



POLICY PRIORITIES

AN INFORMATION
BRIEF FROM ASCD



ASCD and
Education Policy

75 YEARS OF LEADERSHIP





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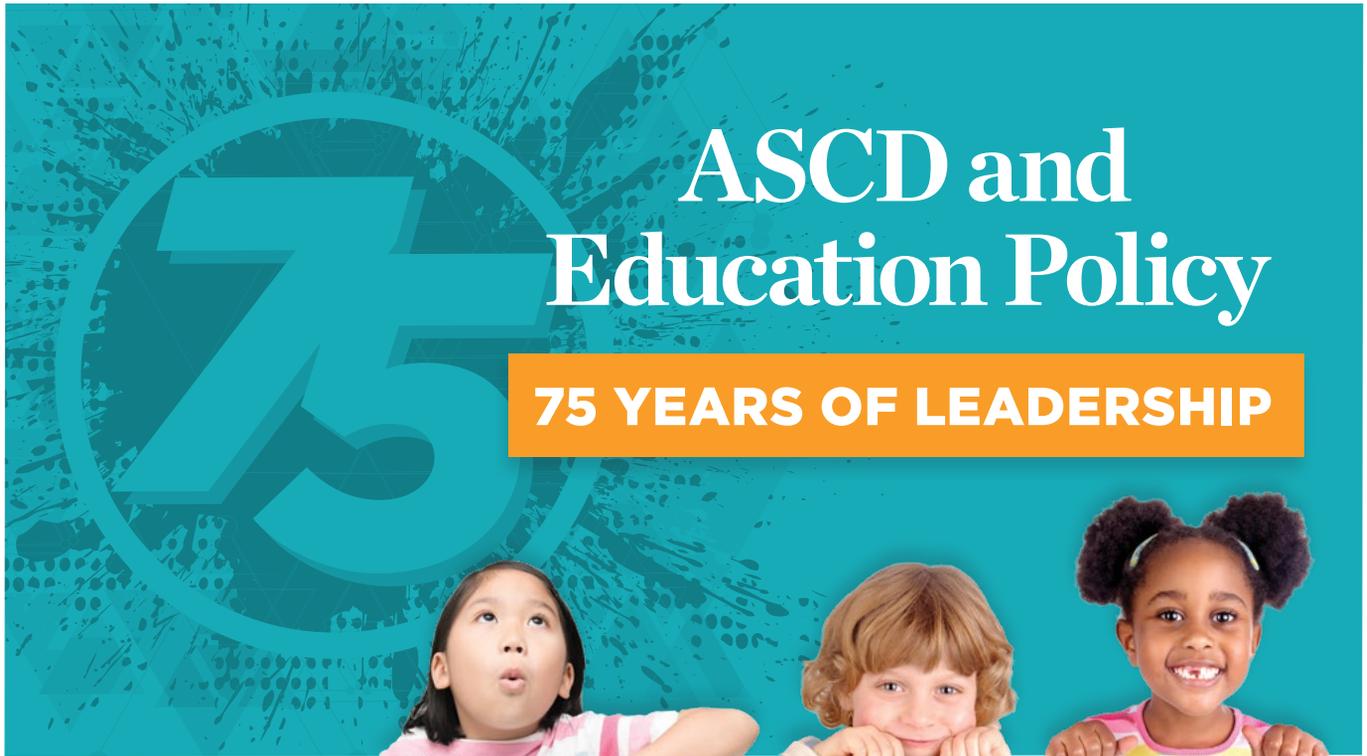
AN INFORMATION BRIEF FROM ASCD

Providing educator advocates with timely and in-depth insight into a variety of education policies.

VOLUME 24 /// ISSUE 01 /// SPRING 2018

ASCD and Education Policy

75 YEARS OF LEADERSHIP



A FOND FAREWELL

ASCD is discontinuing the *Policy Priorities* newsletter after this Spring 2018 issue. The publication began 23 years ago as a monthly newsletter, *Infobrief*, and transitioned to a quarterly policy brief providing background information and context for critical, timely education policy issues for administrators, teachers, policymakers, and the public. We will be focusing on new channels for communicating our policy and advocacy efforts in the months ahead.



This issue and the archives of *Policy Priorities* (and *Infobrief*) remain open at www.ascd.org/policypriorities.

