



American Association of School Administrators

2006

Legislative Agenda

Prepared by the AASA Executive Committee
Approved by the AASA Governing Board
February 23, 2006

General Policy Positions:

AASA believes that:

1. Increasing achievement for all students is one of the critical missions of public schools. An important federal role in this mission is supplementing the efforts of states and school districts to increase achievement for low-income and minority students.
2. Increasing achievement for all students while closing the gap between the percentage of low-income and middle-income students or between African-American and Latino and white students is mandatory.
3. Revitalizing the state-federal partnership to supplement local and state efforts requires clarifying the terms of the contract between school districts and the federal government. Required activities under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the federal compensation for those activities must be very specific. Congress and the U.S. Department of Education have failed to provide promised funds while insisting that states and school districts undertake all required activities and accomplish all required outcomes.
4. Improving academic achievement requires more accurate measurement of the effect of instruction. Assisting states and school districts to more accurately assess the results of instruction is an important federal research role. More information about student achievement will help teachers and administrators plan educational services and better inform parents and the public about what students demonstrate they know and can do.

AASA Proposal to Reauthorize ESEA

AASA believes that improving achievement for all students, and specifically improving the achievement of students served by funds under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, ESEA, requires that information about the achievement of individual students and cohorts of students must be improved.

To improve the information educators and parents have about the progress of individual students and cohorts of students and communities have about the progress of students both in the aggregate and in the major groups for which data are disaggregated, states should:

- a. Review and continually improve state content and performance standards for reading, math and science to create a clear path to the skills and knowledge students are ultimately expected to master in public schools.
- b. Continue disaggregating and reporting results on statewide tests either in terms of growth of cohorts of students in aggregate and in identified groups or based on year-to-year comparisons of the percentage of students scoring at the proficient level by grade levels.
- c. Develop statewide tests that permit charting the academic progress of both individual students and cohorts of students toward achieving state performance standards or comparing the percentage of students making adequate yearly progress by scoring at the proficient level on annual test scores.
- d. Improve state accountability systems to more accurately evaluate the performance of schools and school districts by establishing:
 - i. Evaluation scales that identify degrees of success and failure to meet state performance standards.
 - ii. A statistically valid reporting format for results of both individual students and cohorts of students being served by ESEA funds on statewide tests, and local option assessments, if used, of all public school students disaggregated by major demographic categories for ethnicity and income.
 - iii. Vertically aligned state content and performance standards that permit using either adequate yearly progress as a measure of success or benchmarks for student progress that establish annual expectations for growth in achievement, based on progress of a sample of other students across the state.
 - iv. Statistically valid statewide tests, and local option assessments if used, for all special education students in schools using ESEA funds that are consistent with the annual achievement benchmarks in the students IEP toward mastery of state content and performance standards.

- v. Statistically valid state assessments for all public school students in schools using ESEA funds who are not proficient in English, based on the judgment of a team of teachers, administrators and parents and the state content and performance standards.
- e. Create an option for school districts to replace state assessments with local assessments keyed to state content and performance standards that are more accurate and instructionally useful for both individual students and cohorts of students than the state tests.
 - i. This option permits school districts using more accurate and instructionally useful measures to substitute their data for statewide test data or give equal weight to the local data in determining whether expectations for growth of Title I students meets state performance standards and narrows the gap between targeted students and higher achieving students in meeting state performance standards.

Disclosure of Federal Oversight Actions

The U.S. Department of Education should establish an independent review of all state applications for assistance and requests for waivers or plan changes under any Title of ESEA. The oversight body would not have decision-making authority regarding action of requests. To increase the transparency of federal oversight of education programs the independent review body would:

1. Disclose all requests for plan changes or waivers of regulations or guidance,
2. Any waiver given to the states shall be disclosed and made public within 30 days of the waiver being granted.
3. Provide expert opinion on every state request, and
4. Catalog state requests to facilitate comparison of federal actions.

Eliminating Unfunded and Underfunded Requirements

Federal funding for education programs should be a clear quid pro quo wherein federal compensation to states and school districts for activities required under ESEA is clearly tied to the cost of those activities. Failure to establish a direct contractual link between required activities and compensation in the form of federal funding results in chronic underfunding of federal programs and coercion to use state and local funds to undertake federal requirements. Where the federal government fails to provide compensation at the level promised for required activities and deliverables, required activities and deliverables should be reduced to match the reduced compensation.

AASA Position on Regulation of Federal Education Programs

1. The federal government should not be able to alter the required activities for a few states without permitting all other states to consider altering their activities in the same manner.
2. Every state request for changes in state plans and waivers of regulations or guidance must be posted immediately to make the regulation of federal programs fair and transparent.
3. The federal government should not be able to add requirements for new activities or outcomes to the activities and outcomes accepted by the states in their ESEA state plans without new legislative authority or completely meeting rules for changes in regulations or guidance.

Revitalizing the State/Federal Partnership

The federal government is simply too far removed from the political culture and legal structure of the 50 states to direct the work of teachers, principals and superintendents as they try to improve achievement for each student and wrestle with persistently poor results in some schools. Judgments about where and how to intervene most successfully with each student requires knowledge of the professionals, the students and the families involved. However, establishing and implementing carefully targeted policy aimed at improvement of achievement for Title I, high-poverty, students is an appropriate role for the federal government where success is possible.