

All Children Will Learn

2009 AASA Legislative Agenda

Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

January 26, 2009

Preamble

AASA believes that the goal of universal proficiency contained in the 2001 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, called No Child Left Behind, requires system-wide changes in public schools. Public education is vital to the continued success of American democracy and leadership matters in improving outcomes for children. As such, AASA believes that achieving the lofty goals of ESEA requires simultaneous focus in three areas:

- Getting children ready for schools by working together with communities to produce the best outcomes for children;
- Getting schools ready for students by ensuring that they are safe places where teaching and learning have been transformed to meet the needs of each child; and
- Getting children ready for democracy and prepared for active roles in society through collaboration between schools and communities.

Core Beliefs

AASA believes that a high-quality public education is a basic civil right. Equal access to educational opportunity is a cornerstone of American democracy. State and local school system leaders are dedicated to helping students reach high levels of learning and to preparing students to be active participants in a global society.

AASA believes the primary responsibility for determining educational methods and strategies resides at the state and local level. The supplemental federal role must be consistent with the 1979 U.S. Department of Education Organization Act. States have a constitutional responsibility to establish, fund and support public education. Local school districts have a responsibility to ensure student learning in the context of their state's constitutional requirements for education.

AASA believes the role of the federal government in education is to help ensure equal opportunities to learn for each child by assisting states and school districts in their efforts to develop capacity, by providing leadership and by providing resources. The federal government should supplement and support rather than dictate state efforts in education.

AASA members know that the devastating effects of poverty have a significant impact on student achievement. While school systems do address the effects of poverty, they cannot eliminate the causes of poverty. Federal efforts to improve student achievement should coordinate with other relevant systems, such as health care, housing and judicial systems, to alleviate the fundamental inequities that perpetuate poverty.

AASA believes that states and school systems should not be required to spend state and local funds to implement federal program mandates.

AASA believes that successfully prepared students leaving the public school system will have:

- An academic background that allows them to engage in the workforce, post-secondary education, and life-long learning in an increasingly competitive, rapidly changing global society;
- A mastery of content within and across academic areas that provides a solid foundation of knowledge and understanding of the world;
- The skill set that enables them to actively participate in life-long learning as they strive to expand their knowledge and understanding of their increasingly connected world;
- The ability to work, live and learn with people of all races, creeds and ethnicities; and
- Experience with art, music, literature and the performing arts that develop their ability to discern patterns from disparate information and create new forms from old information. Creativity and moving beyond accepted limitations on ideas is critical to maintaining our competitive edge in a global society.

Critical Assumptions

Maximizing children's learning requires equal measures of high expectations, appropriate instruction, appropriate health care, early developmental activities and care for children's well-being throughout their early childhood and school years.

Equal educational outcomes for low-income and minority students and other special populations of students, such as English language learners and students with disabilities, have proven to be the educational challenge most resistant to improvement. There are two major causes of the inability to obtain equal results for all children: opportunities to learn are not equally distributed and non-school factors, such as health and school readiness, have not been directly connected to initiatives to improve educational outcomes for low-income and minority students.

Federal programs aimed at children's health, personal and social development, overall well-being and education that are disjointed and disconnected must be successfully connected to schools. These programs need to be connected to schools through ESEA in a way that increases learning for all students, closes gaps in achievement and aligns other educational outcomes among all groups of children. Those programs should be distributed based on children's need for services and support.

ESEA Title I funds must be carefully targeted to make a difference in student learning. Funding for Title I of ESEA will never amount to much more than two to three percent of state and local expenditures. Title I dollars should be focused on districts with the highest percentages of low-income students.

Continuous improvement of a loosely coupled public education system where every school and school system is unique requires clear, widely accepted goals, great flexibility and constancy of purpose and principles.

Federal education policy must follow a hypothesis defined by researcher John Carroll: Given the right amount of time and appropriate instruction, nearly all children can succeed in learning the desired material. Thus, federal programs must promote flexible learning time and continuous improvement of high-quality, developmentally appropriate instruction.

