



A Blueprint for Reform: ESEA Reauthorization

A Quick Reference Summary for Local School Board Members

March 2010

On March 29, 2010, the U.S. Department of Education released, “A Blueprint for Reform: The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).” The plan provides a comprehensive set of initiatives by which the federal government intends to support local school districts to raise student performance and close the achievement gap for academically-struggling students in our public schools. Additionally, the shift in emphasis from being more punitive to more supportive is indeed a more constructive shift and the renewed emphasis on all students graduating from high school being college and career-ready is welcomed.

As a blueprint, there are details yet to be developed that will determine the ultimate success of the program and NSBA’s decision whether to support it. As examples, more details will be needed regarding the use of multiple assessments in measuring student achievement, how school districts of varying sizes and capacity will be able to take advantage and manage the broad and integrated array of strategies, and how fiscal challenges that school districts are facing now and over the next few years will impact the implementation of this initiative.

There are a number of positive features that are included in plan which NSBA supports. Additionally it is a significant improvement over current law (i.e. No Child Left Behind). However, there are problem areas. NSBA opposes the Department’s current proposal to condition Title I funds on states adopting common standards or a specific standard-setting approval process (as distinguished from states voluntarily adopting standards without federal coercion) and we oppose the proposed shift in emphasis away from Title I formula-based funding with regard to funding increases to competitive grants. Given the very limited resources available to many high-need schools in rural and urban areas to prepare and submit successful applications this presents an unnecessarily difficult task. Failure to receive such federal support could adversely impact schools and school districts with significant enrollment of poverty students.

Finally, we oppose the limiting options for “turnaround models” available to “challenge” schools to the four options presented given the broad range and complexity of issues facing these schools that may require more tailored strategies.

This *Quick Reference Summary* focuses on key themes, reforms and requirements proposed by the U.S. Department of Education. Local school board members are encouraged to review the Blueprint in its entirety. Additionally, school board members are encouraged to review the ESEA Recommendations submitted by the National School Boards Association to Chairman George Miller (D-CA-7) of the House Committee on Education and Labor on March 26, 2010 (www.nsba.org/ESEArecommendations).

OFFICE OF ADVOCACY

PART I. MAJOR THEMES

The following reflect major themes of the *Blueprint*:

General/Overarching

- Accountability system based on college/career standards, rewards, progress, success, and rigorous investment in lowest-performing schools.
- College- and Career Ready (defined by the Administration as no remediation classes upon entering college).
- Recognition of cross-cutting priorities to include technology, evidence, efficiency, support for English Language learners and students with disabilities, and support for rural and other high-need areas.
- Greater access to effective teachers and leaders.
- Greater equity among schools.
- Greater access to college-level, dual-credit, advanced placement, and other accelerated courses in high-need schools.
- Shared responsibility for improving student outcomes (between and among public agencies, families, and community organizations).
- Federal formula grants to high poverty school districts under Title I at current levels; and new funding for competitive grants.

Standards & Assessments

- Higher academic standards for all students.
- New generation of assessments (higher-order thinking skills).
- Greater focus on assessments based on individual student growth and school progress over time in addition to proficiency and absolute performance.

Capacity Building

- Increased state and district capacity to support schools, school leaders, teachers, administrators and students including coordination with early learning programs to improve school readiness.

State and Local School District Flexibility

- Greater focus on reforms related to the length and structure of the school day and year, so that students have the time they need to succeed and teacher have the time they need to collaborate and improve their practice.
- Additional flexibility for states and school districts in how they spend federal dollars as long as they are continuing to focus on improving outcomes for students.
- Race to the Top (RTTT) Fund incentives for systemic reforms.
- Expansion of high performing public charter schools & other “autonomous” public schools.
- Expansion of public school choice options.
- Fewer, larger, more flexible funding streams.
- Fewer restrictions on school districts in blending federal education program funds.

- Continued support for state efforts to develop and implement upgraded standards. Continued federal formula grants to develop and implement quality assessments. (However, beginning in 2015, formula funds will be available only to states that are implementing assessments based on college/career ready standards that are common to a significant number of states.)
- Expanded eligibility to states and school districts for both continuing funds and additional funds to expand strategies for additional students, schools, districts, or states as long as success can be demonstrated.
- Increased focus on a well rounded education.
- Expanded competitive grants to strengthen the recruitment and preparation of teachers, principals, and administrators through high quality programs.
- Expanded competitive grants available for consortia of states or other entities working in partnerships with states for research on, development and improvement of, additional high-quality assessments (in such areas as science, history, or foreign language, high school assessments in academic and career and technical subjects, universally-designed instruments, and for assessments of English Language Learners and students with disabilities).
- New competitive grants to support the development and implementation of a continuum of effective community services, strong family supports, and comprehensive education reforms to improve educational and life outcomes.
- More focus on educational entrepreneurship by expanding competitive grants aimed at increasing the supply of public educational options available to students (available for states, charter school authorizers, charter management organizations, districts, and non-profit organizations).

