

Forum on Educational Accountability

FEA@fairtest.org <http://www.edaccountability.org> 857-350-8207

FEA Recommendations for Improving ESEA/NCLB - Summary

The Forum on Educational Accountability (FEA) has released recommendations for the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA, currently “No Child Left Behind” or NCLB). These proposals strengthen public schools, improve learning, enhance equity and empower educators, by improving federal policy in the areas of assessment, accountability, capacity building, and opportunity to learn. The full reform agenda is at <http://www.edaccountability.org/Legislative.html>. FEA carries forward the *Joint Organizational Statement on NLCB*, signed by 152 national organizations.

While FEA supports some components of the Department of Education's "Blueprint," we have serious concerns about several elements, such as continued support of a model that punishes schools and educators for poor test performance, rather than providing supports to help them improve. Our plan, summarized below, ensures schools have the capacity to help all children achieve success.

On assessment:

- Require states to use multiple sources of evidence of various types (“multiple measures”) in evaluating schools.
- Support development of improved assessments, such as performance tasks and projects, which states can make available to educators and incorporate into large-scale assessments.
- Support development of state and local assessment systems that include classroom-based evidence as part of public reporting and accountability and for improving teaching and learning.
- Support use of growth and improvement approaches, provided they incorporate multiple measures.
- Ensure new assessments consider the needs of diverse learners, including use of the principles of universal design for learning.
- Reduce the amount of mandated testing, e.g., returning to requirements in the 1994 federal law (once each in elementary, middle and high schools), thus aligning the U.S. with the practices of most nations which find fewer but better assessments produce superior results.

FEA believes the Blueprint and Education Department guidelines for assessment consortia continue an overuse of testing, are weak on multiple measures, do not allow the use of local evidence for accountability, and are unclear as to whether growth measures must incorporate multiple measures. However, they do acknowledge some value of performance items and universal design principles.

On accountability:

- Eliminate “adequate yearly progress” (AYP) requirements and sanctions, while retaining the reporting of data disaggregated by demographic group, as endorsed in the Blueprint.
- Avoid tying the goal of ensuring all students are on track to be college and workforce ready to an arbitrary and impossible 2020 deadline. Expect demonstration of reasonably attainable rates of improvement (e.g., those now achieved by schools in the top quarter on improvement rates).

- In evaluating and recommending interventions in and changes to schools or districts, use both multiple sources of evidence - comprehensive indicators - and reviews of schools and districts by qualified state teams.
- Allow a broad range of “turnaround” options, rather than the narrow menu established in NCLB, Race to the Top, School Improvement Grants, and the Blueprint. Use indicators and reviews to tailor change actions to schools’ needs. Build improvement plans from elements demonstrated to be essential to school improvement, e.g., collaborative professional development, strong leadership, parent involvement, and rich and challenging curriculum.
- Establish the principle of holding schools and districts accountable through monitoring and public reporting to ensure consistent and successful efforts to fulfill improvement plans.
- Develop a formula linking the number of schools required to engage in change activities to federal appropriation levels, rather than adopt the Blueprint provision setting specified percentages of schools subject to turnaround regardless of funding.
- Assist states and districts to develop and implement sound and fair educator evaluation policies aimed primarily at improvement, rather than the Blueprint model, which largely shifts test-based accountability from schools to educators. Good evaluation programs should include evidence of student learning, but scores from large-scale tests would play only a small part.

On public school improvement/capacity building:

- As part of high-quality professional learning, require all Title I-funded schools to provide time for staff collaboration. Strengthen educators’ capacity to work with diverse learners and parents and to assess all students well. Use funds saved by eliminating mandated tutoring and transfers, as the Blueprint proposes, for professional development.
- Strengthen parent involvement and support for parents to assist in their child’s learning, critical factors almost entirely absent from the Blueprint.
- Require teacher preparation programs under Title II to include one-year intensive clinical placements, as in current law under the Teacher Quality Grant Program in Title II of the Higher Education.

On opportunity to learn and equity:

- Significantly increase federal funding by making Title I and IDEA Part B mandatory federal budget items, fully funded at authorized levels. Use formulas ensuring all public schools serving needy children obtain significant support. Significantly increase support for professional development, the education of English learners, school improvement, parental involvement, and the capacity of states to assist districts and schools. Avoid the overuse of competitive grants, as proposed in the Administration’s FY2011 budget, which would reduce real-dollar funding for school programs.
- Require states, with federal funding, to develop comprehensive indicator systems on the distribution within and across districts of resources important to schooling. Compile data on out-of-school indicators such as health care, unemployment and student/family mobility rates. Require states to consider this evidence in school evaluations, and to develop strategies for providing resources to overcome inequities identified by the indicators. The Blueprint acknowledges these concerns; however, its recommendations must be strengthened.