Money makes a difference in the quality of services provided to children, and more money wisely spent will improve children's educational outcomes. Thus, states and the federal government have an obligation to distribute funds in a manner that promotes equal opportunities to learn for all children.

AASA Recommendations for Federal Support of States and School Systems to Improve Opportunities to Learn for Low-Income and Minority Students

AASA recommends that ESEA move from the 93 disconnected and disjointed programs added between the original passage of the law in 1965 and the most recent reauthorization in 2001 toward a more systemic continuum of services and supports based on poverty, special student populations and special conditions. We need to return to the original goal of ESEA, which was to promote equal educational opportunity.

The federal government should help states and school systems either improve opportunities to learn for low-income and minority students or address the needs of populations of students with special conditions in those school systems that improved their ability to serve all children. This recommendation is designed to give Congress and the Obama Administration incentives to increase the federal investment in education by sharpening the focus on poverty, serving the whole child, and adhering to the principle that given appropriate instruction and enough time all students will achieve greater learning success.

Continuum of Services and Support

Basic Federal Services for Low-Poverty School Systems

AASA believes that basic services for low-poverty school systems should include:

- Immediate access (at no cost) to research that will help teachers, principals and superintendents organize and deliver high-quality, developmentally-appropriate instruction;
- Immediate access (at no cost) to information about best practices that will help teachers, principals and superintendents organize and deliver high-quality, developmentally-appropriate instruction; and
- Funds for professional development.

Federal Services and Support for School Systems with Special Populations or Unique Circumstances

AASA believes that federal services and support should be provided to school systems with special populations or special characteristics.

- Special populations include:
 - English language learners
 - Special education students
 - Homeless students
- Special characteristics include:
 - Small and rural
 - High-poverty rural
 - Impacted (this is a legislative term that drives a program called Impact Aid) by federal installations, institutions or lands

Federal Services and Support for High-poverty School Systems

AASA believes that federal services and support for high-poverty school systems should include:

- Increased coordination and cooperation among federal agencies that have programs, initiatives and money targeted at serving children in poverty, including education, mental health, transition to work, early childhood education, and child care, among other programs;
- Establishment of a White House Office of Youth Policy;
- Immediate access (at no cost) to research that will help teachers, principals and superintendents organize and deliver high-quality, developmentally-appropriate instruction;
- Immediate access (at no cost) to information about best practices that may help teachers, principals and superintendents organize and deliver high-quality, developmentally-appropriate instruction;
- Adequate funds for high-quality professional development;
- Universal access to health care, including mental health care, for children and their parents or guardians, by tying all relevant federal programs together in ESEA and assessing the impact of non-school factors;
- Guaranteed ability to make Medicaid claims for services, administrative costs and transportation by amending both ESEA and Title XIX of the Social Security Act;
- Universal access to early child care in homes or centers, guaranteed by tying together these services with all relevant federal programs in ESEA;
- Universal access to early childhood education programs, guaranteed by tying all relevant federal programs together in ESEA;
- Full funding for Head Start;
- Universal access to well-administered recreation and after-school care through high school, guaranteed by tying all relevant federal programs together in ESEA;
- Scholarships for teaching candidates who will agree to teach in high-poverty schools guaranteed in ESEA reauthorization and the Higher Education Act; and
- Funds to pay salary supplements for teachers and administrators; and
- Reinstating public school districts' eligibility to participate in all federal workforce preparation and training programs,, in recognition of the responsibility and capacity of schools to prepare students for the multitude of opportunities available to them after high school graduation, including support for schools' efforts to develop and expand career and technical programs.

Program Standards for All Children Will Learn

AASA believes ESEA should provide coherent goals, assumptions and methods to improve learning for all students, especially for low-income and minority students. These goals, assumptions and methods should be based on evidence gained from research and practice.

