

Reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act the **Right** Way



TOOLS FOR LOCAL LEADERS



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ESEA RESOURCES

For the latest on our national ESEA campaign, go to www.EducationVotes.NEA.org

For the latest Congressional action alert for NEA members, go to our Legislative Action Center: www.NEA.org/lac

For written materials such as policy documents, issue briefs, grassroots materials that can be downloaded, and more, go to www.NEA.org/ESEAResources

For the latest from the U.S. Department of Education, go to www.ed.gov/news or <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/blueprint/index.html>

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Every student has the right to a great public school—a school that educates the whole child, involves the whole family, and engages the entire community.

Since January 2002, educators have lived with the flawed No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the law previously known as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). NCLB deviated sharply from the original intent of the law: to give all students equal access to educational opportunity. ESEA/NCLB is now before Congress to be renewed. This is our opportunity to correct NCLB's failures and move closer to great public schools for every student.

In March 2010, the Obama administration released a “Blueprint for Reform” reflecting its approach to reauthorization of ESEA. NEA immediately raised serious concerns about several provisions that would:

- **Allocate too many scarce federal dollars through competition among states.** Instead, our federal government should distribute the vast majority of resources based on need. Creating even more winners and losers won't provide a solid foundation that helps students succeed.
- **Continue to rely on standardized tests to label schools, but also to label teachers.** The blueprint would label and categorize schools—and now, teachers—based on how students perform on state standardized tests. Schools should be evaluated based on the multiple criteria that are the essential components of a great public school. Students should have multiple ways to demonstrate what they have learned over time. And teachers should be evaluated on their instructional practice and expertise.
- **Promote deeply troubling school turnaround models.** Three of the four models proposed to turn around struggling schools are unworkable, especially in rural areas. They are headline-grabbing approaches with no foundation in research. Only the transformation model is based on collaboration, which is essential to effect sustainable change.

There is some good news, however. Not a single Member of Congress has introduced the administration's proposal in the form of legislation, which is highly unusual.

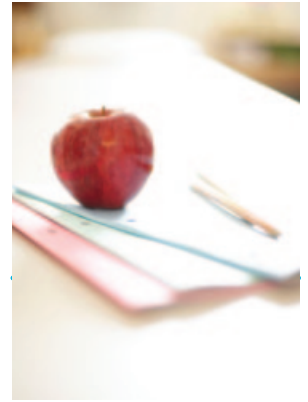
So, what now? We need to shift into high gear to educate Members of Congress—the very people who will write and vote on the next ESEA law. Local leaders will play a pivotal role in mobilizing members, speaking up for students and public education, and building support among Members of Congress, parents, and other stakeholders. This toolkit provides information and materials to achieve those goals.

Remember: We are the professional experts as well as the voice of experience—the people who staff the public schools that educate nine out of 10 American children. It is our obligation to tell Congress how to reauthorize ESEA the right way.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dennis Van Roekel". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dennis Van Roekel
President, National Education Association
September 1, 2010

WHERE WE ARE, HOW WE GOT HERE



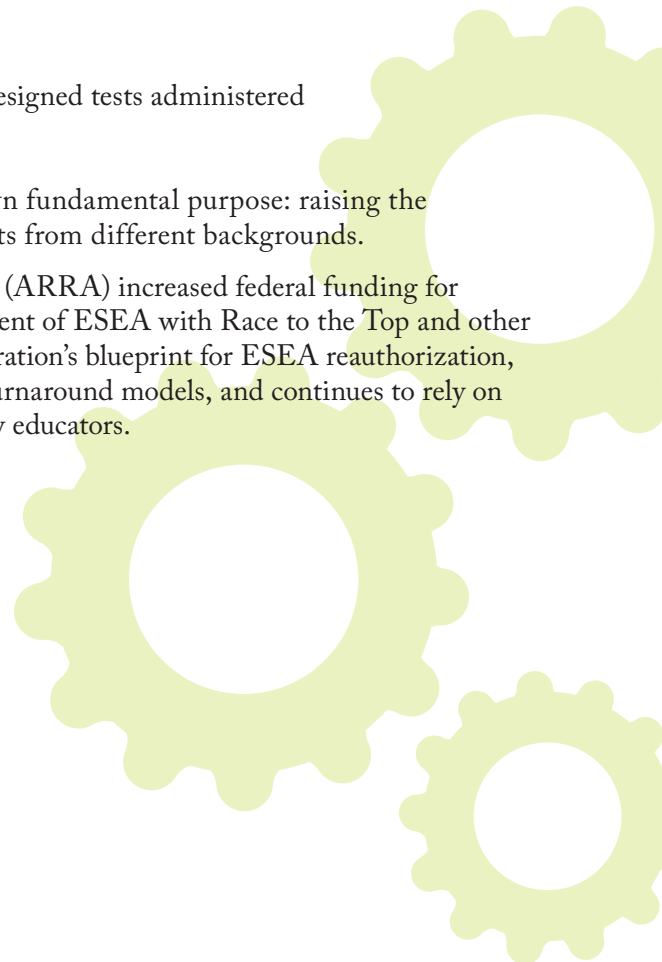
A cornerstone of President Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965—now called No Child Left Behind—promised all students equal access to educational opportunities. Title I, the first section of the law, is the biggest source of federal funding for education, especially programs aimed at poor students and schools.

Congress has reauthorized ESEA eight times over the years. No Child Left Behind, the current version, was signed into law by President George W. Bush in 2002. The new name signaled a new direction: greater emphasis on accountability and disaggregated data to illuminate achievement gaps. It also brought widely deplored, unanticipated consequences:

- Narrowing the curriculum
- Teaching to the test
- Lowering state academic standards
- Labeling and punishing students and schools based on poorly designed tests administered on a single day of the school year

The bottom line is that No Child Left Behind has failed to fulfill its own fundamental purpose: raising the achievement of all students and closing achievement gaps among students from different backgrounds.

On the positive side, the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) increased federal funding for education dramatically. On the other hand, it undermined the original intent of ESEA with Race to the Top and other programs governed by competition instead of need. The Obama administration’s blueprint for ESEA reauthorization, released in March 2010, maintains this approach, promotes unworkable turnaround models, and continues to rely on badly-designed standardized tests to categorize students, schools, and now educators.