IN 2018, ALL CHILDREN IN THE United States receive a free public K-12 education regardless of their race, ethnicity, physical or mental abilities, socioeconomic situation, or immigration status. This inclusive climate is the culmination of more than 70 years of efforts to dismantle policies that denied access to specific groups of school-age children.

For most of the 20th century, most public schools in the United States operated under a system of legally sanctioned racial segregation that was based on the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* U.S. Supreme Court ruling. It wouldn't be until 1954 that the U.S. Supreme Court rejected that framework.

In *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), Chief Justice Earl Warren delivered the court's unanimous ruling, stating "We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has

no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.”

This landmark civil rights decision was followed two decades later by an equally monumental mandate that public schools provide equal educational opportunities for students with disabilities. Passage of the 1975 federal Education for All Handicapped Children Act, now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), guaranteed a free, appropriate public education for students with disabilities.

These historic examples of increased equity and access mark just two of the positive changes within the American public education system over the last seven decades. Progress has been uneven. Plenty of concerns, such as greater resource equity, still need to be addressed. As a nation, we struggle to educate an increasingly diverse and economically less affluent K–12 student population to achieve higher career, college, and citizenship expectations.

Despite these challenges, successes in education policy have been substantial. Educator advocates, supported and informed by ASCD over 75 years, have achieved significant legislative and legal changes to the nation’s public education system that benefit all children.

Equity: Before and After *Brown v. Board*

ASCD was founded in 1943, more than a decade before the *Brown v. Board* decision. From the start, the organization welcomed any educator regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, or national background. The organization was also a vocal proponent for civil rights in 1947, 1948, 1950, 1952, and 1954 (Van Til, 1986).

Then, as now, ASCD viewed educational equity as a core principal of democracy. Public policies, according

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to a standing position the organization adopted in 1959, should entitle all children to “safe, healthy, and comfortable school facilities; well-qualified teachers and other staff members; high-quality curriculum and learning materials; and adequate supplies and equipment” (ASCD, n.d.-a).

Despite the tectonic shift in legal support provided by *Brown v. Board*, change on the ground was slow to arrive. Schoolchildren, such as civil rights icon Rep. John Lewis (D-Ga.), expected that they would experience immediate, material improvements in their education.

“I thought . . . that I would go to a better school,” he said. At a desegregated school, “I wouldn’t have to ride a broken-down bus, and I would be able to get new books. But it never happened for me. It never happened” (Tippett & Lewis, 2017).

More than two decades, additional court rulings, and innumerable political and social changes would occur before America’s public schools were fully integrated (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2004). ASCD committed to the movement, passing a resolution in 1955 that called for all public schools to be “open and free to children of all people . . . to develop to their fullest potential.” Starting in 1959, the association passed the first of several resolutions to “recognize, value and encourage equity and cultural diversity as major goals of education” (ASCD, 2004, p. 72).

Slow as full integration was to take hold, impressive educational gains

have been made. Prior to *Brown*, only one in seven African Americans graduated high school, compared to one in three white Americans. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, by 2014, 85 percent of African Americans and 89 percent of white Americans received high school diplomas. The rate of African Americans graduating college also improved. Before *Brown*, only one in 40 African Americans earned a college degree. Now, more than one in five do (Brownstein, 2014).

ESEA: Enshrining Equity in Law

President Lyndon Johnson’s signing of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education (ESEA) Act substantively changed the federal government’s role in public education, traditionally the purview of states and local municipalities. ESEA created funding streams for educational programming—if states met certain terms.

ESEA’s driving force has always been its first title, which sets out to provide children who live in poverty, in every state, with an equitably funded education. At its core, Title I bolsters state and local efforts to provide socioeconomically disadvantaged students with the additional educational supports they need to achieve academic success.

President Johnson’s initial pledge of \$1 billion dollars was intended as a down payment for more substantial

federal government investments. ESEA's Title I was a signature legislative component to his "war on poverty." But funding the escalating Vietnam war foiled those plans, curtailing domestic spending on it and the attendant education initiatives (Lawrence, 2017).