Content Standards

- 1.1 AASA recognizes the need for high standards for all children.
- 1.2 AASA supports the establishment of standards for student performance, curriculum content, teacher certification and professional training. Today's children live in a highly mobile and globally-oriented world. As such, the standards should include the mastery of both basic skills and higher-order thinking skills.
- 1.3 AASA believes state-developed standards should be the primary educational framework that local districts should use to develop educational programs.
- 1.4 AASA supports voluntary national standards developed by professionally qualified national organizations and practitioners.
- 1.5 AASA believes alignment of standards, curriculum, instruction, assessment and professional development for teachers, principals and superintendents is critical to successful implementation of high content standards.

Accountability

- 2.1 AASA supports clear, accurate measures that hold school systems and schools accountable for the quality of their performance.
- 2.2 AASA supports holding states accountable for providing appropriate financial and programmatic support and for monitoring and connecting both state and federal programs aimed at children's health, development and well-being. These programs must be aligned with the education system to ensure that children are ready to learn.
- 2.3 AASA supports holding school systems accountable for providing developmentally-appropriate instruction for each student in a timeframe that maximizes the probability of success.
- 2.4 AASA believes in holding students and schools accountable through the use of multiple sources of valid and reliable assessments and in reporting progress to the students and the general public. In addition to measuring individual student growth, it is critical that schools and school systems evaluate program effectiveness using multiple sources of evidence.
- 2.5 AASA believes that where intervention by the state is required as a result of failure to meet expectations under ESEA, the intervention should be narrowly focused on building capacity for improvement in those schools where there is a pervasive pattern of underachievement.
- 2.6 AASA supports accountability for all agencies working with school districts to serve the total child so long as the appropriate parties or agencies are held accountable for their individual responsibilities in the helping children meet expected standards developmentally, academically and socially.

Evidence of Learning

- 3.1 AASA supports the use of growth measures to monitor student progress. Each child should be assessed using multiple sources of evidence that begin with his or her level of learning, not with the use of arbitrary group starting points that could be inappropriate for the child.
- 3.2 AASA believes school and student performance should be based on more than just a single measure or test. The multiple indicators should be determined at the state and local levels.
- 3.3 AASA believes that success for special education students should be measured in accordance with the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) and should not be subjected to arbitrary percentage caps.
- 3.4 AASA believes English language learners should not be measured in a language they do not understand. English and native language assessments need to be fair, appropriate and based on each student's level of proficiency.
- 3.5 The accountability system at both the state and federal levels should be both fair and transparent to parents, community members and students.
- 3.6 AASA welcomes the continued use of disaggregated data as a positive influence in schools that allow teachers and administrators to focus on the success of all children. The results of the disaggregation should be used to make informed decisions about teaching and learning.
- 3.7 AASA supports the use of multiple opportunities to bring students to an acceptable standard of performance, including extended-learning day programs, summer learning sessions, re-testing and after-school learning opportunities.

Research and Best Practices

- 4.1 AASA values the role that the federal government plays in providing high-quality research that can inform decision making in local school systems. It is essential that all research funded by the federal government be transparent and widely disseminated to teachers and administrators.
- 4.2 AASA believes that the topics chosen for research should continue to identify best practices for closing the achievement gap and improving the quality of education for all children.
- 4.3 AASA believes that there is an unmet need for federally-funded research regarding high-quality professional development for all educators, including teachers, principals and superintendents.
- 4.4 AASA supports the revitalization of federally supported research venues and other means of innovations aimed at raising awareness of and providing ready access to best practices.

Public School Workforce Issues

- 5.1 AASA urges inclusion of funds to encourage teachers to work in hard-to-staff schools in urban and rural areas.
- 5.2 AASA believes that school districts with hard-to-staff schools should have access to cutting edge technology for professional development and instruction.
- 5.2 AASA believes the federal government has a role in supporting enhanced teacher salaries across all school systems, including incentives such as loan forgiveness.

