

PROGRESS REPORT: NCLB/ESEA Reauthorization

TO: Freshmen Members of Congress
FR: George Miller

In response to recommendations from parents, teachers, principals, superintendents, and other stakeholders at our 13 NCLB/ESEA hearings this year and a review of written recommendations from over 90 education groups, I have asked committee staff to develop proposals for our consideration in nine key areas. Your feedback on these changes is key to the reauthorization process. Thank you.

- ***Allow states to use growth models that recognize progress over time.***
The current accountability system requires schools to compare different groups of students year to year (i.e. comparing this year's third graders with last year's third graders). Schools are judged to have made "adequate yearly progress" (AYP) only when a set percentage of students reach an established benchmark at a given time – regardless of schools having a range of starting points in terms of their students' proficiency. States should be allowed to use growth models that can expand the focus – and give schools credit for – the progress of low-performing and high-performing students. Funding would be provided to help states design and establish the data systems used for growth models and to expand the use of data and technology in our schools.
- ***Allow states to use more than test scores to measure student learning and school performance.*** Concerns have been expressed that too much weight is placed on standardized tests and that student progress should be measured more fairly, comprehensively, and accurately. States should be allowed to gather multiple sources of evidence of student and school success – such as graduation rates and real-time classroom tests that allow teachers to adjust their instruction as necessary.
- ***Improve test quality.*** Concerns must be addressed about fairness, validity, reliability, and appropriateness of tests for the students being tested, particularly for students who are in special education or students who are English Language Learners. In exchange for increased resources for developing tests, states should be required to improve the quality of tests to better measure what students know and can do to help drive richer classroom instruction.
- ***Direct appropriate and flexible interventions to schools that need the most assistance.*** Schools that have not made AYP are all treated the same under NCLB – with the same interventions and sanctions taking place over the same period of time. Schools should be allowed to use proven instructional interventions appropriate to their needs, and chronically struggling schools must receive more intensive support and assistance.

- ***Address the high school dropout crisis and take comprehensive steps to turn around low-performing high schools.*** Over 30 percent of all high school students fail to receive a diploma on time. Proposals should include providing critical support to help turn around low-performing high schools and ways to guarantee real progress toward closing graduation gaps. Safeguards must be put in place to ensure that the Department of Education does not allow states to over-inflate their graduation rates and assessment scores by using questionable statistics.
- ***Making necessary changes to assessments and accountability so that the law works better for English Language Learners (ELLs).*** NCLB requires states to offer assessments in the language and form most likely to yield accurate data “to the extent practicable.” This has resulted in only a small number of states that have developed appropriate academic assessments for ELLs. Proposals should prioritize closing the achievement gap between ELL students and their English proficient peers and ensure sound instructional practices are available for ELL instruction.
- ***Modify the assessment and accountability systems so that the academic progress of students with disabilities can be accurately measured and reported.*** NCLB requires the majority of students with disabilities to be assessed at grade level rather than at instructional level thereby creating a disconnect between the law and some students’ Individual Education Plans (IEPs). Assessments should be developed that would more accurately reflect what students have learned.
- ***Build and elevate the teaching profession by providing teachers and principals with the supports they need to succeed – including higher salaries, career ladders, mentoring, and performance pay based on proven models.*** The teacher shortage crisis and the need to increase the number of outstanding teachers in shortage subjects like math, science, foreign language, special education and English Language Learners must be a priority. It is also imperative that we help close the achievement gap by closing the teacher quality gap – making sure that poor and minority students have teachers of the same quality as do other students.
- ***Increase funding so that all schools have the resources they need to help all children succeed.*** Since signing No Child Left Behind in 2002, President Bush has shortchanged schools by over \$56 billion. We are focused on putting funding for our schools back on track. On June 7th the House Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Subcommittee approved a **\$4.2 billion** increase for education for 2008. This includes an 8.4 percent increase in funding for No Child Left Behind. Programs that will see substantial increases include Title I Grants (an increase of \$1.5 billion for a total of \$14.3 billion), the Title I School Improvement Fund (an increase of \$375 million for a total of \$500 million), and English Language Acquisition Grants (an increase of \$106 million for a total of \$775 million – the highest level of funding in the history of the program.)