



2006 ASCD Legislative Agenda: Brief Policy Papers

The following brief policy papers provide expanded information on each of the Association's top five legislative priorities for 2006. For more information about these issues, including printer-friendly versions of the 2006 ASCD Legislative Agenda and the key messages, please visit www.ascd.org/legislativeagenda.

Multiple Measures of Assessment

Current Status

Under the U.S. No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), schools and districts must meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) requirements by demonstrating students' proficiency on mandatory assessments each year. Currently, NCLB requires assessments in math and literacy in grades 3–8 and 10. In 2007–2008, those requirements will increase when science assessment is added once in grades 3–5, 6–9, and 10–12. Although NCLB is not slated for reauthorization until 2007, the testing provisions of the law may be addressed in the coming year through other legislation or regulations.

The U.S. Department of Education, for example, has approved a pilot program that allows 10 states to develop growth models of assessment. Growth models allow schools and districts to meet accountability requirements by tracking individual student progress over time, as opposed to comparing the performance of one year's group of students to that of the following year's students.

ASCD Supports Multiple Measures of Assessment

ASCD supports assessments and accountability based on valid and reliable information from multiple data sources. When done properly, measuring student learning is an essential tool in educating children. The use of multiple and/or formative assessments provides appropriate evidence of student learning to ensure accountability to students and the district community. The data from these assessments can be used to help modify instructional practice to better meet students' individual learning needs.

Unfortunately, many of the assessments used to make high-stakes decisions do not meet these criteria. NCLB places too much emphasis on single assessments administered once each year. These single assessments make up a narrow accountability system that is inadequate for measuring the full breadth of student learning. What's more, the data from these assessments are often insufficient to help teachers improve their instruction. In some states, teachers receive information only about the percentages of students who fail certain tests, without the detailed information they need to help those students succeed.

Researchers from the University of Washington found that “because of the way most high-stakes assessments are designed and the way scores are reported, students with . . . vastly different strengths and weaknesses can actually receive the same score.” The lack of complete information means that teachers are unaware of differences among students that would call for dramatically different interventions. According to the researchers, “unless we look beneath test scores, at individual students and the conditions that foster high-quality learning, more and more students will continue to fall below the bar” (Valencia & Riddle Buly, 2004).

The U.S. Department of Education Web site claims that annual testing provides information that helps teachers improve student performance and diagnose problems. This is incorrect. As assessment expert W. James Popham (2006) writes in *Educational Leadership*, the vast majority of state standardized tests used for accountability under NCLB are instructionally insensitive—“they’re unable to detect even striking instructional improvements when such improvements occur.”

The U.S. Department of Education Web site also states, “If a single annual test were the only device a teacher used to gauge student performance, it would indeed be inadequate. Effective teachers assess their students in various ways during the school year.” If the Department of Education admits that a single test is inadequate as a comprehensive student assessment, then it stands to reason that a single test is inadequate as the sole determinant of school performance under NCLB. According to Stephen Raudenbush (2004), evaluating schools with the tests typically used for NCLB is “scientifically indefensible.”

ASCD calls upon the U.S. Congress and the U.S. Department of Education to allow the use of multiple assessments for evaluating student growth and performance. Creating a more sophisticated assessment system is crucial to improving the education of all children. Such a system will ensure not only that important accountability decisions are based on the best possible data, but also that data can be used by educators to determine which students are struggling, what strategies are working to help those children, and how they should adjust their instruction to ensure that each child succeeds.

As Popham argues, the current assessment system may push out forms of assessment that can demonstrably help students learn. A better assessment system would help states employ instructionally sensitive accountability tests capable of detecting the effect of first-rate teaching (Popham, 2006). Additional flexibility that the U.S. Department of Education has provided for states to explore value-added assessment is only a beginning. **ASCD also calls for flexibility that will allow additional assessment data to be incorporated at the school level, including**

portfolio assessments and other authentic assessment data. Improvements to the assessment system must also allow for the use of formative assessments.

