

INTRODUCTION

Every seven years Congress is scheduled to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA); the main federal law for public K-12 education.

In 2001, ESEA was reauthorized as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). While everyone supports the goals of NCLB, it is becoming increasingly obvious that there are problems with its implementation, as well as other undesired consequences threatening our schools.

NCLB is particularly significant to state policymakers because it drastically expands the federal government's involvement in education. Previous versions of ESEA consisted of programs focused specifically on providing additional resources to low-income students. NCLB, however, impacts every student, every teacher, every school, and every state and does so without much additional money.

At the heart of NCLB is the requirement that all children be "proficient" by 2013-2014. To reach this, states must increase each year, or in three year increments, the percentage of students passing standardized tests. Certain subgroups of students are reported independently—students with disabilities, limited English proficiency, from low-income and major racial backgrounds. These subgroups of students are held to the same standards and same timeframe for reaching 100% proficiency as all other students. Likewise, the law treats all schools the same, regardless of whether they are in rural, urban or suburban communities or the challenges they face.

Closing the achievement gaps is not to be abandoned; however, the law needs to be fixed and federal funding needs to increase if states are going to meet NCLB's goals. In 2007, NCLB is scheduled to be reauthorized. It is essential that Congress takes this opportunity to make sensible changes to the law and become involved in education in a way that better serves the needs of students.

BIPARTISAN STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES ON NCLB

Since NCLB was passed, state legislatures have been at the forefront on the issue; leading the call for change. Legislators recognize the problems the law poses for public education, both in its implementation and its consequences. They are also worried that NCLB is taking control away from states and local communities and putting it in the hands of the federal government. Education has always been a state responsibility because those closest to the classroom know best how to respond to the nation's diverse and unique communities.

Over the past four years, individual legislatures have been introducing bills and resolutions to fix NCLB and to encourage Congress to do the same. A list of those actions can be found at www.qualityednow.org.

While states have been trying to smooth out the rough edges of the law, there are still fundamental problems ingrained in the statute. These problems can be resolved only by congressional action. The Bipartisan Statement of Principles on NCLB is a unified effort by legislators from all 50 states to call for changes to the law.

In 2005, the National Conference of State Legislatures task force on NCLB released a report calling on Congress to make over 40 changes to the law, such as returning it focus to the students in most need and providing additional flexibility so that states and local communities regain control of their education systems. The report, *Delivering on the Promise*, received great fanfare by most of the education community; however, only a few of the recommendations have been approved by the federal government. It has become apparent that it will take a collective effort to get Congress to do more.

With this in mind, Communities for Quality Education hosted the State Legislator Education Summit in December of 2005. The summit brought together a bipartisan group of state legislators, researchers, and education advocates to discuss NCLB and the future role of the federal government in education. There was broad agreement and support for fundamental changes to NCLB and a desire to be part of the congressional reauthorization process.

The Bipartisan Statement of Principles reflects the common concerns of a diverse group of legislators. Their statement recognizes the laudable goals of NCLB, while highlighting the problems with its implementation and the undesired consequences it creates. It calls on Congress to enter into a revitalized partnership that recognizes student progress and school reform must start with states and local communities.

Once enough signatures have been garnered, the statement will be sent to Congress along with other material to support an inclusive reauthorization process that leads to sensible changes and a better partnership between the federal government and states for the benefit of our schools.

WHY NOW?

It is vital that legislator engage in this effort now. NCLB is schedule to be reauthorized in 2007; however, many people are saying that it will not get done until 2008 or 2009. Congress needs to be urged to take more immediate action to fix the problems with the law. Although, regardless of when it actually happens, the discussions that will shape reauthorization have begun.

At the very minimum, states need to continue to urge Congress to increase federal funding for education. NCLB was cut approximately \$800 million in fiscal year 2006 and the proposed budget for 2007 would cut billions more. Several states have passed legislation urging Congress to increase funding for NCLB or provide states waivers and other flexibility to prevent parts of the law from damaging public education.