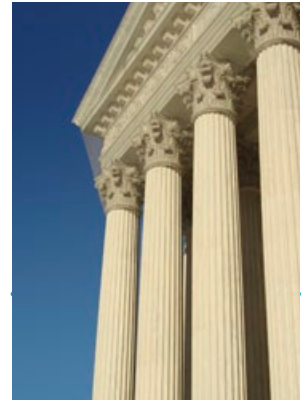
WHAT DO WE WANT FOR EVERY STUDENT?



We believe that to fulfill the promise of great public schools for every student, our nation must adopt policies at the appropriate levels of government that provide for:

- **High expectations, standards, and a rigorous, comprehensive 21st century curriculum for all students.** All students should have access to a rigorous, comprehensive education that includes critical thinking and problem solving, develops high-level communication and literacy skills, and imparts a deep understanding of content. Curriculum must be aligned with standards and assessments, and should go beyond what multiple-choice tests can assess.
- **A qualified, caring, diverse, and stable workforce.** A qualified, caring, diverse, and stable workforce in our schools requires a pool of well-prepared, highly-skilled candidates for all vacancies; quality induction for new teachers that includes mentoring by trained, veteran teachers; opportunities for continual improvement and growth for all employees; working conditions in which employees can succeed; and professional compensation and benefits.
- **Quality programs and services that meet the full range of children's needs so they come to school each day ready and able to learn.** Students must have access to programs such as public school pre-kindergarten and kindergarten; after-school enrichment and intervention; good nutrition, including school breakfasts and lunches; school-based health care and related services; counseling and mentoring programs for students and families; safe and efficient transportation; and safe and drug-free schools.
- **Quality conditions for teaching and lifelong learning.** Quality conditions for teaching and learning include smaller classes and optimal-sized learning communities; safe, healthy, modern, and orderly schools; up-to-date textbooks, technology, media centers, and materials; policies that encourage collaboration and shared decision-making among staff; timely provision of data; and training staff to use data to inform decisions.
- **Parental, family, and community involvement and engagement.** Policies should assist and encourage parents, families, and communities to be actively involved and engaged in their public schools; require professional development programs that equip all educators to devise effective strategies for communicating with—and engaging—parents, families, and community groups; and provide incentives or require employers to grant a reasonable amount of leave for parents to participate in their children's school activities.
- **Shared responsibility for appropriate school accountability among stakeholders at all levels.** Appropriate accountability means using results to identify policies and programs that improve student learning and provide positive support, including resources and technical assistance for schools that need help. Schools, districts, states, and the federal government should be financially accountable to the public. Policymakers should be accountable for providing the resources needed to produce positive results. Accountability systems should be transparent. Policies should be determined and communicated in an open, consistent, and timely manner.
- **Adequate, equitable, and sustainable funding.** School funding systems must provide adequate, equitable, sustainable funding. Making taxes fair and eliminating inefficient and ineffective business subsidies are essential prerequisites to achieving adequacy, equity, and stability in school funding. ESEA programs should be fully funded at their authorized levels.

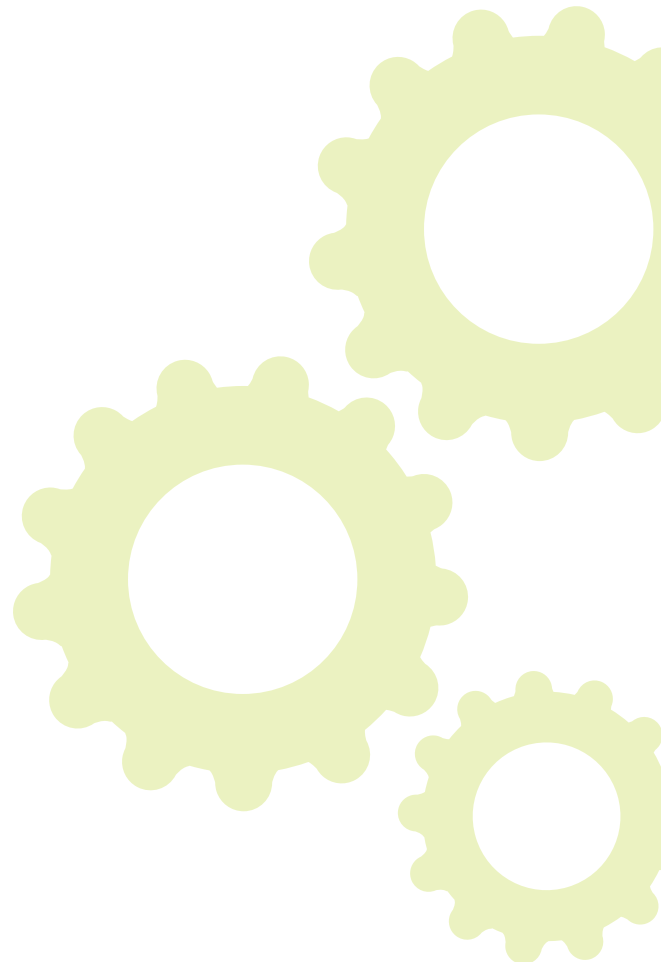
HOW CAN THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT HELP?