Effective Teaching and Learning

- Increased emphasis on professional development for teachers and school leaders.
- Increased emphasis on evidence-based instructional models and support.
- New definition of *effective teachers* and *effective leaders* related to student growth and other measures.
- A state link between teacher/leader preparation, job placement, student growth and retention.
- District level performance evaluation system that differentiates by “effectiveness.”

PART II. REQUIREMENTS

The following reflect major requirements of the *Blueprint*:

Standards

- Adopt state-developed standards in English language arts and mathematics; OR secure certification from 4-year public university system that mastery of the standards ensures a student will not need to take remedial coursework; OR work with other states in a consortium to create state-developed common standards – all based on evidence regarding what

students must know and be able to do at each grade level to be on track to graduate from high school college/career ready. (States)

- Adopt statewide English language proficiency standards for English learners aligned so that they reflect the academic language necessary to master the state’s content standards. (States)

Assessments

- Adopt high quality state-wide assessment system. (States)
- Continue annual testing. (States)

Capacity Building

- District must set aside a portion of funds to expand their capacity to improve student performance in high-need schools to ensure equitable distribution of effective teachers and leaders. (Districts; Reward districts exempt)
- High-poverty schools must receive state and local funding levels for personnel and relevant non-personnel expenditures comparable to those received by low-poverty schools in the state. (Districts)

Accountability

- Adopt statewide accountability system that awards success, requires interventions in the lowest-performing schools and districts, and allows local flexibility to determine appropriate improvements and support strategies for most schools. (States)
- Establish a state data system to collect and make public information that is critical to determining how schools and districts are progressing in preparing students to graduate college/career ready. (States)
- Collect and make public data relating to student academic achievement and growth in English language arts and mathematics, student academic achievement in science, and if states so choose, student academic achievement and growth in other subjects. (States and Districts)
- Collect and make public high school data that includes graduation rates, college enrollment rates, rates of enrollment without remediation, and disaggregated student data. (States)
- Collect and make public data about teaching and learning conditions, school climate, student, teacher and leader attendance, disciplinary incidents OR student, parent, school staff surveys about school experience. (States and Districts)
- Establish new State and district accountability criteria for providing the schools, principals, and teachers with the support they need. (States and Districts)
- Establish new category of “REWARD” for schools, districts, and states to be accompanied by new funding, priority for financial rewards, and greater flexibility. Reward districts will also be given flexibility in implementing interventions in their lowest-performing schools.
- Establish three new categories of “CHALLENGE” for schools/districts/states (lowest 15 percent):
 1. Lowest performing five percent in each state – MUST implement one of the four school turnaround models sited below (although a Reward Districts will receive flexibility to implement a different research-based intervention model beyond the scope of the four turnaround models).

2. Next five percent to be identified in a *warning category*, and subject to research-based, locally-determined strategies to help improvement.
 3. Next five percent unable to close the persistent, significant achievement gap – must implement data-driven interventions to support those students who are furthest behind.
- Mandated Intervention Models for the lowest performing five percent of schools in each state:
 - *Transformation Model*: Replace the principal, strengthen staffing, implement a research-based instructional program, provide extended learning time, and implement new governance and flexibility.
 - *Turnaround Model*: Replace the principal and rehire no more than 50 percent of school staff, implement a research-based instructional program, provide extended learning time, and implement a new governance structure.
 - *Restart Model*: Convert or close and reopen the school under the management of an effective charter operator, charter management organization, or education management organization.
 - *School Closure Model*: Close the school and enroll students who attended it in other, higher-performing schools in the district.

School Turnaround Grants

- Districts and their partners will receive 3-year awards to implement one of the models and will be eligible for two additional years of funding if the school is showing progress. (Districts)
- Develop plans to ensure equitable distribution of teachers and principals that receive at least “effective” rating. (States)
- Secretary will reserve a portion of grants for additional activities to enhance state, district and non-profit sector capacity.