As the directors of the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing have said, “A single test cannot address all that is important for students to know and be able to do. Multiple measures are needed to address the full depth and breadth of our expectations for student learning.” Beyond multiple-choice and short-answer items that are typical of current assessments, “other types of performance measures—essays, applied projects, portfolios, demonstrations, oral presentations, etc.—are needed to represent and guide students’ progress” (Herman, Baker, & Linn, 2004).

ASCD is opposed to federal sanctions that are determined by performance on a single assessment. Using a single test as the determinant for student, individual school, and school district performance does not present an accurate assessment and will result in inappropriately and inaccurately labeled students, schools, and school districts.

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Comprehensive Professional Development

Current Status

Under No Child Left Behind (NCLB), Title II, Improving Teacher Quality, is the primary federal program for professional development of teachers, principals, and other administrators. Title II, which is funded at \$2.8 billion for 2006, primarily supports grants to states and school districts. The funds may be used to hire, retain, and recruit teachers; establish mentoring programs; and reform teacher and principal certification procedures. Additional allowable uses include improving early childhood teaching and literacy development, and enhancing teacher subject mastery and technology programs. Under the proposed budget for fiscal year 2007, the House and Senate have asked to reduce funding for this program by almost \$140 million.

Teacher quality grants are a categorical grant program; therefore, the money flows to school districts based on formulas. States receive funding through formula grants that are based 65 percent on poverty and 35 percent on population. The states are then required to direct 95 percent of the money to school districts. The formula that the states use for this disbursement is 80 percent based on poverty and 20 percent on population.

Although there are other opportunities for professional development resources and programs, Title II is the largest federal program that meets this need. Other professional development opportunities and resources are available through competitive grants. For many school districts, however, pursuing a competitive grant is an insurmountable obstacle because they do not have the capacity to complete the extensive process.

The American Competitiveness Initiative, which was proposed this year by President Bush to provide incentives to increase the number and skills of teachers in math and science, presents another opportunity for professional development resources. This initiative includes additional resources to recruit and train new teachers in math and science.

ASCD Supports Professional Development for All Educators

ASCD supports high-quality professional development, including leadership development for all educators. Students are better served when local school districts are given ample resources and flexibility for professional development to build instructional and leadership capacity.

Currently, many professional development programs focus on teachers and their impact in the classroom. Helping teachers to understand the content they teach and how students learn that content is a vital aspect of professional development. The importance of high-quality teachers cannot be overstated—teachers who know their content and how to teach it have the greatest potential for improving student achievement. Many studies show the importance of this type of professional development for math and science teachers. There is a need for more research to examine the effect of professional development on language arts, social studies, and other areas of the curriculum.

Teachers are not the only educators in need of professional development. According to the Wallace Foundation, school leadership is second only to teacher quality among school-related factors that have an effect on student learning. School leadership matters. This was the finding of a recent study by Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL). Using 25 years of education research, McREL determined that improving principals' leadership abilities by one standard deviation would lead to an increase in average student achievement of 10 percentile points. Professional development must meet the needs of school building and school district leaders, including district personnel who influence curriculum, learning materials, and school improvement.

ASCD calls upon the U.S. Congress to provide increased resources and flexibility for comprehensive, high-quality professional development. To improve student achievement, school districts need both quality teachers and quality school leaders. High-quality professional development opportunities must be available to all educators in a school district. Teachers and educational leaders who are highly qualified through ongoing professional learning in all career stages have the greatest effect in improving student learning.

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High School Reform

Current Status

In the budget for fiscal year 2007, President George Bush proposed expanding the requirements of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) to high schools. The budget includes approximately \$1.5 billion for high school reform; more in-depth proposals are anticipated from the Bush administration.

High school reform is a prominent education topic among governors, educators, business groups, and others across the country. Several themes emerge: greater rigor, economic competitiveness, and better preparation for students (both those who are college-bound and those planning to go directly into the workplace). Policymakers throughout the federal, state, and local sectors are interested in making the educational experience for students in grades 9–12 more stringent and more meaningful. Increased attention has also been paid to the need to reduce dropout rates, including the need to improve student engagement. Research has shown that students who are not engaged are at a much higher risk of dropping out. Engaged students not only attend school more, but are also likely to get more out of their time in school because they approach learning more eagerly, seek greater opportunities, and persist in the face of difficulty (Voke, 2002).