The reauthorized ESEA must focus on policies that help transform public schools into high-quality learning centers. The law is complex, so each proposed change must be carefully considered to fully understand its effects on our nation's schools and students. NEA encourages Congress to listen to the voices of educators in developing legislative proposals and to heed these principles for reauthorization:

- **The federal government should serve as a partner to support state efforts to transform public schools.** The 21st century requires a partnership among all levels of government—federal, state, and local—to make up for historically inequitable distribution of tools and resources among our nation's schools. We should support effective models of innovation—such as community schools, career academies, well-designed and accountable charter schools, magnet schools, 21st century skills, and educational technology—and create educational environments that better prepare students for challenging postsecondary experiences and the world of work.
- **The federal government plays a critical role in ensuring that all children—especially the most disadvantaged—have access to an education that prepares them to succeed in the 21st century.** The federal government should focus on high-quality early childhood education, parental/family involvement programs, and quality healthcare for children to help overcome poverty that may impede student progress. The federal government should support community schools to address these issues comprehensively. It must invest in proven programs such as knowledge-rich curricula and intensive interventions, and it must provide resources to improve teaching and learning conditions through smaller classes, school repair, and school modernization.
- **The federal government should put an end to label-and-abandon policies and practices that harm schools and students.** Instead, the federal government should require states to create accountability systems that CORRECTLY identify struggling schools and provide meaningful, research-based support for those schools. The schools most in need of improvement deserve targeted, effective, research-based interventions that address their specific needs. States and school districts should be given significant flexibility to meet agreed-upon outcomes using a transparent process that employs rich data systems and a variety of growth models that acknowledge student progress. School quality and student learning must be based on multiple, valid, and appropriate measures and indicators. Educators MUST be involved in designing and implementing these accountability systems.
- **The federal government should demonstrate respect for the professions of teaching and educational support by providing support and resources to help students succeed.** Hard-to-staff schools—especially those with high concentrations of disadvantaged students or those that have consistently struggled to meet student achievement targets—need significant support and resources, including targeted funding to attract and retain quality educators; teacher induction programs that provide intensive mentoring; and professional development for education support professionals.

- **The federal government should require states to detail how they will remedy inequities in educational tools, opportunities, and resources.** Funding should be targeted to schools with the highest concentrations of poverty. To build on the historic investment in education of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), the federal government should guarantee funding for critical programs such as Title I of ESEA and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).
- **State and local collective bargaining for school employees must be respected.**
- **Targeted programs that support students and schools with unique needs—such as English-language acquisition, impact aid, rural schools, and Indian education—should be maintained and expanded.**
- **The federal government should serve as a research clearinghouse, making available to educators a wealth of knowledge about how best to teach students and help schools improve their practices.**



ESEA DONE RIGHT: HOW DO WE EXPLAIN IT?



NEA believes that in revising the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Congress must **MAKE CERTAIN** the law helps create great public schools for every student. Specifically:

1. ESEA should promote innovation, high expectations, and encourage development of 21st century skills in public schools.

- Innovation in public schools is not achieved simply by promoting more charter schools. There are lots of innovative models and ways to deliver a world-class public education that prepares students for citizenship, lifelong learning, and challenging postsecondary education and careers.
- Students need a well-rounded, challenging curriculum infused with 21st century skills to prepare them to compete in today's global economy.
- Local communities across the country have already developed new, sustainable approaches to public education—shining examples include magnet schools and teacher-led schools.
- Common core standards—if developed with educators and adopted voluntarily by the states—can help ensure that every child is held to high standards and that those standards are more uniform than those now in use.
- The federal government must increase support for educational research and development, and should create a clearinghouse for promising, innovative practices.

2. ESEA should end the obsession with high-stakes, poor-quality tests by developing high-quality assessment systems that provide multiple ways for students to show what they have learned.

- The best way to assess student achievement is with multiple, valid, reliable measures of student learning and school performance over time.
- We must replace the cheap, flawed standardized tests now used with second-generation assessment systems that (1) provide students with **MULTIPLE WAYS** to show what they have learned over time and (2) provide educators with valid data to improve instruction and enhance support for students.
- The concept of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) must be replaced by a system that recognizes schools' progress in meeting learning goals and correctly identifies struggling schools so they can get the support they need to improve.
- High-quality, longitudinal data systems that improve instruction and protect the privacy of students and educators need to be developed.
- Special populations—such as students with disabilities and English-language learners—have unique instructional and assessment needs. Standards and assessments must be accessible to all students.

3. ESEA should help provide great educators and school leaders for every student.

- Teachers and education support professionals must be respected and involved in all decisions. We believe they must be involved in all decisions that affect students and schools, as well as decisions related to their professions.
- To give all students access to the accomplished educators they deserve, we must establish high, state-based standards for entry into the profession and offer incentives to teach in hard-to-staff schools.
- School administrators should be effective instructional leaders and operational managers.
- To attract top-tier college graduates to the teaching profession, we should establish a prestigious national education institute and provide incentives for states to create world-class teacher preparation programs of their own.
- To master their craft and deliver the best instruction to students, teachers need and want a robust, comprehensive, fair system of evaluating instructional practices. Such systems must be designed at the local level—with educators—and implemented by well-trained personnel.
- Treating public education employees fairly means protecting their rights under state laws, local laws, and collective bargaining agreements.

4. ESEA should promote public education as a shared responsibility of parents, communities, educators, and policymakers.

- Students succeed when public schools involve and engage their parents, caregivers, and families.
- Parental and community engagement with public schools can be enhanced through programs that include business leaders, policymakers, and community organizations.
- Collaboration among administrators and education employees is the key to creating school climates in which students can succeed—and great public schools for all our students.
- Local communities must help develop and share responsibility for strategies to turn around struggling schools and students. This type of collaboration should be a required element of school turnaround efforts.
- NEA leads the way in school turnaround efforts with its Priority Schools Campaign.

5. ESEA should provide increased funding to all states and school districts to meet the growing demand for globally-competitive education of U.S. students.

- Federal funding for education should not be decided by jump balls—some students win and some students lose.
- Federal funding for public schools should be adequate, equitable, and sustainable.
- The federal government should require states and districts to prepare educational equity and adequacy plans that address disparities in resources, support services, programs, and opportunities to experience smaller classes, advanced courses, and exposure to accomplished educators.
- NEA has and will continue to advocate relentlessly for full funding of critical federal programs—for example, Title I, IDEA, and other funding streams for special populations.
- The federal role should include support for research-based strategies to transform struggling schools.

GRASSROOTS ORGANIZING TECHNIQUES & TOOLS



When it comes to advocating for a better ESEA, the solution is grassroots organizing. Getting educators involved in this advocacy effort is critical—everyone from teachers and education support professionals to students and retired members must be involved.

