



ASCD Recommendations for the Reauthorization of No Child Left Behind

The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) represents 178,000 educators. Our membership is composed of teachers, principals, superintendents, school district specialists, and higher education academics. We are professionally trained educators on the front lines of education. We are almost evenly split among school districts in urban, suburban, and rural districts. You will find our members in most classrooms and central offices throughout the country.

Advocacy for the whole child is at the heart of the ASCD mission. Our position (<http://www.wholechildeducation.org>) calls for comprehensive education of all children from preschool through college. The success of this endeavor depends on broad engagement of all stakeholders, including parents, teachers, communities, and policymakers at all levels. Education must move away from single assessments to more innovative approaches that better measure the skills needed for success in an increasingly competitive world. We have an opportunity to achieve this goal while ensuring all our children reach high academic standards. The U.S. Congress can accelerate this achievement with the reauthorization of both Head Start and No Child Left Behind (NCLB).

ASCD recognizes that we need to improve our schools. Although the United States continues to be a leader in innovation and academics, this status is neither a guarantee, nor a right. Our position as world leader is temporary, unless we ask more of our students and those who are responsible for their learning.

ASCD commends Congress for its commitment to improve the effectiveness of NCLB through reauthorization. We applaud Congress for the recognition that responsible accountability will yield results. ASCD praises Congress for ensuring that communities, schools, and other stakeholders are able to easily compare the performance of one school to another. These steps have helped to improve education, and we look forward to future improvements.

In addition to our specific recommendations, financial resources are a critical in this equation; however, federal roles and resources in education have traditionally been limited. Under the original NCLB legislation, schools were required to incur significantly increased costs, but while the federal government has increased the resources provided, the funding is far below the additional costs required by NCLB. We urge Congress to drastically increase funding for education.

For questions about our recommendations, please contact Dan Fuller, ASCD Director of Public Policy, at 1-703-575-5621, or via e-mail at dfuller@ascd.org. Thank you for your consideration.

Summary of ASCD Recommendations

- A) Adjust the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) model to incorporate multiple measures of assessment, including growth models, formative assessments, grade point averages, student exhibitions, AP and IB courses, and portfolio assessments.
- B) Offer the full complement of sanctions and intervention strategies immediately. The intervention options should be uniformly offered and should enable a school to choose between supplemental service options and public school choice.
- C) Require supplemental service providers to use only instructors who meet the same criteria in the definition of “highly qualified” required of public school educators.
- D) Return the ability to determine which teachers are “highly qualified” to the states.
- E) Expand the Teacher Incentive Fund and support similar programs that provide incentives to teachers and school leaders who work in high-need, high-poverty school districts.
- F) Increase targeted federal resources to those schools and programs that serve populations with the neediest children by increasing the weighting factor of poverty in federal formulas.
- G) Redesign current competitive grant programs to categorical programs that will drive funds to those school districts with high-poverty and high-need students, rather than those school districts with effective grant writers.
- H) Allow English language learners the flexibility to demonstrate progress over the course of three years, rather than the current one-year construct. Schools should be allowed to demonstrate growth and progress over a three-year period before being sanctioned.
- I) Support the student-specific, Individualized Education Plan (IEP) as the measure for the learning of students with disabilities, rather than a state assessment.
- J) Create a dedicated fund to support and encourage innovative measures to help redesign our nation’s high schools.

Adjust Adequate Yearly Progress

Adjust the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) model to incorporate multiple measures of assessment, including growth models, formative assessments, grade point averages, student exhibitions, AP and IB course participation, and portfolio assessments. The current model is flawed and superficial in terms of gauging student performance. One day of testing can have too many adverse affects on student, school, and district performance. It is akin to judging the entire performance of Congress on one vote. The goal of education is to provide an increasing amount of knowledge while still challenging students throughout their academic career. Measuring student progress and assessing knowledge is not a simple snapshot operation achieved with one or two tests. ASCD urges Congress to expand the growth model approach and to provide incentives for states and schools to use other measurements, including student exhibitions, grade point averages, portfolios, and formative assessments. This approach not only provides more accurate results on student performance, but also diagnoses learning shortfalls and assists in the support of student learning. Although illustrating and demonstrating school performance is important, educating children is the goal.

Sanctions and Interventions

The current NCLB model is compliance-driven, rather than education-centered. The federal solution is prescriptive and inflexible; schools are punished for what they do not do. To effectuate positive change, the sanctions and approach must change. ASCD urges Congress to offer the full complement of school improvement strategies earlier in the process rather than the current prescriptive approach that dictates specific order and timeline for strategies. Enable a school to choose between supplemental service options and public school choice. School improvement options should be uniformly offered to all states. Allowable strategies and state-approved plans should be as transparent as the school results. By enabling local school districts and states to choose the strategies best suited to their unique needs, Congress would provide significantly better results for all parties.

ASCD supports research-based effective interventions to increase student learning. These interventions should be proven through data and have the appropriate support to achieve success. Additionally, supplemental service providers must use only instructors who meet the same criteria in the definition of “highly qualified” required of public school educators. Any supplemental service provider that does not meet these criteria must not be allowed to offer services.

