

March 17, 2010
Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
ESEA Reauthorization: The Obama Administration's ESEA Reauthorization Priorities
Arne Duncan
U.S. Secretary of Education
Testimony

Thank you Chairman Harkin, Senator Enzi, and Members of the Committee for inviting me to testify today on the Obama Administration's Blueprint for reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. Today, more than ever, a world-class education is necessary for success. The President and I believe strongly that this Blueprint provides a way for America to strengthen the schools that our children attend and prepare the children who will be the architects of our continued greatness to assume that role.

This blueprint builds on the significant reforms already made in response to the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 around four areas: (1) Improving teacher and principal effectiveness to ensure that every classroom has a great teacher and every school has a great leader; (2) Providing information to families to help them evaluate and improve their children's schools, and to educators to help them improve their students' learning; (3) Implementing college- and career-ready standards and developing improved assessments aligned with those standards; and (4) Improving student learning and achievement in America's lowest-performing schools by providing intensive support and effective interventions.

Incorporating and extending this framework, this blueprint for a re-envisioned federal role builds on these key priorities:

(1) College- and Career-Ready Students

Raising standards for all students. We will set a clear goal: Every student should graduate from high school ready for college and a career, regardless of their income, race, ethnic or language background, or disability status. Following the lead of the nation's governors, we're calling on all states to develop and adopt standards in English language arts and mathematics that build toward college- and career-readiness by the time students graduate from high school. States may choose to upgrade their existing standards or work together with other states to develop and adopt common, state-developed standards.

Better assessments. We will support the development and use of a new generation of assessments that are aligned with college- and career-ready standards, to better determine whether students have acquired the skills they need for success. New assessment systems will better capture higher-order skills, provide more accurate measures of student growth, and better inform classroom instruction to respond to academic needs.

A complete education. Students need a well-rounded education to contribute as citizens in our democracy and to thrive in a global economy – from literacy to mathematics, science, and technology to history, civics, foreign languages, the arts, financial literacy, and other subjects. We will support states, districts, school leaders, and teachers in implementing a more complete

education through improved professional development and evidence-based instructional models and supports.

(2) Great Teachers and Leaders in Every School

Effective teachers and principals. We will elevate the teaching profession to focus on recognizing, encouraging, and rewarding excellence. We are calling on states and districts to develop and implement systems of teacher and principal evaluation and support, and to identify effective and highly effective teachers and principals on the basis of student growth and other factors. These systems will inform professional development and help teachers and principals improve student learning. In addition, a new program will support ambitious efforts to recruit, place, reward, retain, and promote effective teachers and principals and enhance the profession of teaching.

Our best teachers and leaders where they are needed most. Our proposal will provide funds to states and districts to develop and support effective teachers and leaders, with a focus on improving the effectiveness of teachers and leaders in high-need schools. We will call on states and districts to track equitable access to effective teachers and principals, and where needed, take steps to improve access to effective educators for students in high-poverty, high-minority schools.

Strengthening teacher and leader preparation and recruitment. We need more effective pathways and practices for preparing, placing, and supporting beginning teachers and principals in high-need schools. States will monitor the effectiveness of their traditional and alternative preparation programs, and we will invest in programs whose graduates are succeeding in the classroom, based on student growth and other factors.

(3) Equity and Opportunity for All Students

Rigorous and fair accountability for all levels. All students will be included in an accountability system that builds on college- and career-ready standards, rewards progress and success, and requires rigorous interventions in the lowest-performing schools. We will celebrate the Reward states, districts, and schools that do the most to improve outcomes for their students and to close achievement gaps, as well as those who are on the path to have all students graduating or on track to graduate ready for college and a career by 2020. All schools will be aiming to do their part to help us reach that ambitious goal, and for most schools, leaders at the state, district, and school level will enjoy broad flexibility to determine how to get there.

But in the lowest-performing schools that have not made progress over time, we will ask for dramatic change. To ensure that responsibility for improving student outcomes no longer falls solely at the door of schools, we will also promote accountability for states and districts that are not providing their schools, principals, and teachers with the support they need to succeed.

Meeting the needs of diverse learners. Schools must support all students, including by providing appropriate instruction and access to a challenging curriculum along with additional supports and attention where needed. From English Learners and students with disabilities to

Native American students, homeless students, migrant students, rural students, and neglected or delinquent students, our proposal will continue to support and strengthen programs for these students and ensure that schools are helping them meet college- and career-ready standards.

Greater equity. To give every student a fair chance to succeed, and give principals and teachers the resources to support student success, we will call on school districts and states to take steps to ensure equity, by such means as moving toward comparability in resources between high- and low-poverty schools.

(4) Raise the Bar and Reward Excellence

Fostering a Race to the Top. Race to the Top has provided incentives for excellence by encouraging state and local leaders to work together on ambitious reforms, make tough choices, and develop comprehensive plans that change policies and practices to improve outcomes for students. We will continue Race to the Top's incentives for systemic reforms at the state level and expand the program to school districts that are willing to take on bold, comprehensive reforms.

Supporting effective public school choice. We will support the expansion of high-performing public charter schools and other autonomous public schools, and support local communities as they expand public school choice options for students within and across school districts.

Promoting a culture of college readiness and success. Access to a challenging high school curriculum has a greater impact on whether a student will earn a 4-year college degree than his or her high school test scores, class rank, or grades. We will increase access to college-level, dual credit, and other accelerated courses in high-need schools and support college-going strategies and models that will help students succeed.

(5) Promote Innovation and Continuous Improvement

Fostering innovation and accelerating success. The Investing in Innovation Fund will support local and nonprofit leaders as they develop and scale up programs that have demonstrated success, and discover the next generation of innovative solutions.

Supporting, recognizing, and rewarding local innovations. Our proposal will encourage and support local innovation by creating fewer, larger, more flexible funding streams around areas integral to student success, giving states and districts flexibility to focus on local needs. New competitive funding streams will provide greater flexibility, reward results, and ensure that federal funds are used wisely. At the same time, districts will have fewer restrictions on blending funds from different categories with less red tape.

Supporting student success. Tackling persistent achievement gaps requires public agencies, community organizations, and families to share responsibility for improving outcomes for students. We will prioritize programs that include a comprehensive redesign of the school day, week, or year, that promote schools as the center of their communities, or that partner with community organizations. Our proposal will invest in new models that keep students safe,

supported, and healthy both in and out of school, and that support strategies to better engage families and community members in their children's education.

I look forward to working with the Members of this Committee on a bipartisan basis to complete this critical work, and I would be happy to answer any questions that you have. Thank you.