You may be a local leader, but you can't possibly do it all alone. So if you haven't already created an ESEA team, now is the time to do so. The key is working together and speaking with one voice to maximize our collective power and get Congress to reauthorize ESEA the right way. Among the techniques you'll want to consider:

- Lobbying visits to Members of Congress—back home and in Washington, DC
- Mobilizing educators in the workplace
- Organizing online with Facebook and Twitter
- Reaching out to local news media, parent groups, and business leaders
- Holding rallies and other public events
- Working in partnership with state, community, and other local organizations

Building a Grassroots ESEA Action Team

When building your team, ask people you know will get the work done and think creatively about who to include. Do you have new members who are eager to improve public education? Recruiting people who are not yet in leadership positions is a good way to involve them and develop their leadership potential.

TIP: TRY A SURVEY! People like being asked about their opinions. If you're looking for a way to get members or community groups involved, try a short survey on public education. Get people's views and then engage them around the issues most important to them. A sample survey is being developed and will be posted on www.NEA.org/ESEAResources.

Think about what needs to be done and the skills each person brings to the table. Opportunities for engaging members include:

- **Contacting elected officials:** Lobbying visits require scheduling and follow up. If an official won't meet with you, try going where you KNOW the person will be. Liaisons to elected officials should not be shy. Ideally, they already know some of the people you're trying to reach.
- **Reaching out to community, parent, and other groups:** Talk to other organizations about public education and ask them to help persuade Congress to reauthorize NCLB/ESEA the right way. Possibilities include neighborhood associations; community, women's, civil rights, and parents' groups; other labor unions; school administrators; faith-based organizations; business leaders; and more.
- **Getting free publicity:** Build relationships with local newspaper, television, and radio reporters, then pitch stories you would like to see them cover. Encourage fellow educators to write letters to local newspaper editors and comment on local blogs. Use tools such as Facebook and Twitter to spread your message and engage colleagues.
- **Organizing events:** Call-ins and other activities are a great way to get educators involved, but they don't just happen. Someone needs to plan and carry them out. That includes posting flyers and sending emails to let people know when and where the action is.
- **Producing materials:** You'll need all sorts of materials for your campaign. Do you know someone who's good with graphic design? This is a perfect role for him or her to play!
- **Keeping records and lists:** Develop and maintain lists of members likely to get involved in different activities—people who have taken action in the past, filled out a survey, or volunteered to be a part of your NCLB/ESEA campaign.

TIP: GET A COMMITMENT!

You need to know you can count on your team members. Ask each of them to commit to taking on working a specified number of hours, participate in meetings, and report on progress. Let people who can't commit know it's OK to say "no"—it's best to be up front about expectations. And remember to thank people as they complete their assignments.

Your Team is Ready to Go. NOW WHAT?

Mobilizing educators to serve as visible advocates for a better ESEA is an important part of this fight. You'll want to use online tools as well as face-to-face communications to engage and energize folks.

ONLINE TOOLS

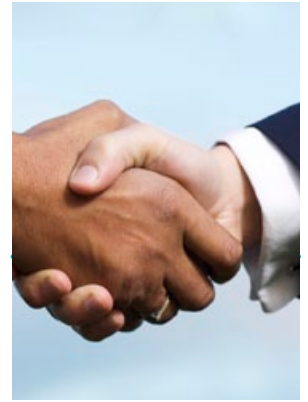
1. **Sign up at www.EducationVotes.NEA.org.** This NEA website is specifically for member activists. Get the latest news about what's happening with ESEA reauthorization and updates on other pending legislation. Become a cyber-lobbyist. Share your story and urge other Association members to do the same.
2. **Join "Speak up for Education & Kids" at www.facebook.com/speakupforkids.** NEA started this Facebook group to unite educators, community members, and others who believe that investing in education is the best way to equip our children to succeed—in school and in life. It's also a great way to get quick updates on developing stories and breaking news.
3. **Find out what your state Association is saying or doing on ESEA.** Check your state Association's website and coordinate activities with your state's government relations or communications director.

- 4. Find out whether schools in your local or state are part of NEA's Priority Schools Campaign at <http://NEApriorityschools.org>.** This is really important as they may be eligible for federal grants; NEA resources are also available. Let's make sure we succeed in helping these schools!
- 5. Start your own Facebook page.** Then find the Facebook pages of your Senators and the Representative for your district, and post messages on them. Ask other team members to do the same.
- 6. Compile email address lists.** Then use them to promote rallies, lobbying visits, town hall meetings, and updates on ESEA reauthorization. Keeping folks in the loop makes it easier to mobilize them when you need them.
- 7. Visit the websites of Members of Congress—addresses are available at www.senate.gov and www.house.gov—and sign up for their email newsletters.** They provide invaluable information such as when your Senators and Representatives will be back home, legislation they are sponsoring or supporting, and what they tend to focus on when they are in Washington.
- 8. Join our Legislative Action Center at www.NEA.org/lac.** Email letters to your Senators and Representative, and forward their responses to team members and CampaignHub@nea.org. Remember: every Association member can play a role in determining where a Member of Congress stands on ESEA issues.

FACE-TO-FACE COMMUNICATION

- 1. Post a flyer.** See if your state Association has developed any ESEA flyers or make copies of the one in this toolkit (*see page 21*).
- 2. Start a letter-writing campaign.** Ask educators to share stories with Members of Congress about how ESEA has affected them. Ask Association reps (or volunteers in each building) to distribute samples and then collect letters for delivery to your Member of Congress.
- 3. Organize a call-in day.** NEA has set up a toll-free number that connects educators to the Congressional switchboard. Email CampaignHub@nea.org to gain access to it.
- 4. Collect and deliver postcards.** Some folks might not have time to write a whole letter, but may be willing to dash off a postcard. Ask action team members to carry a few postcards with them at all times. If they get into a conversation about ESEA (in the teachers' lounge or during test time), they can pull out a few postcards, ask colleagues to write messages, and then offer to deliver them. Develop your own postcards or print copies of the one in this guide (*see page 22/23*).
- 5. Start a petition campaign.** This is a fast and easy way to take action. Develop your own petition or use the one in this guide (*see page 24*).
- 6. Attend or host a town hall meeting.** Ask educators to pose questions at a town meeting held by a Member of Congress. Better yet, organize your own town hall meeting with community partners and ask a Member of Congress to come. Be sure to invite the press.
- 7. Get the ESEA/NCLB Update.** Sign up for this biweekly email newsletter at www.NEA.org/home/NoChildLeftBehindAct.html. Then make a five-minute report on the latest developments a regular part of association meetings and events.
- 8. Take advantage of campaign season.** Yes, it's that time a year again, so take advantage of it:
 - Find out when and where your Member of Congress will be attending events. Then recruit a group of educators to come and ask questions to make our points about ESEA. Is your Member of Congress going to be in a local parade? Show up with 20 local educators carrying signs: *Reauthorize ESEA the RIGHT WAY!*
 - Ask your Member of Congress to spend a day at your school so he/she can see firsthand how ESEA affects us every day. Invite some reporters and use them to help spread our message about the right way to reauthorize ESEA.

