

Reauthorization of ESEA (Elementary and Secondary Act)

BACKGROUND

In 2001, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was reauthorized by Congress as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in an effort to improve the education of America's students. Specific language was included in the bill which protected the freedoms of private, religious, and home schools (section 9506), and also allowed for equitable participation for private schools in some programs, specifically programs designed to help disadvantaged students and to further the professional development of teachers and principals.

In addition, the NCLB Act prohibited the establishment of a national curriculum (section 9527), national testing (section 9529), mandatory national teacher certification (section 9530), and a national student database (section 9531).

STATUS

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES:

The Republican majority in the Education and Workforce Committee favor a piecemeal approach to ESEA (NCLB) reauthorization and has introduced a series of bills to address the inherent problems in the current version of ESEA.

SENATE:

The Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee has not offered any K – 12 reform legislation. However, Chairman Tom Harkin favors comprehensive ESEA reform.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION:

Secretary of Education Arne Duncan campaigned for a comprehensive ESEA bill by the start 2011 school year. Since ESEA reauthorization stalled in Congress, he announced that the DOE would be offering NCLB relief “waivers” to states that adopt favored reforms such as national standards and testing. Although complete details of the waiver program have not been made public, several states have indicated that they will seek relief waivers since they will not achieve 100% proficiency in math and reading by the 2014 deadline. Despite a lack of information regarding the requirements for states to receive the “waivers,” the Department has indicated that the distribution of the “waivers” will be tied to the states’ adoption of “college- or- career-ready standards,” and testing which is tied to the Common Core Standards.

CONCERNS

As the House, Senate, and the Department of Education move towards education reform on different tracks, the AACS continues to communicate the important principles of freedom and choice in education. Private, faith-based schools must have the freedom to operate according to their mission, and language must be in place to protect their autonomy. These schools provide educational options for parents, and safe, friendly, successful environments where their children can learn. Educational policies must reflect these principles in order to be effective and successful.

Protecting religious, private, and home schools are essential to providing educational choice and freedom. In addition, the government must ensure that in no way will there be a federally established national curriculum, national test, national student data base, or a mandatory teacher certification.

Protection of Religious, Private, and Home Schools

- Religious, private, and home schools are already regulated under state law.
- Religious, private, and home schools have strong accountability to the parents.
- A very high percentage of religious, private, and home schools do not receive federal (or state) funds.
- Religious, private, and home schools have demonstrated that they are succeeding in educating their students without governmental educational regulations.

Danger of National Curriculum / National Standards

- A national curriculum would diminish the ability of each state to meet its schools' diverse cultural and educational needs.
- A national curriculum would expand the control of the federal government over local schools and state departments of education which would limit parental involvement.
- A national curriculum would limit the individualized instruction essential to helping students with special needs.
- A national curriculum would create a vague and unspecified "statewide partnership" with local politicians and secular educators.
- A national curriculum would be easily influenced by controversial societal norms which would influence the values and beliefs under girding the teaching-learning process.

Dangers of National Test

- A national test would create a *de facto* national curriculum.
- A national test would be susceptible to having its content politicized.
- A national test would be in addition to, not in place of state and local testing, which would result in less instructional time in the classroom.
- A national test is not the answer to increase accountability for a school's progress; it would distance schools from their most effective accountability partners: principals, teachers, and parents.
- A national test will not improve the education of America's students because it decreases the individual learning needs in the educational process.
- A national test would jeopardize the freedoms of private, religious, and home schools by dictating what content should be covered in their classes.

Dangers of a National Student Database

- A national database jeopardizes the privacy of children and their families.
- A national database has the potential of increasing the risk of identity theft, which would endanger children and their families.
- A national database which has a parental "opt-in" policy could eventually become an "opt-out" policy which would diminish parental control.
- A national database demonstrates a "big brother" philosophy of monitoring and tracking young citizens.
- A national database would incur a large federal expense to produce and maintain.
- Currently, the states and federal government track disaggregated data on students, rendering more detailed, personally identifiable data unnecessary.
- A national database presents a threat to private, religious, and home school students who are enrolled in one or more public school classes.

Dangers of Mandatory National Certification

- A national teacher certification program would add to the complexity of requirements for teachers.
- A national teacher certification program would increase the paperwork load for teachers further curtailing their classroom preparation time.
- A national teacher certification program would not be a panacea for plummeting public school academic success.
- A national teacher certification program would incur extra costs, infringing on the funding of legitimate educational initiatives.
- A national teacher certification program would force teachers to undergo curricula training that may countermand their deeply held personal or religious beliefs.
- A national teacher certification program could be extended to private, religious, and home school teachers, an act which would violate their freedom to teach according to their core beliefs.