing to implement these changes, as well as disaggregated student assessment results from multiple sources of evidence.

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2. Each district that receives Title I funds shall:

   a. Establish or utilize an existing committee to review all school plans and reports. The committee shall include representatives of teachers, other education employees, and parents.

   b. Satisfy all necessary school requests for technical assistance and support through its own staff or other sources such as the state department of education or the federally funded Regional Labs and Research Centers.

   c. Evaluate, assist, monitor, and intervene as necessary in any school that is having particular difficulty implementing the systemic changes. This process should be designed to support continuous improvement. The evaluations shall consider the resources needed by the school as well as in- and out-of-school issues that affect learning, including the need for better inter-agency collaboration. Intervention may include assigning a skilled and experienced specialist to take responsibility for supporting current school leadership or, as appropriate, providing leadership for the school and making all necessary improvements, in collaboration with instructional staff and parents, and shall be tailored to the individual needs of each school.

   d. Evaluate the results from implementing these systemic changes, noting whether there is a positive trend in learning outcomes. Determination of a positive trend shall use multiple measures and be based on rates of improvement attained by a substantial portion of current Title I schools.[1]

   e. Report annually to the state on the extent of its schools' implementation of the systemic changes, including obstacles encountered, steps taken to overcome them, and the results, including disaggregated student assessments, for each school.

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[1] As an example, the positive trend determination could involve the following steps: 1) Ascertain the average rate of increase over the previous three years in the percentage of students reaching proficient at each Title I school in the state, and rank the schools based on the rate of gain. 2) Based on this list, identify the school at the 75th percentile [above the bottom, such that three-fourths are increasing at a slower rate]. 3) The rate of gain by the school at that point shall become the target rate of increase for all Title I schools and all subgroups within those schools, while schools at or above this standard shall be expected to maintain or increase the rate at which their students attain the proficient level.

Alternatively, a similar approach could be used that establishes target rates of gain at multiple key points, e.g., basic, proficient, and advanced. In any case, when nearly all students in a school have attained proficiency, then that school might not be required to meet the rate of gain.

The rate of gain shall be calculated based on data for the three years immediately preceding the year in which ESEA is reauthorized. A reasonable time period, such as three to five years, will be established as the period in which schools not at the set rate of gain would be expected to attain that rate. If a school has not established "a positive trend in learning outcomes" by the end of this period, the district must take the steps described in Section III.B.2.c. After five years, a state will recalculate its target rate of gain.

The Forum on Educational Accountability has established an Expert Panel on Assessment that will examine these issues in more detail. The panel's report is due out in the spring of 2007.

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3. Each state receiving Title I funds shall:

   a. Utilize the existing Committee of Practitioners to review and evaluate all reports submitted by the districts.

   b. Provide all necessary technical assistance requested by the districts. States may use their own staff, federally funded Regional Labs and Research Centers, or other sources.

   c. Be responsible for improving the school if, notwithstanding the district's intervention required by Section III.B.2.c, a school has still not established a "positive trend in learning outcomes" within five years after the start of implementation of the school plan in Section III.B.1.a.

   d. Be responsible for improving the schools in that district, through an appointed specialist or otherwise, until all schools satisfy this standard, if within the same five-year period described in the preceding subsection, a significant portion of a district's Title I-funded schools have not established a "positive trend in learning outcomes."

   e. At its discretion, prepare formats to be used by district schools in developing plans and reporting.

4. Funding:

   a. Section I of this report states that 20 percent of Title I funds will be used for professional development, complemented by a state match, and Section II states that 5 percent will be used for family involvement. That funding will provide substantial support for school and district improvement. However, states will need additional resources both to assist districts and schools and to engage in the interventions described in this section. The federal government should contribute a substantial portion of the funds needed to cover these costs.

   b. Resources to support creation of school improvement plans may come from the increase in the first year's professional development funds.

5. Section 1116(d) of the current law shall be retained. Nothing in these provisions shall authorize private control over public schools or federal funding of private schools, nor require state departments of education to make interventions that are not authorized by state law.

6. Any programs receiving ESEA funds are bound by applicable civil rights laws.

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Appendix

JOINT ORGANIZATIONAL STATEMENT ON NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND (NCLB) ACT

List of signers updated March 23, 2007

The undersigned education, civil rights, religious, children's, disability, and civic organizations are committed to the No Child Left Behind Act's objectives of strong academic achievement for all children and closing the achievement gap. We believe that the federal government has a critical role to play in attaining these goals. We endorse the use of an accountability system that helps ensure all children, including children of color, from low-income families, with disabilities, and of limited English proficiency, are prepared to be successful, participating members of our democracy.

While we all have different positions on various aspects of the law, based on concerns raised during the implementation of NCLB, we believe the following significant, constructive corrections are among those necessary to make the Act fair and effective. Among these concerns are: over-emphasizing standardized testing, narrowing curriculum and instruction to focus on test preparation rather than richer academic learning; over-identifying schools in need of improvement; using sanctions that do not help improve schools; inappropriately excluding low-scoring children in order to boost test results; and inadequate funding. Overall, the law's emphasis needs to shift from applying sanctions for failing to raise test scores to holding states and localities accountable for making the systemic changes that improve student achievement.

RECOMMENDED CHANGES IN NCLB

Progress Measurement

1. Replace the law's arbitrary proficiency targets with ambitious achievement targets based on rates of success actually achieved by the most effective public schools.

2. Allow states to measure progress by using students' growth in achievement as well as their performance in relation to pre-determined levels of academic proficiency.

3. Ensure that states and school districts regularly report to the government and the public their progress in implementing systemic changes to enhance educator, family, and community capacity to improve student learning.