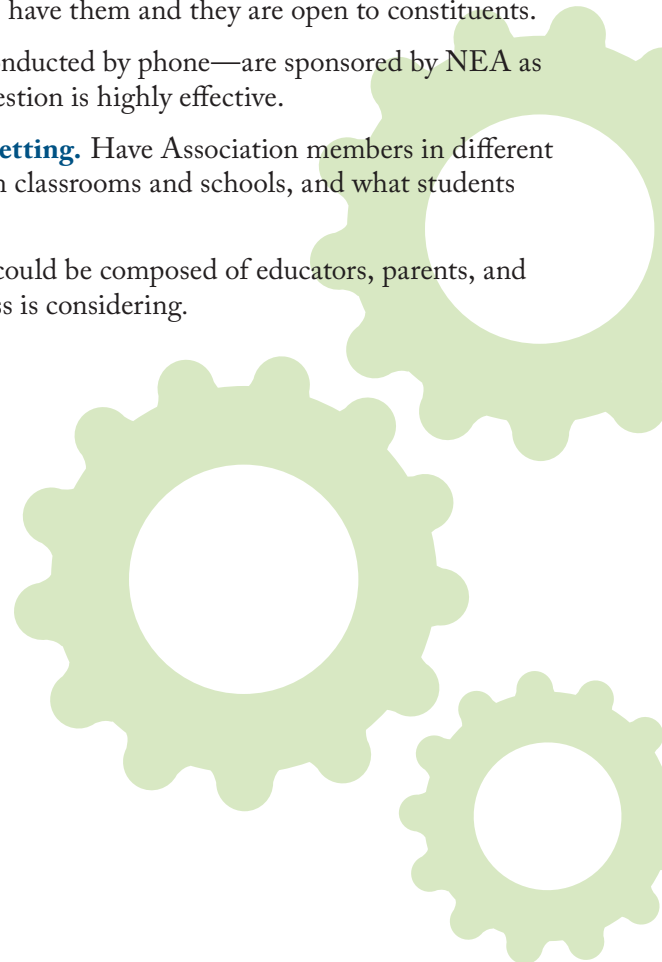
LOBBYING DECISION MAKERS



Direct personal contact is the best way to persuade Members of Congress (and other elected officials). Your personal story is the most powerful tool you have. Sharing your story and asking for support are cornerstones of our advocacy effort.

Lobbying techniques include making lots of phone calls; sending quantities of emails, postcards, and letters; and holding events covered by the news media. You can also:

- **Meet face-to-face with a Member of Congress or his/her staff.** Such meetings are held in Washington, DC, as well as district offices. Local leaders can meet as a group with the Representative for their Congressional district.
- **Show up at an event where you know the Member of Congress will be.** Practice a 10-20 second pitch as well as a one-minute version—you never know how much time you'll have.
- **Find out about back home “office hours.”** Some Members of Congress have them and they are open to constituents.
- **Attend a tele-town hall meeting.** These events—town hall meetings conducted by phone—are sponsored by NEA as well as Members of Congress. Attending one and dialing in to ask a question is highly effective.
- **Invite a Member of Congress to a round table discussion in a school setting.** Have Association members in different positions provide a variety of real-world perspectives on what happens in classrooms and schools, and what students need to succeed.
- **Ask a Member of Congress to set up an education advisory group.** It could be composed of educators, parents, and other stakeholders, and serve as a sounding board for proposals Congress is considering.



Requesting a Meeting

Most Members of Congress have a chief of staff, a legislative director, a press person, a staff member who specializes in specific issues such as education, and a scheduler—the person you need. You can request a meeting in several ways:

- **Call and give the scheduler a heads up.** Best bets are when Congress is in recess, or on a Friday or Monday. Make sure the Member of Congress is in town and NOT in Washington on the day you're asking to meet.
- **Fill out a form online.** If your Member of Congress uses such a form, you'll find it on his/her website.
- **Fax a letter to the Member of Congress.** You'll want to include the purpose of the meeting, when you'd like to meet, who will be attending, and who you represent. The local or state Association leader should sign the letter.

SAMPLE LETTER

BY FAX

Date

The Honorable _____
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable _____
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Attention: Scheduler

Dear _____:

On behalf of 500 teachers represented by _____, an affiliate of the National Education Association, five colleagues and I would like to meet with Senator/Representative _____ to discuss reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

We would like to meet with Senator/Representative _____ during the next district working period. Please contact me at [telephone number] or [email address] to arrange a mutually convenient time. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Name
Title

Preparing for the Meeting

1. Determine your goals in advance. Potential goals include:

- Demonstrating support
- Gathering information
- Persuading a Member of Congress to support NEA's positions
- Confirming a YES vote
- Asking supporters to become champions

2. Decide who should be at the meeting. You'll want to include the people with the most compelling stories and who have the most influence with the Member of Congress.

3. Figure out where the Member of Congress stands on ESEA reauthorization. The more information you have going into the meeting, the better. Review NEA's Congressional Report Card at www.NEA.org/home/19413.html. Grades are based on voting history and the Member's advocacy on behalf of public education, and they range from A to F. Check out past positions and media reports—Google makes what was once time-consuming research quick and easy.

