

2012 Legislative Agenda



At no other time has a high-quality education been more crucial to the nation and its children. A quality education is the pathway to a successful future for the student and society at large. And yet, educating students in such a rapidly evolving world of economic, social, political, informational, and technological change is a monumental challenge to modern educators. Schools must be aware of and responsive to these ongoing transformations so that they are positive and beneficial to the students, families, and communities they serve. Similarly, we bear collective responsibility to support a whole child approach to education for each student. To meet these challenges, ASCD members make the following policy recommendations to achieve our mutual goal of educating students who are healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged and who graduate ready for the demands of college, career, and citizenship.

1

Define what “college and career readiness” means.

Any true definition of college, career, and citizenship readiness is not limited to proficiency in reading and math, but includes all core academic subjects—English, reading or language arts, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, geography, physical education, and health education—and the comprehensive knowledge and cognitive skills required of students after high school graduation. The public needs a common and clear definition of what is meant by “college and career readiness” so that states’ early education programs, elementary and secondary systems, and postsecondary institutions do not set widely varying levels of expectations.

2

Require states to align their accountability, professional evaluation, and reporting systems to include all of their core academic subjects.

Each student deserves equal access to a credible, comprehensive, and well-rounded education that includes instruction in all core academic subjects. Those subjects must be reflected in states’ standards, accountability systems, and public reporting of achievement.

3

Require multiple measures of student achievement to determine student proficiency and school performance.

The true measure of students’ proficiency and readiness must be based on more than just their scores on state standardized reading and math assessments. States, districts, and schools should provide a more comprehensive picture of student achievement through a combination of evaluations, such as growth models; portfolios; criterion-referenced tests; norm-referenced tests; computer adaptive assessments; diagnostic evaluations; and formative, interim, and summative assessments.

4

Establish an accountability system that provides differentiated support based on the circumstances and needs of each school and district.

The No Child Left Behind Act's punitive, one-size-fits-all accountability system is both unfair and counterproductive. State and federal leaders must reconceptualize the goals and interventions for underperforming schools to be commensurate with the schools' level of underperformance and existing support structure. A system of rewards and incentives, including flexibility in the use of Title I funds, should be created for states and schools that consistently perform well, close achievement gaps, succeed in cohort comparisons, or improve educator effectiveness.

5

Establish a system of reciprocal accountability among policymakers, families, educators, and students for success.

Just as educators have accepted accountability, so, too, must policymakers, parents, and communities accept their roles in student success. Public, user-friendly reporting of all education and student achievement data in disaggregated formats, including resource allocations and funding levels, will allow transparency, promote equity, and empower all interested parties to hold appropriate entities accountable for their responsibilities to children.

6

Promote effective school improvement strategies.

All school improvement strategies, particularly those turnaround efforts focused on the lowest-performing schools, must support enriched curriculum; high-quality teaching with ongoing professional learning to improve the quality of instruction; and engaging learning opportunities that involve all students, families, and staff.

7

Support effective, practical, and useful research.

We must support a reciprocal relationship between the federal and state levels that fosters innovative, criteria-driven programs and practices that are linked to school improvement and that can be disseminated nationally. To achieve this, there should be effective promotion of a comprehensive, searchable clearinghouse of successful strategies and practices that lets educators match their local needs to a resource bank of solutions and on-site support linked to school improvement for targeted schools.

8

Improve the preparation for new and aspiring educators to succeed in school.

Preservice preparation lays the foundation for an educator's initial and long-term success in the profession. Yet, too often, teacher and leadership training programs are of uneven quality, and little information is available about the performance of their alumni after graduation. Minimum standards of rigor and relevance in content, instruction, and clinical experiences should be established for preservice programs, and such programs should be held accountable for their graduates' effectiveness in the same way these educators are increasingly being held professionally accountable for their effectiveness in raising student achievement.

9

Support educators' ongoing professional learning to address students' evolving needs.

School leaders and classroom educators need induction and mentoring supports, dedicated school time, and adequate resources to gain and sustain professional knowledge and skills. Effective teaching leads to ongoing student achievement and growth; is evidence-based; and incorporates knowledge and skills into planning and preparation, classroom management, instruction, and subject content.

10

Enhance the effectiveness of school leaders and educators.

Each student should have access to a highly effective teacher in every subject. Any evaluation of an educator's or school leader's effectiveness must be based on multiple criteria (see recommendation #3), including classroom practice and student achievement in the subject area for which an educator or leader is responsible. The evaluation should be based on a combination of inputs, including, but not limited to, student performance, classroom observations, and parental feedback. In addition, such evaluations must be used for educators' continual improvement and professional growth.