From the start, ASCD has argued that federal funding is an essential investment in students and schools, consistently reaffirming its support for education as a policy priority at every level of government. The organization has also maintained a longstanding policy, beginning in 1959, that school funding should be broadly based and not hinge on the financial means of a student's family or strength of the local tax base (ASCD, n.d.-a).

Today the federal government funds Title I at more than \$14 billion annually (an expenditure of approximately \$500 to \$600 per student), which it disburses via four formula grants to states and districts that have flexibility in how they spend their allocations (Dynarski & Kainz, 2015). School districts may use their Title I funds to pay for services intended to meet specific educational needs of children living in poverty, such as the salaries of teachers, math and reading coaches, and paraprofessionals and curriculum materials, teacher professional development, prekindergarten, and afterschool and summer programs. Currently, 21 million American children (U.S. Department of Education, 2015)—more than 50 percent of American

public schoolchildren—benefit from Title I-funded services (Dynarski & Kainz, 2015).

IDEA: Increased Access, Inadequate Support

In 1975, the federal government enacted another landmark education law that addressed civil rights. The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (now IDEA) mandated that children with disabilities receive access to a "free, appropriate public education."

In 1970, U.S. schools educated only one in five children with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Most of these children spent the majority, if not the entirety, of their school day educated in special classrooms separated from the general school population.

Before these federal protections, individual states determined which children could be denied a public school education based on issues such as deafness, blindness, or intellectual disabilities (Crockett, 2015). These legal restrictions left families with few choices. Those who could not afford private educational options were forced to arrange home care for their children or place them in state-run institutions.

Perhaps in response to this untenable situation, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act passed with overwhelming support of Congress and then-President Gerald R. Ford. While

supportive, Ford cautioned that the law would likely strain the fiscal resources of the federal government as well fall short of its promises (Davis, 2007).

"Everyone can agree with the objective stated in the title of this bill—educating all handicapped children in our nation," Ford said. "The key question is whether the bill will really accomplish that objective. Even the strongest supporters of this measure know as well as I that they are falsely raising the expectations of the groups affected by claiming authorization levels which are excessive and unrealistic."

The original terms of the law set a goal for the federal government to pay 40 percent of the average per-pupil expenditure to help offset the schools' excess special education costs. The federal government has never come close to that goal, currently providing only about 18 percent of the costs. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), approximately 6.6 million students today receive IDEA-approved educational services, which is roughly 13 percent of total public school enrollment (2017).

No Child Left Behind—from Accountability

When President George W. Bush reauthorized ESEA in 2002, calling it the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, he dramatically expanded the federal involvement in state and local education decision making. NCLB instituted a punitive and exacting accountability system that required schools to implement a specific series of interventions in schools where students did not perform well on mandated state tests. Adequate yearly progress (AYP) measures required states to determine how well public school students performed on their summative assessments. States also had to disaggregate their testing

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data into various categories such as race, ethnicity, gender, disability, and socioeconomic status. Schools that failed to demonstrate year over year improvements in student proficiency were sanctioned.

NCLB became law via bipartisan congressional support. This data disaggregation to identify achievement gaps remains one of its most positive legacies.

But when NCLB began labeling schools, in increasing numbers, as needing improvement due to flat state test scores (but never rewarded for gains), opposition to the law grew. A critical mass of educators and parents strongly objected to the law's prescriptive solutions, one-size-fits-all

approach to accountability, punitive sanctions, and singular focus on reading and math to the exclusion of all other academic subjects. Policymakers finally decided that accountability assessment needed more meaningful and *multiple* measures of successful student progress.

Policy and the Whole Child

Critics argued that NCLB's emphasis on reading and math proficiency resulted in a narrowed curriculum. Education experts expressed deep concerns that children, especially those attending schools serving

disproportionately high numbers of students living in poverty, were not receiving the well-rounded, comprehensive, and holistic educations they deserved—and needed—for success in school and after graduation.

In response to this curriculum trend, ASCD convened a group of well-respected experts across the fields of education, business, and policy to recast America's definition of a successful learner. ASCD's Commission on the Whole Child reimaged a U.S. education system that would ensure positive educational outcomes for each child.