4. Have a pre-meeting with those who will attend. Set a strategy: long and short-term goals, who will speak at the meeting, what each person will say.

5. Assign roles. Here are some possibilities:

- **Meeting leader:** Makes introductions, runs the meeting, keeps track of time and the agenda
- **Story teller:** Shares a compelling ESEA-related story
- **Delivery person:** Presents leave-behinds such as fact sheets and materials signed by members such as petitions, postcards, and letters
- **Pitch person:** Makes the "ask"
- **Meeting recorder:** Takes notes on what happened and what you promised to do—very important when follow-up time comes

Sample Meeting Agenda

- Introductions: *3 minutes*
- Explain why you formed an ESEA action team, your goals, and how you hope to achieve them: *5 minutes*
- First educator tells story: *3 minutes*
- Second educator tells story: *3 minutes*
- Deliver materials: *3 minutes*
- Make the “ask”: *5-10 minutes*
- Review next steps: *3 minutes*
- Thank you: *1 minute*

What if the Member of Congress supports us?

- Get a photo and use it—in print publications and on the Web (your local Association’s website or Facebook page).
- Offer to provide resources and information.
- Ask him/her to meet with local educators.
- Ask him/her to make strengthening public education a key campaign issue and to talk with colleagues about key education issues.

And if the Member of Congress is undecided?

- Try to understand why: Reservations about our principles? Opposing views?
- Promise to provide information that speaks directly his/her concerns and then do it—promptly.
- Ask him/her to meet with educators in a local school—being back in a classroom can be persuasive.

Or the Member of Congress is opposed?

- Ask for a reason. Look for areas where you might agree.
- Attempt to address his/her concerns.
- STAY POLITE no matter what happens.

NEXT STEPS AND FOLLOW UP: Make sure to provide any materials you promised to provide. Send the Member of Congress copies of published pictures or stories—or links to the website where they appear. Schedule another meeting, if that was discussed. Send a thank-you note—handwritten or email. Email a quick report about the Member of Congress to CampaignHub@nea.org.

NEWS MEDIA

LETTERS, OP-EDS & CALL-INS



Members of Congress read local and regional newspapers, in print and online, to keep up with what’s happening back home—what their constituents are thinking and doing. Most also monitor the handful of media outlets that influence public opinion nationwide: newspapers such as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Chicago Tribune*, and *The Wall Street Journal*.

Landing a favorable news story—or a supportive editorial—is never a sure bet. About all you can be sure of is it that educating a reporter or editorial board will take a great deal of time and effort. In contrast, when it comes to letters to the editors, op-eds, and calls to radio talk shows, YOU actually control the message. See page 17 for an example of a published letter and page 18 for an example of a published op-ed.

When deciding how to approach a media outlet, keep in mind that it’s easier to get published by a small one than a big one, and easier to get a letter published than an op-ed because newspapers run more of them. Whatever you decide, following these guidelines will increase your chances of success:

- **Keep it short.** At most, a letter should be 250 words—the length of Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address. Most op-eds are 600–800 words.
- **Refer to a specific story.** Comments on news stories or editorials from the same media outlet are more likely to be published or get air time.
- **Act fast.** Try to submit your response the same day or the next day—within the week at most. After that, it’s no longer news.
- **Stay focused.** Address one issue in a letter to the editor, no more than three in an op-ed. On air, don’t let the questions or the questioner throw you: Stick to your talking points.
- **Support what you say.** Speak from experience—mention where you teach, what you teach, how long you’ve been doing it. Cite research or statistics from rock-solid sources: U.S. government agencies and leading universities.
- **Avoid jargon and acronyms.** Education policy-speak is a foreign language to non-educators. Use plain English when the general public is your audience: “raising students’ test scores” instead of “adequate yearly progress” or “AYP,” “Race to the Top” or “competitive grants” instead of “RTTT.”
- **Submit electronically.** Instructions are usually posted on the Web—if not, call and ask. Many media outlets won’t open attachments, so incorporate your piece in the body of an email. Include your home address and a telephone number.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Author: NEA President Dennis Van Roekel

Length: 179 words

Published in: *The Washington Post*

Date: February 8, 2010

Education reform without ‘silver bullets’

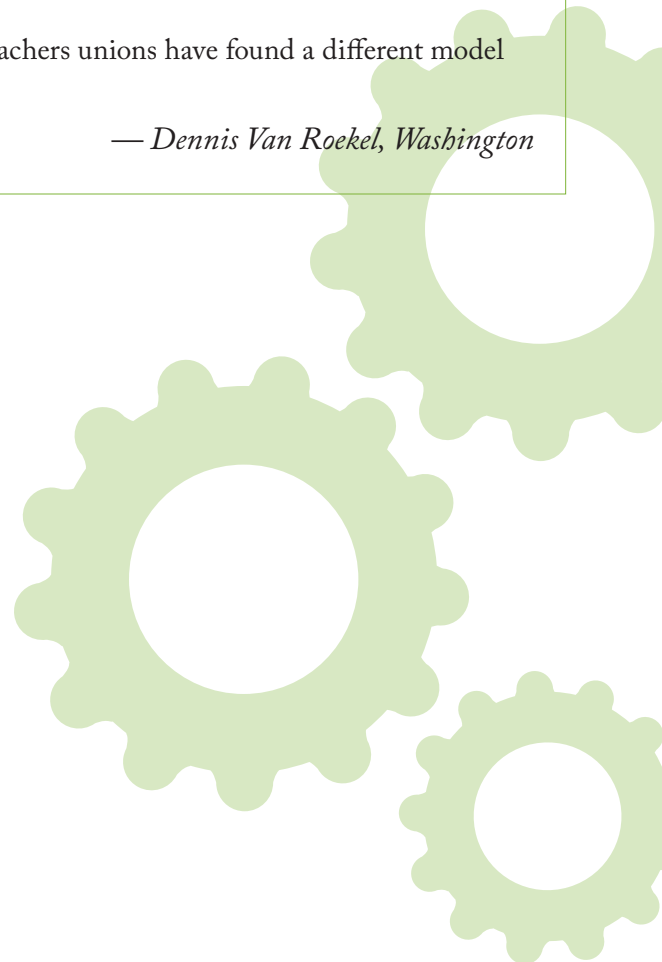
Charter schools and performance pay are not “silver bullets” for struggling public schools; innovation is what matters [“Education’s reform blockers,” editorial, Feb. 1].

