



Statement of Principles for Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

May 19, 2011

Education reform is a national priority and an economic necessity.

It has been nearly three decades since the National Commission on Excellence in Education issued "A Nation at Risk," a compelling report that sounded the alarm on the state of public education in America. Since then, we have spent billions of taxpayer dollars to improve our public schools. Yet American students have fallen behind their international peers in math and science, and our national achievement gap persists.

In 2001, Congress enacted the No Child Left Behind Act - landmark legislation that organized the nation around the imperative of providing an excellent education to every student. Reauthorization of this important law provides an opportunity to renew our commitment to America's children and transform education for the 21st century.

No Child Left Behind was historic both for its substance and the manner in which it was passed. President George W. Bush, the late Senator Ted Kennedy, and new House Speaker John Boehner shepherded the legislation to a bipartisan majority in both chambers. We believe that, when it comes to putting the needs of students' first, leaders on both sides of the aisle share common ground.

As education leaders in ten states, we share a common approach to improving the federal law. We encourage the Congress to consider the following principles as it moves forward reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

Guiding Principles

Federal law should incentivize rigorous academic standards.

High standards must be the norm for all students across the nation. Every state must have rigorous academic standards and set a high standard for proficiency.

Congress should ensure states cannot dumb down standards, lower cut scores or otherwise manipulate accountability. Standards should be benchmarked against international standards and expectations should be measured against the highest achieving states and countries. In the interim, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which is administered in every state, should become one benchmark for evaluating state standards.

Federal law should encourage transparent and rigorous accountability.

Individual student performance and progress must be the centerpiece of every school accountability system. By targeting individual student growth, schools will be motivated to help all children improve.

Congress should consider these elements in the federal accountability framework:

- **All Students, All Schools.** All schools - not just the lowest performing schools – are held accountable for the academic performance of all of its students.
- **Annual Assessments.** All schools must maintain annual assessments in reading and math to measure student performance and teacher effectiveness.
- **Student Gains.** Accountability should recognize annual growth or learning gains, in addition to achievement.
- **Clear and Differentiated Rankings for Schools.** Accountability should reflect the true range of performance, such as grading schools on a scale of A-F, rather than pass or fail.
- **Recognition of Different Levels of Success.** Accountability should incorporate tiered interventions based on school performance and progress with students. Many schools are making great progress with students, and they deserve recognition for their hard work and encouragement to achieve even greater success with students.
- **Disaggregated Student Data.** Schools should continue to disaggregate student achievement data and effectively use that data to inform real time instruction and interventions. All students must be held to the same high expectations.

Federal law should recognize and reward excellence.

Accountability should not only be transparent and rigorous, it should also recognize and reward excellence. Teachers, schools, and districts must be recognized and rewarded for academic performance, increasing student achievement and closing achievement gaps.

Congress should ensure rewards for these accomplishments are achievable, which will encourage even greater student achievement. As schools and districts meet academic targets and raise student achievement, they should earn the right to have greater flexibility and autonomy, including funding flexibility, to leverage federal resources toward innovative reform and policies that put students first.

Federal law should encourage states to replace failure with success.

When schools persistently fail to meet standards, aggressive action must be taken to replace failure with success. States should intervene with urgency to turnaround chronically low-performing schools. Schools that fail to improve student performance should be closed. Ineffective teachers and leaders should be removed. And students and families should have

more educational options.

Congress should encourage and empower all states to take these bold and necessary actions by reducing federal funding to the state when such action is not taken. Federal funding cannot be an entitlement for failure.

Federal law should encourage and reward the recruitment and retention of excellent teachers and leaders.

Highly effective teachers and leaders must be recruited, recognized, rewarded and supported based on their performance rather than certification or credentials. Teacher effectiveness should be based on student learning gains, as determined by valid educator evaluation systems. Effective teachers who increase student achievement should receive additional compensation through higher salaries, bonuses or both. Highly effective teachers should be offered incentives to work with student populations that have the greatest need. Employment decisions should be based on performance, not seniority.

Professional development must be closely linked with teacher evaluations. Addressing areas for growth revealed by enhanced evaluation systems should be the first priority. Highly effective teachers should be able to choose their own professional development opportunities that will improve and enhance their skills.

Congress should encourage and incentivize states and districts to reform their educator hiring, firing and compensation systems.

Federal law should encourage viable options for all students.

Every child – regardless of income, race or zip code – should have the opportunity to attend an excellent school. States should be incentivized to provide an expanded array of viable educational options for all students, including charter schools and digital learning opportunities.

Congress should overhaul federal education funding to empower individual students and their families, rather than simply continue to fund the system. Funding should follow the student and allow for parents to decide what is best for their child.

Chiefs for Change Members:

- Janet Barresi, Oklahoma State Superintendent of Public Information
- Tony Bennett, Indiana Superintendent of Public Instruction
- Stephen Bowen, Maine Commissioner of Education
- Chris Cerf, New Jersey Commissioner of Education
- Deborah A. Gist, Rhode Island Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education
- Kevin Huffman, Tennessee Commissioner of Education
- Paul Pastorek, Former Louisiana State Superintendent of Education
- Gerard Robinson, Virginia Secretary of Education
- Hanna Skandera, New Mexico Public Education Department Secretary-Designate
- Eric Smith, Florida Commissioner of Education