The commission's findings provided the foundation for ASCD's Whole Child Initiative (WCI). The WCI shapes every aspect of the organization's

Education Policy: A Timeline

Despite complaints about stifling bureaucracy and the slow pace of change, education policy has made meaningful impacts on the state of schooling in the United States over the last several decades. For those wishing to take a deep dive into this area of federal law, we've highlighted a few of the most consequential policies implemented during ASCD's lifespan:

- 1954:** U.S. Supreme Court case, *Brown v. Board of Education*, declares the practice of racially segregating public schools unconstitutional.
- 1964:** Title VI of the Civil Rights Act prohibits discrimination in schools based on race, color, or national origin.
- 1965:** Title I of ESEA creates a funding source to assist local schools educating socio-economically disadvantaged children.
- 1965:** The Higher Education Act authorizes federal aid for post-secondary students.
- 1972:** Title IX of the Education Amendments Act prohibits discrimination based on sex in public schools.
- 1973:** Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act prohibits discrimination based on disability in public schools.
- 1975:** The Education for All Handicapped Children Act requires public schools to provide a free, appropriate education to students with disabilities.
- 1980:** Congress establishes the cabinet-level U.S. Department of Education.
- 2001:** President George W. Bush reauthorizes ESEA as NCLB, ushering in standards-based testing reforms and sanctions against schools not meeting AYP goals.
- 2009:** The American Reinvestment and Recovery Act earmarks more than \$90 billion for education, including the Race to the Top initiative, aimed at spurring K-12 education reform.
- 2009:** The Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association launch the Common Core State Standards Initiative.
- 2015:** President Obama reauthorizes ESEA as ESSA, with a new focus on assessing student achievement by multiple measures.

work across its professional development offerings, including its work with affiliate members and the public policy arena.

“‘Whole child education’ was not a term created by ASCD,” acknowledges David Griffith, ASCD’s senior director for advocacy and government relations, “but we did help popularize it and define it as an approach toward ensuring that children feel healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged in schools and at home. It is really about redefining what we mean by student ‘success’ and then helping achieve it with sound, research-based policies and practices.”

This focus on the whole child guided ASCD’s advice to policymakers during the 2015 NCLB reauthorization—now known as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). ASCD urged Congress to create more meaningful and transparent accountability systems that:

- assess students’ command of a range of core subjects beyond English language arts and mathematics;
- use various measures such as formative assessments, evidence of learning, and progress toward personal growth objectives; and
- incorporate important nonacademic factors such as measures of school climate, safety, and parental engagement.

“The passage of ESSA was a welcome sign that national lawmakers recognized the value of a whole child approach to student achievement and school quality,” Griffith says. “No bill is ever ‘perfect’; however, ESSA provides states and districts with the opportunity and much-needed flexibility to measure student success beyond state test scores and to emphasize a more well-rounded education for all students, especially for those most in need.”

ASCD has sustained its whole child focus for more than a decade, offering a full range of practical supports (across programs, policies, and resources) for educators, families, community members, and policymakers to fulfill the mission of educating the whole child.

Educator advocates who attended ASCD’s recent 2018 Leadership Institute for Legislative Advocacy (LILA) conference, learned how a book published by the association two decades prior helped advance social and emotional learning (SEL).

LILA keynote speaker Tim Shriver, president of Special Olympics and cofounder and cochair of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), shared that ASCD’s 1997 book, *Promoting Social and Emotional Learning*, provided foundational text to the SEL field and helped move the conversation from scholarly discussions into the mainstream of education policymaking and practice.

One of ASCD’s most significant achievements was its Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) model, which was developed in partnership with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC). The WSCC model offers a framework for education and health sectors, families, and communities to collaborate in improving each child’s cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development (ASCD, n.d.-b).

In this model, ASCD’s Whole Child tenets align with the CDC’s components of a safe, healthy learning environment: health education, physical education and physical activity, nutrition education, health services, social and emotional climate, psychological and social services, physical environment, employee wellness, family engagement, and community involvement.

As of 2018, 31 states have adopted the WSCC model, with 12 more states using ASCD’s Whole Child approach

and the WSCC to develop their ESSA plans, which outline their intentions for creating safe and supportive learning environments and addressing the social and emotional, physical, and mental health of students (Cairn Guidance, n.d.).