Educators and School Leaders

Based on state-level curriculum and accountability framework, states are the most knowledgeable entity to determine the requirements for teacher quality. The current model needs to incorporate greater flexibility; we recommend returning the ability to determine which teachers are “highly qualified” to the states. Congress should provide federal guidance, support, oversight, and reporting requirements, yet allow the states to determine the requirements and qualifications. The federal role should provide parameters that enable state-to-state comparisons. For many states, valuable resources are being spent to meet federal requirements for existing, effective teachers. In many instances, good teachers are leaving the profession or being deemed “unqualified” by the federal standards. In addition, mid-career professionals or people who could

teach in specific subject areas are not allowed to share their knowledge or skills because they have not met the federal prescriptive requirements.

Professional Development and Incentives

The appropriate federal role should enable greater resources, flexibility, and support to develop effective teachers and school leaders. Increasing professional development resource opportunities for states and school districts will result in better teacher preparation, easier recruitment, and higher salaries and retention levels. The federal government should channel efforts into this approach, rather than serving as an enforcement agency, providing best practices, clearinghouses, professional development programs, and resources to help schools meet, train, and retain high-quality teachers. Programs like the Teacher Incentive Fund, which reward teachers and school administrators who help students in low-income schools achieve, should be expanded and made universally available to school leaders working in high-need, high-poverty school districts. We propose expanding this program and enabling funding for other programs to achieve the same laudable goals.

Research has indicated that good teachers are fundamental to success, but many of our best teachers are not serving in the high-need districts due to higher salaries and better working conditions in more affluent school districts. The Teacher Incentive Fund and other incentives that provide rewards for those achieving success in high-poverty districts are an effective approach to closing the achievement gap in needy schools.

Poverty Factor

Although the federal role in education has been limited prior to NCLB, the reality is that education should be a state and local concern. The differences among schools are greater than the commonality among our students, and the best approach is one where local educators and professionals understand the unique circumstances and needs surrounding their local school districts. When President Johnson created Title I in 1964, he provided federal resources to disadvantaged children and schools to alleviate and mollify the commensurate issues around poverty that lead to learning shortfalls. Our government has moved away from this mission. ASCD argues for a return to this approach by assigning resources to schools and programs that serve the highest and neediest populations. ASCD proposes increasing the weighting factor of poverty in federal formulas. Typically, the distribution of federal programs serving disadvantaged children is derived by a formula that uses a poverty factor of 35 to 50 percent when determining federal funding levels. Poverty should be the driving portion of the formula from the federal government and the state to the school district. These formulas should be based on higher percentages of poverty, rather than the current model of poverty and population. Congress should prioritize and provide resources to ensure the original focus of these programs is to address the highest poverty students and school districts. This should be accomplished in a manner that does not impose significant, unplanned shortfalls for schools or states during such a transition. The most effective role the federal government can serve is to provide the resources and support necessary to help these populations.

Competitive Grants versus Categorical Programs

Under the current construct, the competitive grant programs provide an advantage for school districts with the capacity to engage in the grant writing process. This indirectly favors those

school districts with more resources to employ grant writers and other qualified staff to seek out and receive this funding. A better approach would be to redesign these programs, like Reading First and other competitive grant programs, into formula or categorical grant programs that would provide more resources to every school district, rather than those with the staff to acquire these resources. Two caveats would be to ensure a poverty weighting formula in the calculation and to retain the existing allowable uses of these programs. By changing to categorical programs, every school district would have access to these funds. Congress should drive funds to those school districts with high-poverty and high-need students, rather than those schools with effective grant writers.

Supporting Learners with Special Needs

The current federal guidelines and sanctions for students with special needs (IDEA) and English language learners are punitive and not realistic. These guidelines need to be changed to more accurately reflect school, district, and student success at the local level and in compliance with state standards.

English language learners should be given the flexibility to demonstrate progress while assimilating. This is best done over the course of three years, rather than in one year. Schools should be allowed to demonstrate growth and progress over a three-year period before receiving sanctions.

For students with disabilities, schools are punished for not reaching goals that may not be viable to a student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP). We recommend that the IEP be the measure for learning of students with disabilities. An IEP is a realistic, personalized, and relevant assessment of a student's learning progress and expectations. Throughout the plan, benchmarks are established and the goals are all student-specific and focused. IEPs are predictors of student abilities and reflections of learning goals. Test preparation may not be a relevant learning exercise in the student's IEP. Also, test preparation takes time that could detract from fulfilling the goals of the IEP.

Secondary School Innovations

Various proposals call for increased testing at the high school level. These proposals include expanding the subjects tested and the frequency of tests. ASCD recommends creating a dedicated fund to support and encourage innovative measures to help redesign our nation's high schools. This fund should be directed to high schools in high-poverty areas with low graduation rates and also those high schools with proven results to expand their innovations and assist high schools in need of improvement. Resources from this fund should focus on the development of multiple measures of assessment, flexible use of time and structure, and rewarding those school districts that implement a nontraditional calendar or school day and achieve high results. More resources should be allotted for schools that share their best practices with low-performing schools.