ASCD Calls for Flexibility and Resources to Support Innovative High School Reform

ASCD, like many leading policymakers, believes that we must begin to reform high school to make it more educationally meaningful for students while preparing them for continued education or work in a global marketplace. Currently, ASCD is exploring how to improve the overall high school experience and spur greater involvement with communities and businesses.

To accomplish this, **ASCD seeks a partnership with the federal government to support and encourage high school reform.** The U.S. Congress can create the conditions for innovative high school reform by providing flexibility, autonomy, and resources at the state and local level. Currently, states from Connecticut to Alaska are actively considering varying measures of high school reform. The questions about how to reform high schools are as varied as the states themselves. In some instances, legislative initiatives to reform high schools are driven directly by the state's governor. In other states, high school reform is being addressed by state boards of education or through commissions or panels.

Reform approaches are also varied. Proposed reform approaches include core curriculum, new graduation requirements, exit exams aligned with college entrance exams, dropout prevention

programs, more math and science classes, and scholarship programs. The different approaches reflect the varying conditions in each state and the necessity for flexibility and autonomy to meet a wide variety of needs. **ASCD calls on the federal government to enable states and school districts to determine which approaches are most effective for each locality's unique situation.**

ASCD is opposed to school choice programs that do not provide equal access for all students. We will fail to successfully reform high schools if we rely on programs that send only a few students to select private schools without ensuring equal access for all students. In addition, **ASCD remains opposed to policies that evaluate schools, students, and reform methods on the basis of a narrowly constructed testing system.**

References

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School Readiness

Current Status

The U.S. Congress is currently working to reauthorize the school readiness initiative Head Start. Head Start provides comprehensive educational, social, health, nutritional, and psychological services to poor children and their families. Funding in fiscal year 2006 is \$6.8 billion in grants to 1,700 local organizations serving nearly 1 million children.

The House of Representatives passed its version of the Head Start reauthorization, the School Readiness Act (H.R. 2123), on September 22, 2005. The Senate Education Committee passed its version, the Head Start Improvements for School Readiness (S. 1107), on May 25, 2005. The next step is full Senate consideration, but it appears unlikely the Senate will consider the bill this year. As a result, the process will begin again when the next Congress reconvenes in January 2007. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a report in March 2005 that found incidences of mismanagement, waste, and inappropriate oversight of Head Start grantees. In response to the GAO report, both versions of the legislation include new accountability requirements.

ASCD Supports School Readiness

ASCD supports programs that provide high-quality learning environments for young children. These environments incorporate smaller class sizes, a cognitively stimulating and developmentally appropriate curriculum, and highly qualified teachers who are trained in early education. For these programs to succeed, we recognize the importance of parental involvement, parental training, and high-quality professional development for early childhood educators. Additionally, **ASCD supports aligning the curriculum in early childhood programs with that of the local school district to ensure a seamless transition into kindergarten and the early elementary school grades.**

ASCD calls for resources, training, and opportunities to create and nurture high-quality learning environments. These resources must be available at both the federal and state levels, and must include both financial resources and support for ongoing research. In addition, ASCD embraces accountability for early childhood programs; however, the assessments must be valid, reliable, developmentally appropriate, and based on multiple measures. **ASCD opposes the use of single-measure assessment in determining the effectiveness of local school readiness programs.** Single-measure assessment cannot provide an accurate representation of a program's success and is not adequate as the sole determinant for a program's accountability.

ASCD supports local schools working with local early childhood agencies to provide both health care and school readiness programs. Early childhood programs must recognize the inextricable link between children's health and learning. Numerous research studies have demonstrated the correlations between healthy children and school readiness. Children struggling with basic health issues in the early years face greater incidence of arrested development and health complications that make learning more challenging. In the case of nutrition, improper or unbalanced diets may result in greater physical and mental problems and challenges. Other prominent health issues include vision problems (detected or undetected), dental and oral health problems, and other maladies that affect a child's ability to concentrate and learn.

Absenteeism is also a problem that may be easily rectified for many children. For example, children with severe, untreated asthma have greater absentee rates than those children with asthma who receive medical attention and support. For problems such as these, scarce education resources are spent to provide compensatory and basic services to children who, with simple health care, would be ready to succeed in school with less need for special attention.