One example: Hillsborough County, Fla.—the Tampa area—has been at the forefront of teacher pay reform, with the full cooperation of the local teachers union. Educators and administrators learned that simply paying bonuses based on test scores did nothing to improve student achievement because the county has had performance pay in place for almost a decade.

So Hillsborough proposed a system to look at many indicators of student achievement in its evaluation of teachers. The opinions of teaching colleagues will be weighed, as well as principals. The teachers union was involved at every step in developing this process, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has awarded Hillsborough \$100 million to put this system in place. The district will be able to see what does or does not affect the bottom line: student achievement.

While education policy seems to be increasingly driven by conflict, teachers unions have found a different model for improving schools: collaboration.

—Dennis Van Roekel, Washington



OP-ED

Author: NEA Friend of Education Diane Ravitch

Length: 760 words

Published in: *The Washington Post*

Date: April 2, 2010

A New Agenda for School Reform

I used to be a strong supporter of school accountability and choice. But in recent years, it became clear to me that these strategies were not working. The federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) program enacted in 2002 did not produce large gains in reading and math. The gains in math were larger before the law was implemented, and the most recent national tests showed that eighth-grade students have made no improvement in reading since 1998. By mandating a utopian goal of 100 percent proficiency, the law encouraged states to lower their standards and make false claims of progress. Worse, the law stigmatized schools that could not meet its unrealistic expectation.

Choice, too, has been disappointing. We now know that choice is no panacea. The districts with the most choice for the longest period—Cleveland and Milwaukee—have seen no improvement in their public schools nor in their choice schools. Charter schools have been compared to regular public schools on the National Assessment of Educational Progress in 2003, 2005, 2007 and 2009, and have never outperformed them. Nationally, only 3 percent of public school students are enrolled in charters, and no one is giving much thought to improving the system that enrolls the other 97 percent.

It is time to change course.

To begin with, let's agree that a good education encompasses far more than just basic skills. A good education involves learning history, geography, civics, the arts, science, literature and foreign language. Schools should be expected to teach these subjects even if students are not tested on them.

Everyone agrees that good education requires good teachers. To get good teachers, states should insist—and the federal government should demand—that all new teachers have a major in the subject they expect to teach or preferably a strong educational background in two subjects, such as mathematics and music or history and literature. Every state should expect teachers to pass a rigorous examination in the subjects they will teach, as well as a general examination to demonstrate their literacy and numeracy.

We need principals who are master teachers, not inexperienced teachers who took a course called “How to Be a Leader.” The principal is expected to evaluate teachers, to decide who deserves tenure and to help those who are struggling and trying to improve. If the principal is not a master teacher, he or she will not be able to perform the most crucial functions of the job.

We need superintendents who are experienced educators because their decisions about personnel, curriculum and instruction affect

the entire school system. If they lack experience, they will not be qualified to select the best principals or the best curricula for their districts.

We need assessments that gauge students' understanding and require them to demonstrate what they know, not tests that allow students to rely solely on guessing and picking one among four canned answers.

We should stop using the term “failing schools” to describe schools where test scores are low. Usually, a school has low test scores because it enrolls a disproportionately large number of low-performing students. Among its students may be many who do not speak or read English, who live in poverty, who miss school frequently because they must baby-sit while their parents look for work, or who have disabilities that interfere with their learning. These are not excuses for their low scores but facts about their lives.

Instead of closing such schools and firing their staffs, every state should have inspection teams that spend time in every low-performing school and diagnose its problems. Some may be mitigated with extra teachers, extra bilingual staff, an after-school program or other resources. The inspection team may find that the school was turned into a dumping ground by district officials to make other schools look better. It may find a heroic staff that is doing well under adverse circumstances and needs help. Whatever the cause of low performance, the inspection team should create a plan to improve the school.

Only in rare circumstances should a school be closed. In many poor communities, schools are the most stable institution. Closing them destroys the fabric of the community.

We must break free of the NCLB mind-set that makes accountability synonymous with punishment. As we seek to rebuild our education system, we must improve the schools where performance is poor, not punish them.

If we are serious about school reform, we will look for long-term solutions, not quick fixes.

We wasted eight years with the “measure and punish” strategy of NCLB. Let's not waste the next eight years.

*Diane Ravitch is a historian of education. Her most recent book is *The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice Are Undermining Education*.*

GLOSSARY TO EDUCATION POLICY TERMS



Accountable: Answerable or responsible for an outcome or result.

Achievement gaps: Disparities in the academic performance of otherwise comparable groups of students who vary by race, ethnicity, gender, or socio-economic status. For example, more than 80 percent of white students graduate from high school, while barely 60 percent of African-American and Hispanic students graduate.

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP): Created by No Child Left Behind, this proxy for progress in academic performance is defined differently by each state. Schools are categorized on the basis of students' scores on standardized tests in language arts and mathematics, given once a year in grades three through eight. AYP originally was designed to compare this year's students to last year's students to determine if the school and district were improving.

American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA): Signed into law in 2009 by President Barack Obama, this \$787 billion "economic stimulus package" provided more than \$130 billion for U.S. Department of Education programs. It also created competition-driven programs such as Race to the Top, the Teacher Incentive Fund, and School Improvement Grants.

Assessment systems: Formative assessments—for example, students' projects and real-world application of knowledge—are used to provide immediate feedback and improve lessons. Summative assessments—for example, statewide and end-of-course tests—"summarize" or "sum up" a student's learning; standardized tests are a form of summative assessment. All assessment systems should help students learn to solve problems and think critically.

Charter management organization (CMO): Non-profit entity that starts and manages charter schools.

Collective bargaining: Negotiations between an employer and a group of employees that determine the conditions of employment.