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4. Provide a comprehensive picture of students' and schools' performance by moving from an overwhelming reliance on standardized tests to using multiple indicators of student achievement in addition to these tests.

5. Fund research and development of more effective accountability systems that better meet the goal of high academic achievement for all children.

Assessments

6. Help states develop assessment systems that include district and school-based measures in order to provide better, more timely information about student learning.

7. Strengthen enforcement of NCLB provisions requiring that assessments must:

   - Be aligned with state content and achievement standards;
   - Be used for purposes for which they are valid and reliable;
   - Be consistent with nationally recognized professional and technical standards;
   - Be of adequate technical quality for each purpose required under the Act;
   - Provide multiple, up-to-date measures of student performance including measures that assess higher order thinking skills and understanding; and
   - Provide useful diagnostic information to improve teaching and learning.

8. Decrease the testing burden on states, schools and districts by allowing states to assess students annually in selected grades in elementary, middle schools, and high schools.

Building Capacity

9. Ensure changes in teacher and administrator preparation and continuing professional development that research evidence and experience indicate improve educational quality and student achievement.

10. Enhance state and local capacity to effectively implement the comprehensive changes required to increase the knowledge and skills of administrators, teachers, families, and communities to support high student achievement.

Sanctions

11. Ensure that improvement plans are allowed sufficient time to take hold before applying sanctions; sanctions should not be applied if they undermine existing effective reform efforts.

12. Replace sanctions that do not have a consistent record of success with interventions that enable schools to make changes that result in improved student achievement.

Funding

13. Raise authorized levels of NCLB funding to cover a substantial percentage of the costs that states and districts will incur to carry out these recommendations, and fully fund the law at those levels without reducing expenditures for other education programs.

14. Fully fund Title I to ensure that 100 percent of eligible children are served.

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We, the undersigned, will work for the adoption of these recommendations as central structural changes needed to NCLB at the same time that we advance our individual organization's proposals.

Advancement Project
American Association of School Administrators
American Association of School Librarians (AASL), a division of the American Library Association (ALA)
American Association of University Women
American Baptist Women's Ministries
American Counseling Association
American Dance Therapy Association
American Federation of School Administrators (AFSA)
American Federation of Teachers
American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)
American Humanist Association
American Speech-Language-Hearing Association
Americans for the Arts
Annenberg Institute for School Reform
Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund
Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance (APALA)
ASPIRA
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN)
Association of Education Publishers
Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO)
Big Picture Company
Center for Community Change
Center for Expansion of Language and Thinking
Center for Parent Leadership
Children's Defense Fund
Church Women United
Citizens for Effective Schools
Coalition for Community Schools
Coalition of Essential Schools
Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism
Communities for Quality Education
Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders
Council for Exceptional Children
Council for Hispanic Ministries of the United Church of Christ
Council for Learning Disabilities
Council of Administrators of Special Education, Inc.
Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform
Disciples Home Missions of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Disciples Justice Action Network (Disciples of Christ)
Division for Learning Disabilities of the Council for Exceptional Children (DLD/CEC)
Education Action!
Every Child Matters
FairTest: The National Center for Fair & Open Testing
Forum for Education and Democracy
Gender Public Advocacy Coalition (GPAC)
Hmong National Development
Indigenous Women's Network
Institute for Language and Education Policy
International Reading Association
International Technology Education Association
Japanese American Citizens League
Learning Disabilities Association of America
League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)
Ministers for Racial, Social and Economic Justice of the United Church of Christ
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)
NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund (LDF)
National Alliance of Black School Educators
National Association for Asian and Pacific American Education (NAAPAE)
National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE)
National Association for the Education and Advancement of Cambodian, Laotian and Vietnamese Americans (NAFEA)
National Association for the Education of African American Children with Learning Disabilities
National Association of Federally Impacted Schools
National Association of Pupil Services Administrators
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Association of Social Workers
National Baptist Convention, USA (NBCUSA)
National Coalition for Asian Pacific American Community Development
National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education (NCPIE)
National Conference of Black Mayors
National Council for Community and Education Partnerships (NCCEP)

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National Council for the Social Studies
National Council of Churches
National Council of Jewish Women
National Council of Teachers of English
National Education Association
National Federation of Filipino American Associations
National Indian Education Association
National Indian School Board Association
National Korean American Service & Education Consortium (NAKASEC)
National Mental Health Association
National Ministries, American Baptist Churches USA
National Pacific Islander Educator Network
National Parent Teacher Association (PTA)
National Reading Conference
National Rural Education Association
National School Boards Association
National School Supply and Equipment Association
National Superintendents Roundtable
National Urban League
Native Hawaiian Education Association
Network of Spiritual Progressives
Organization of Chinese Americans
People for the American Way
Presbyterian Church (USA)
Progressive National Baptist Convention
Protestants for the Common Good
Public Education Network (PEN)
Rural School and Community Trust
Service Employees International Union
School Social Work Association of America
Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund
Social Action Committee of the Congress of Secular Jewish Organizations
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)
Stand for Children
Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL)
The Children's Aid Society
The Episcopal Church
The National Coalition of ESEA Title I Parents.
United Black Christians of the United Church of Christ
United Church of Christ Justice and Witness Ministries
United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society
USAction
Women's Division of the General Board of Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church
Women of Reform Judaism

This list is updated as new organizations sign on to the Joint Statement. Visit www.edaccountability.org for the most up-to-date list.

We encourage national organizations to sign the Joint Statement. Email the endorsement to Monty@fairtest.org. Identify your organization and a contact (please include an email, phone, and address for the person you identify as the contact). Include your organization's Web site address.

We also encourage state and local organizations to endorse and use the Joint Statement, but we are not adding such groups to the list of signers.

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