ASCD calls upon the U.S. Congress to support high-quality prekindergarten education programs for all children and to increase funding for school readiness programs, including Head Start. Investing in early childhood is not only morally sound, but also financially beneficial. For example, the High/Scope Perry Preschool Project incorporated a cost-benefit analysis to study the effects of an early childhood program on high-risk three- and four-year-old children. That study found that spending \$15,166 per child on a high-quality two-year preschool program in the early 1960s resulted in \$195,621 in savings and benefits per child by the time those children reached age 40 in 2004. In 2005, RAND researchers examined rigorous evaluations of 20 early childhood programs serving disadvantaged children in the United States. They found net benefits ranging from \$1,400 per child to nearly \$240,000 per child. The benefits include savings on education, taxes paid on future earnings, savings on welfare, and savings on crime.

The major conclusion of these studies is that high-quality preschool programs for young children living in poverty contribute to the children's intellectual and social development in childhood, school success, economic performance, and reduced commission of crime. Given the importance of this investment, we cannot afford to fail to provide more resources and support to programs that improve children's health and school readiness.

ASCD calls for flexibility in alignment of federal programs with state and local school readiness programs. There are approximately 14,383 school districts in the United States, educating approximately 43 million children. These districts are diverse, which makes a one-size-fits-all approach to school readiness impossible. Early childhood programs must have the flexibility to prioritize and address specific health and school-readiness issues on a district-by-

district basis. To ensure that these programs are aligned with and best prepare children for the local schools that they will attend, it is critical that the primary goal of the health and educational services provided by these programs satisfy the unique needs of the local community they serve.

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Effective School Interventions

Current Status

U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings has extended a pilot program to allow schools to reverse the order in which public school choice and supplemental education services are offered to students. This is a step in the right direction. To support No Child Left Behind's (NCLB) focus on school improvement, we must provide flexibility for districts and schools to decide which improvement option is the most effective and feasible.

Under the original NCLB law, schools that failed to achieve adequate yearly progress (AYP) for two consecutive years were required to offer students the option of attending another, higher-performing school. After a third year of not achieving AYP, a school was then required to offer supplemental services. Supplemental services include tutoring, remediation, academic intervention, and instruction that must take place outside of the regular class day. Priority for both school choice and supplemental services must be given to the lowest-achieving and lowest-income students.

The local school district is required to pay all costs associated with these sanctions and school improvement methods, including transportation costs related to public school choice and the cost for supplemental services. NCLB requires the local school district to provide at least 5 percent of the Title I allocation and up to 20 percent, depending on the need for choice-related transportation and/or supplemental service providers. In addition, local education agencies are allowed to transfer money from other federal programs into Title I. These programs include federal assistance for teaching (Title II, Part A), education technology (Title II, Part D), Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities (Title IV, Part A), and Innovative Educational Programs (Title V).

ASCD Supports Effective School Interventions

The pilot program to offer supplemental services before choice will help more students if it is allowed in the areas where public school choice is not a realistic option. **ASCD will continue to seek greater flexibility in the required school improvement choices, enabling local school districts to determine what is the most effective and feasible approach for improving the performance of their students.** As with all school improvement efforts, intervention decisions are local decisions that must be based on the unique circumstances of each district. One size does not fit all.

The original sequence of these sanctions was questionable. Significantly more students have benefited from the supplemental services option than the public school choice option. Recent examination data provided to the federal government showed that fewer than one percent of those eligible for public school choice were actually participating, according to *Education Week*. Conversely, enrollment in supplemental services increased. **ASCD seeks flexibility for districts and schools to decide which school improvement option is the most effective, provided that the approach selected has clear outcomes and measurable results.**

In addition to flexibility, ASCD seeks parity in requirements for teachers and instructors. Under NCLB, supplemental service providers are not required to hire instructors or teachers who meet the “highly qualified” definition required of instructional staff in local school districts. This is contradictory. If, as the research indicates, teachers are critical to student learning, then why allow federal tax resources to support people who are teaching but do not meet the criteria required of our children’s public school teachers?

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