Other Services and Supports Needed to Overcome the Effects of Poverty

- 6.1 AASA believes the federal government has a responsibility to help prepare children for success in school in their first five years of life by addressing an array of social factors that have been shown to affect student achievement. These factors include, but are not limited to, poverty, health care, early education and child care.
- 6.2 AASA believes the federal government must help build and support an economic system that sustains families above the poverty level, providing access to quality jobs and acceptable wages. The federal government's definition of "families in poverty" should be expanded to include the working poor.
- 6.3 AASA believes the federal government has the responsibility to provide funding for social intervention before children start school. This support should be disseminated through the non-profit and social networks that assist children in getting ready for school. This federal support should be focused on families in poverty, the working poor and immigrant families. This support should also expand quality, low-income housing for families in need.
- 6.4 AASA supports the establishment and federal funding of a comprehensive, universal health care system that starts with prenatal care and includes school-based, school-linked and community health clinics. Comprehensive health care for children is vital for improved academic achievement. School systems play a critical role in providing health care services for students, including access to vision and dental care.
- 6.5 AASA believes the federal government should provide funding and access to mental health care for students in need of such assistance.
- 6.6 AASA believes the federal government must increase Medicaid payments for low-income students, including school-based administrative and transportation claiming.
- 6.7 AASA believes in early childhood education for all children starting at age three as a crucial link to reducing the achievement gap.
- 6.8 AASA supports full funding for Head Start to expand access to all eligible children.
- 6.9 AASA believes the federal government should improve access to high-quality child care for families in poverty, including the working poor. Federal support could include tax incentives for employers to provide family support for child care and dollars to provide after-school care for children of all ages.
- 6.10 AASA supports the engagement of families in schools and recognizes the vital importance of parents/guardians in the success of each child.

Recommendations for Other Services and Supports for School Systems with Special Populations and Special Conditions

- 7.1 AASA supports the provisions of ESEA aimed at language instruction for limited English proficient and immigrant students. In particular, AASA supports the programs that drive funds to school systems through a formula and urges the maximization of local control in order to expand the continuum of services available to English language learners.
- 7.2 AASA supports creating a pilot program that would provide grants for dual language programs for schools serving concentrations of low-income and minority students.
- 7.3 AASA believes that 100 percent of the funding under the Safe and Drug Free Schools Act should flow directly to local school districts to ensure the maximum benefit at the local level. In addition, AASA supports the inclusion of school resource officers as an allowable use of funds under this program.
- 7.4 AASA supports more federal resources for after-school programs under the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program. These after-school programs, which should be governed by local school systems, play an important role in ensuring the success of students from all backgrounds. These additional federal funds should not come at the expense of other ESEA Title allocations.
- 7.5 AASA supports the continued flexibility allowed to school districts under the Education Innovative Block Grant Program and urges the restoration of funding for this program.
- 7.6 AASA supports the Rural Education Achievement Program Reauthorization Act.
- 7.7 AASA opposes the limitation of eligibility under the Rural and Low-Income Schools Program that would eliminate funding for many rural districts.
- 7.7 AASA supports federal funding for literacy programs but strongly encourages Congress to ensure that the U.S. Department of Education does not dictate or prescribe specific curricula.
- 7.8 AASA supports the continuation and expansion of programs in ESEA that address the unique needs of Indian/Native American, Native Hawaiian and Native Alaskan communities, as well as federally-impacted military and Native American areas.
- 7.9 AASA recognizes the unique circumstances of federally-impacted school systems and supports full funding of Impact Aid.

AASA Positions on Other Federal Policy and Legislation That Supports Students' Learning, Health, Personal Development and Wellness

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

- 8.1 AASA maintains its commitment to mandatory federal funding of IDEA at 40 percent of the national average per-pupil expenditure for every child in special education. The long-term federal funding shortfall is straining school system budgets and is diverting resources from other critical local educational programs.
- 8.2 AASA believes that the district of residence should be responsible for the equitable participation of parentally-placed private school students. AASA supports a return to the principles of the 1997 IDEA law for this provision.
- 8.3 AASA supports reducing local maintenance of effort as federal funding increases.
- 8.4 AASA supports making the requirement for parental consent for Medicaid reimbursement part of the parental consent provisions in the Individualized Education Program process.