Common core state standards: K-12 standards developed for nationwide use by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers in partnership with NEA members, other educators, and content experts. The English-language arts and mathematics standards were issued in June 2010 and adopted by three-quarters of the states within three months.

Disaggregated data: In general, "disaggregate" means to separate a whole into its parts. Under No Child Left Behind, it means sorting and reporting students' test results in 10 categories: American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, Hispanic, black, white, multiracial, migrant, economically disadvantaged, limited English proficiency, and students with disabilities.

Economically disadvantaged: For purposes of No Child Left Behind, generally means students who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

Education management organization (EMO): Private company that runs public schools, usually on a for-profit basis.

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA): Enacted in 1965 as part of President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty to provide equal educational opportunity for all, especially poor students. Reauthorized eight times, most recently in 2002 as No Child Left Behind. Title I of ESEA is the largest source of federal funding for education.

English-language learners (ELLs): Students with limited proficiency in English, often because English is not their first language. The number of ELLs in our schools has grown rapidly—and continues to grow—especially in certain parts of the country. ELLs constitute more than 10 percent of the total U.S. student population and more than 20 percent in urban areas. Most ELLs are U.S. citizens.

Growth model: Measures progress by tracking the performance of individual students over time. More accurate than the current measure—Adequate Yearly Progress—which compares test scores of groups of students whose composition varies from year to year. A “value-added model” is a type of growth model.

Investing in Innovation Fund (i3): Competition-driven program created by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) that funds programs run by partnerships of local educational agencies, nonprofits, and schools. Union-led schools and partnerships are eligible for grants awarded by this program.

Local educational agency (LEA): Board of education or other body that oversees public elementary or secondary schools in a city, county, township, school district, or other subdivision of a state.

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP): Known as “the nation’s report card” because it is the largest, nationally representative, continuing assessment of U.S. student performance. Covers many subjects, including mathematics, reading, science, writing, the arts, civics, economics, geography, and U.S. history. Unlike state tests, NAEP data show essentially no progress since the enactment of No Child Left Behind.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB): Eighth reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which was signed into law in 2002 by President George W. Bush.

Race to the Top (RTTT): Competition-driven grant program created by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) that requires states who apply for a one-time infusion of federal funds to agree to make lasting changes in state laws and policies.

School Improvement Grants (SIG): Title I program for struggling schools that uses the U.S. Department of Education’s four turnaround models.

Standardized tests: All students receive the same directions, the same amount of time, and answer the same questions, usually in a multiple-choice format that is computer-scored. Each question has only one correct answer. Standardized tests usually are not designed to encourage critical thinking and problem solving.

State educational agency (SEA): State department of education that oversees public elementary and secondary schools.

State report cards: Data on the performance of schools and districts that are compiled and published (generally on the Web) to fulfill No Child Left Behind reporting requirements. Test scores are sorted into 10 categories: American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, Hispanic, black, white, multiracial, migrant, economically disadvantaged, limited English proficiency, and students with disabilities.

Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF): Provides competitive grants for development, implementation, and evaluation of performance-based compensation systems.

Title I: First section of ESEA and biggest source of federal funding for education, especially for poor students and schools in high-poverty neighborhoods.

Turnaround models: The U.S. Department of Education’s four approaches to improving struggling schools. The “turnaround model” entails firing the principal and 50 percent or more of the staff, adopting a new governance structure, and changing the curriculum. Under the “restart model,” a school is closed and then reopened by a charter school operator, charter management organization (CMO), or education management organization (EMO). The “closure model” entails shutting a school down and enrolling its students in other schools. The “transformation model,” the only model offering the promise of lasting change, requires a new principal (unless a waiver is granted), professional development for teachers, extended learning time for students, and outreach to families and communities.

Reauthorize: To renew and revise an existing law.

Value-added model: A type of growth model. In education, a method of analyzing students’ test scores that, despite associations with merit pay plans, has little or no validity as a measure of individual teachers’ effectiveness.

THE ADMINISTRATION'S BLUEPRINT DROESN'T MEASURE UP

THE ADMINISTRATION'S PLAN TO REFORM NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND MISSES THE MARK ABOUT WHAT IT TAKES TO IMPROVE OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

- ✗ Washington Bureaucrats Determine Winners and Losers
- ✗ Lacks a Solid Foundation for Sustainable Support
- ✗ High-Stakes Standardized Tests Continue to Label Students, Teachers and Schools
- ✗ Competitive Allocation of Resources Leave 85% of Schools Out of the Mix
- ✗ Help for Struggling Schools is Not Research-Based
- ✗ Fails to Engage Parents and Families

THERE IS A BETTER WAY.

To fulfill the promise of public education we must:

- ✓ Promote innovation and 21st century skills
- ✓ Attract, support, and retain great educators and leaders
- ✓ Provide more time and attention for students with small class sizes, rich curriculum and after-school enrichment
- ✓ Allow students multiple ways to show what they know instead of NCLB's broken standardized tests that mislabel students and schools as failures
- ✓ Help turn around struggling schools with proven solutions
- ✓ Provide stable federal funding to all states
- ✓ Support greater parental and community involvement



Learn more and join this important campaign at

www.EducationVotes.NEA.org

Send Congress a Message



LEAVE **NCLB** BEHIND
DO WHAT WORKS FOR KIDS!



IMPORTANT MESSAGE
FROM AN EDUCATOR:
DO WHAT WORKS FOR KIDS!



Let Your Voice Be Heard

There is no greater issue to the short- and long-term economic future of our country than making sure our public schools are delivering for our children. Congress is now prepared to address the flawed No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law and it is critical to get it right.

To fulfill the promise of public education we must:

- Promote innovation and 21st century skills
- Attract, support, and retain great educators and leaders
- Provide more time and attention for students with small class sizes, rich curriculum, and after-school enrichment
- Allow students multiple ways to show what they know instead of perpetuating NCLB's broken standardized tests that mislabel students and schools as failures
- Help turn around struggling schools with proven solutions
- Provide stable federal funding to all states
- Support greater parental and community involvement

I urge Congress to adopt these reforms so that we effectively meet the needs of students, educators, schools, parents, and our communities.

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