



LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

ASCD®
2013

Education leaders are continually instituting innovative practices and implementing systemic reforms in their ongoing commitment to support students' success and school improvement.

Unfortunately, federal education policies have not kept pace and are, indeed, hindering innovation and progress. The current version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act is badly out-of-date and more than five years overdue for revision. This delay in reauthorization has prompted a patchwork of temporary solutions that are neither ideal nor lasting.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONGRESS

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) is the cornerstone of federal K–12 education policy. Thus, the foremost priority for ASCD and its members in 2013 is for Congress to reauthorize ESEA with changes that incorporate the following recommendations. These changes will help provide the necessary stability and long-term vision for our education system to ensure that each student is healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged.

A new law must be enacted this year to fix the flaws of the current law; align and support reform initiatives currently under way at the state and local levels; and guide subsequent revisions to federal programs, such as special education and career-technical education.



Support meaningful accountability systems.

Any comprehensive determination of student proficiency, school quality, or educator effectiveness must take into account student growth, use multiple measures of evaluation beyond standardized test scores, and differentiate among levels of performance.

Promote comprehensive improvement strategies.

Methods to improve student achievement, educator effectiveness, or school quality must be evidence-based; engage all stakeholders, including families and communities; and be grounded in a whole child approach to education. Interventions for those not meeting expectations need to be commensurate with their level of underperformance and existing and needed support structures.

Help educators support students.

The classroom teacher and school principal are the two most important in-school factors affecting student achievement. As a result, the foremost strategy and funding priority must be adequate and effective preparation and ongoing professional development for educators to improve student outcomes.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR SUCCESS

As policymakers and stakeholders address these recommendations, the following guiding principles are key elements that will help ensure success for students, educators, and education systems.

A whole child education. The demands of today's global society require a new approach to education to fully prepare our nation's youth for college, careers, and citizenship. A whole child approach to education enhances learning by addressing each student's social, emotional, physical, and academic needs. Educators, families, policymakers, and communities have a collective responsibility to work together to provide engaging learning opportunities that meet the needs of each student in a safe and supportive environment. A comprehensive approach to learning recognizes that successful young people are knowledgeable, healthy, motivated, civically inspired, engaged in the arts, prepared for work and economic self-sufficiency, and ready for the world beyond their own borders.

Multiple measures. The true measure of students' proficiency, educator effectiveness, and school quality must be based on more than just students' test scores on a few standardized tests. A comprehensive picture of student achievement should track individual growth over time and could include portfolios, presentations, and summative assessments. Similarly, evaluations of educator effectiveness should be based on a combination of elements and could include students' performance, classroom observations, and staff feedback. Measures of school quality should also incorporate additional elements, such as school climate, availability of advanced courses, and graduation rates.

Capacity for success.

All school improvement strategies—particularly interventions focused on the lowest-performing schools—must inform and engage all stakeholders; support enriched curriculum; enhance the school culture; provide high-quality teaching with ongoing professional learning to improve the quality of instruction; be commensurate with the need; and offer engaging learning opportunities that involve all students, families, and staff. Policymakers must provide sufficient time and resources for successful implementation of any capacity-building strategy, and such assistance must be mindful of and appropriate for local circumstances. In addition, districts and schools that consistently perform well, close achievement gaps, succeed in cohort comparisons, or improve educator effectiveness should receive rewards and incentives, including flexibility in the use of federal funds.

Improving student outcomes.

Like members of any highly skilled occupation, educators welcome professional standards, workplace accountability, ongoing training, and leadership opportunities. Evaluations of teachers and administrators must use multiple measures and lead to professional development opportunities that build the capacity of districts and schools to improve student outcomes. At a minimum, professional development for educators requires dedicated school time and adequate resources and must include the knowledge and skills for planning and preparation, classroom management, instruction, and subject-area content consistent with standards that prepare students for college and careers.