School-Based Medicaid Claiming

- 9.1 AASA strongly supports the role that school districts play in providing medically necessary services to Medicaid-eligible students and the right of school systems to claim reimbursement for those services. AASA opposes the steps being taken by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to exclude school systems from reimbursement.
- 9.2 AASA supports ensuring that all school systems can receive reimbursement for Medicaid services, administrative costs and transportation.
- 9.3 AASA supports the expansion of Medicaid claiming to include eligibility for 504 Vocational Rehabilitation students.
- 9.4 AASA urges the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to work with states and local school districts to ensure a uniform and reasonable methodology for claiming reimbursement for Medicaid-eligible services across the country.
- 9.5 AASA supports the continuation of a moratorium against any changes by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services in school-based Medicaid claiming.

Universal Children's Health Insurance

- 10.1 AASA supports the proposal of the Children's Defense Fund to provide health insurance for all children and pregnant women whose family income is up to three times the poverty line.
- 10.2 AASA supports efforts to increase Medicaid doctors' reimbursement rate for practitioners who participate in the Medicaid program.

Child Nutrition

- 11.1 AASA supports efforts to improve federal rules regarding the nutritional content of food and beverages served during the school day.
- 11.2 AASA feels that exceptions to school nutrition policies should include school-sponsored events, fundraisers and celebrations.
- 11.3 AASA believes that when federal requirements result in loss of revenue for school systems, the federal government should recognize and provide a reimbursement for that loss of revenue.
- 11.4 AASA believes that nutrition policy is best addressed at the local level and opposes any federal over-reach into nutrition policy.

Higher Education Act

- 12.1 AASA supports the role of school systems as active partners with institutions of higher education in determining solutions for teacher recruitment and retention and leadership development.
- 12.2 AASA believes that mentoring and induction programs play an important role in the training of new teachers and should be a vital part of recruitment and retention efforts.
- 12.3 AASA supports a focus on educational leadership development within higher education institutions.

E-Rate

- 13.1 AASA strongly supports the E-Rate program as a vital part of connecting school systems across the country. As Congress begins the reauthorization of the Telecommunications Act, AASA supports the continued inclusion of E-Rate in the Universal Service Fund.
- 13.2 AASA supports efforts to reduce the paperwork requirements for participation in the E-Rate program while still ensuring program integrity.
- 13.3 AASA supports efforts to eliminate the current \$2.25 billion funding cap and allow the program to meet the increasing demand for technology services.

Secure Rural Schools and Communities Self-Determination Act

- 14.1 AASA continues to support the Secure Rural Schools and Communities Self-Determination Act.

Vouchers and Tuition Tax Credits

- 15.1 AASA supports strong, high-quality public school systems and continues to oppose efforts to extend federal support to private schools.
- 15.2 AASA supports the expiration and elimination of the private school voucher program in the District of Columbia, known as the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program.

Qualified Zone Academy Bonds

- 16.1 AASA recognizes the success of the Qualified Zone Academy Bonds program in addressing some school facility needs. AASA supports the expansion of this program to include new construction and additional resources.

Seclusion and Restraint

- 17.1 AASA believes that monitored seclusion and restraints should be used as a last resort but must be an option for staff working with students who are out of control and pose a danger to themselves and others.

Economic Recovery Act

- 18.1 AASA supports efforts by Congress and the Obama Administration to include America's public schools in the Economic Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Schools across the nation have been negatively impacted by the recent economic downturn. The additional federal funds provide an opportunity to address new and back-logged renovation and construction projects, avoid staff cuts, and bring IDEA funding to the mandated 40 percent of the national average per pupil expenditure for every child in special education. The economic recovery funds are a tangible representation of the federal funds and recognize the role that public schools can have in helping their local communities through this economic downturn.
- 18.2 AASA supports clarifying language in the Economic Recovery and Reinvestment Act to prevent states from supplanting their state funds with the federal funds, to require maintenance of effort by the states and to ensure that funds are distributed to the local districts as quickly as possible, through formulas.
- 18.3 AASA supports waivers of supplement/supplant and 'maintenance of effort' provisions where schools are using funds from the Economic Recovery and Reinvestment Act to fill in gaps and back fill cuts in state and local revenues.