In addition, ASCD’s legislative agenda, which guides its annual federal policy priorities, has been predicated on the goal of a whole child education for the past decade. Griffith adds that ASCD’s 2018 agenda acknowledges the “mutual responsibility of schools and communities to provide a personalized academic experience that ensures a well-rounded education and the necessary wraparound services for each student to succeed. It calls on policymakers to offer healthy, nutritious meals to all students; and to foster greater alignment, integration, and collaboration between education and the health sector to improve each child’s cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development.”

The Quest for Common Academic Standards

In 2009, the National Governor’s Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers, with financial support from the Gates Foundation, began a project to rewrite the standards that guide classroom teaching and learning. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) sought to provide higher, clearer standards in English language arts and mathematics that would offer states a strong benchmark of comparable quality.

Forty-five states and the District of Columbia adopted the new standards with the encouragement of the Obama administration. The administration also allocated \$360 billion to two state testing consortia—The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and

the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (Smarter Balanced)—to develop state assessments aligned to the new standards.

ASCD's Position Advisory Committee conducted a deliberative, year-long study of the CCSS before endorsing them. The organization, via its 2010 adopted position, supported the development of state-led, transparent, high learning standards that would be implemented according to the following principles:

- Educate the whole child through a broad and rich curriculum;
- Contain global competencies that develop the skills, knowledge, and attitudes to work effectively in an increasingly interdependent world;
- Provide equity in learning conditions for all students;
- Ensure effective instruction that results in increased learning for all students;
- Expand assessment options in measuring progress toward attaining the standards while maintaining accountability for results;
- Rely on multiple indicators for assessing student performance and achievement;
- Develop coherent policies that support and align teacher preparation, licensure, and ongoing professional development requirements and activities;
- Include representation of educators at all levels and incorporates their input throughout the development, implementation, and evaluation process; and
- Maintain ongoing support among policymakers, educators, parents, and communities to secure necessary resources for the standards and their successful implementation.

Unfortunately, misperceptions about the federal government's role in the CCSS quickly led to criticism that

the United States was moving toward a nationalized public education system. Public citizens, including parents, criticized the standards development and implementation processes as lacking transparency. Many regarded the new assessments as simply more—not improved—testing.

Backlash against the standards prompted many state departments of education to review their ELA and math standards. This year, U.S. Education Secretary Betsy DeVos opined that the standards “are dead.” Still, they remain in effect in 35 states and D.C. Ten states did rewrite their standards, which resulted in varying degrees of change—from simple rebranding, to some tweaks, to major rewrites or outright replacement (Ujifusa, Bannerjee, & Tomko, 2017).

Public Education's Past and Future

Today, more than 50 million children in America—approximately 90 percent of all school-age children—attend public schools (NCES, n.d.). The United States, notes Griffith, has long viewed public education as integral to our democratic system.

More work is needed, he acknowledges, to continue improving the system, especially given evolving student demographics. Recent trends in school enrollment show an increasingly diverse student body with the numbers of African American, Latino/Hispanic, and Asian student populations all increasing (Maxwell, 2014). In addition, more than 50 percent of the nation's public schoolchildren now come from low-income families. That number is predicted to increase (Suits, 2015). All of which will require new efforts at all levels to meet the needs of this changing population.

What will be federal policymakers' next major role in improving our nation's public education system? The

current administration has signaled strong support for shifting education decision making to the states, a policy move celebrated by some and dismissed by others, and for diverting funds from the public school system toward vouchers.

Back in 1996, ASCD members defined public education's crucial role in sustaining democracy: “Democracies depend on public schools for the education of active citizens through equal access to a free, high-quality public education. Schools are critical public sites for nurturing the hope of democracy by preparing students to participate fully in civic life and in the building of a better society” (ASCD, n.d.-a).

That belief is more important than ever, Griffith contends. Public education in the 21st century has achieved significant milestones in 2016, such as an all-time high graduation rate of 84 percent and more than a million high school students enrolled in at least one advanced placement class—double the number 10 years ago (Balingit, 2017; College Board, 2017).

“Public education has never been better in this country in terms of school rigor, educator quality, and student achievement. This progress toward an equitable education for all, while slow and incomplete, is a result of the contributions—at both the practice and policy levels—of educator advocates like ASCD members for more than seven decades. Here's to another successful 75 years, for ASCD and America's schools!”

Barbara Michelman is a freelance education writer and consultant who lives in Virginia.

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