Performance Evaluation Systems

- Develop performance evaluation systems in collaboration with teachers, principals, and other stakeholders – and in so doing have greater flexibility in the use of funds. (Districts)
- Report at least every two years on the qualifications and effectiveness ratings of teachers. (States and Districts)

English Learners

- Establish new criteria to ensure statewide identification of students as English Learners, determine eligibility, placement, and duration of programs and services based on states’ valid and reliable English language proficiency assessments. (States)
- Implement a system to evaluate the effectiveness of language instruction programs, provide information on the achievement of subgroups, drive better decisions for program improvement and support districts in selecting effective programs. (States)
- Failure to improve will result in loss of flexibility in the use of funds. (Districts)
- Adopt and implement statewide grade-by-grade English language proficiency standards linked to academic content standards. (States)

Homeless Students

- Allocation of federal funds will be established on the basis of counts of homeless students rather than by shares of Title I allocations.
- Report on the academic outcomes for students served by the Homeless Children and Youths education program. (Grantees)

Neglected and Delinquent Youths

- Reserve funds to support programs conducted by locally-operated institutions serving neglected and delinquent children and youths. (Districts)
- Secretary will update the method used to identify districts as “rural.”

Literacy

- Develop comprehensive evidenced-based preK-12 literacy plans and align federal, state, and local funds to provide high-quality literacy instruction. (States)
- Priority will be given to states that have adopted common, state-developed college/career ready standards.
- Priority will be given to districts that propose to align other local, state, and federal resources with their plans to improve literacy instruction.

STEM

- Federal competitive grants will be available to support transition to higher standards strengthening STEM programs.
- Develop comprehensive, evidenced-based plans, and align federal, state, and local funds to provide high-quality STEM instruction. (States)

Complete Education

- Priority will be given to states that have adopted common state-developed college/career ready standards.
- Priority will be given to districts that propose to align other local, state, and federal resources with their plan to improve instruction in STEM subjects, evidenced-based, and targeted to the schools with the greatest needs or those that have a plan for sustaining the strategy.
- Priority will be given to districts that propose to align other local, state, and federal resources with their plan to improve instruction in STEM subjects.

Ensuring a Well Rounded Education

- Priority will be given to applicants proposing to integrate teaching and learning across academic subjects; to address student learning; and at the high school level, to work with colleges or universities to ensure that coursework is truly aligned with those instructional expectations.
- The Secretary will set aside funds to carry out additional activities to improve teaching and learning in academic subjects.

College Pathways and Accelerated learning

- Priority will be given to applicants that propose to serve high schools with low graduation rates and that partner with state higher education offices and institutions of higher education in a program that allows higher education credits to be portable beyond the individual partner institution.

21st Century Community Learning Centers

- Priority will be given to applicants that propose to carry out programs to support the improvements of Challenge schools, and those that propose to implement comprehensive and coordinated programs.

Successful, Safe, and Healthy Students

- Develop and implement a state or district-wide school climate needs assessment to evaluate school engagement, school safety, and school environment, and publicly report information. (Grantees)
- The assessment must include surveys of students, school staff, and family experiences with respect to individual schools, and additional data such as suspensions and disciplinary actions.
- States will use the data to identify local needs and provide competitive sub grants to school districts and their partners to address the needs of students, schools, and communities.
- Priority will be given to applicants that propose to support partnerships between districts and nonprofit organizations, including community-based organizations.
- Priority will be given to grantees willing to direct funds to schools with the greatest need, including Challenge Schools – or schools with the greatest needs as identified through the school climate needs assessment.

Race to the Top

- Competitive grants to states and school districts to take on ambitious reforms patterned after RTTT.
- Grantees must develop and implement comprehensive plans in collaboration with stakeholders to improve student outcomes (rigorous career/career-ready standards, high quality assessments, better information to families and educators, effective teachers and leaders, turning around persistently low-performing schools, supporting innovative models for reform.
- States must award at least 50% of their grant funds to school districts that participate in the state plan.
- Continue grants based on ability to implement plans effectively and meeting performance targets.

Investing in Innovation (i3)

- Secretary will use a rigorous, 3-tiered evidence framework that directs the highest levels of funding to programs with the strongest evidence.
- Grantees will be required to form partnerships with the private sector to secure matching funds to conduct or participate in an independent evaluation of its projects.

Expanding Educational Options (Charter Schools, Public School Choice, Magnet School Assistance)

- Priority for competitive grants to expand educational entrepreneurship options to applicants proposing to start or expand high-performing public charter schools and autonomous schools that would be subject to the same accountability systems as traditional schools.
- Grantees would be required to develop plans to serve all students in the schools and provide information so that students and families are aware of and able to apply to these schools.
- Grantees would be allowed to set aside funds to improve their capacity to oversee and support schools funded under this program.
- Priority for competitive grants to expand public school choice options to inter-district choice programs that provide comprehensive choices to every student in a district and that increase diversity in the schools.
- Continue to provide competitive grants to districts to support magnet schools under a desegregation plan ordered by a federal court, state court or other authorized state agency or official, or approved by the Secretary.

Questions concerning this Quick Reference Summary should be directed to Reginald M. Felton, director, federal relations at 703-838-6782, or by e-mail, rfelton@nsba.org.