

ESEA Reauthorization: Meeting the Needs of the Whole Student Hearing
Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
April 22, 2010

Testimony of Clare Struck
Guidance Counselor, Malcolm Price Laboratory School
Cedar Falls, Iowa

Chairman Harkin, Ranking Member Enzi, and members of the committee: My name is Clare Struck and I am an elementary school counselor at the Malcolm Price Laboratory School in Cedar Falls, Iowa. Thank you for this opportunity to speak on behalf of the students and staff of the Price Laboratory School (PLS) as well as the 170,000 educational leaders who are members of ASCD. I appear before you today as a mother, an educator, and a strong advocate committed to meeting the needs of the whole child. It has been my life's work and the work of the Price Laboratory School to provide all of our children—from six weeks of age through high school—with a whole child education; one that ensures that they are **healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged**.

Before I begin, I want to acknowledge Chairman Harkin's work on behalf of the whole child. Throughout the course of your career in the House and Senate, you have been a staunch champion on issues affecting our children—everything from the foods they eat to the quality of the education they receive and the school buildings in which they learn. We at Price Lab were proud of your being chosen as the first recipient of the Whole Child Leadership Award in 2006. In accepting the award, you said, "Educators, parents, and children rely on Congress to fund education initiatives that will help our kids reach their full potential. With help from organizations like ASCD, I am confident we can persuade the Senate to meet this responsibility. After all, there is no better investment we can make than developing the minds of our children." Thank you, Chairman Harkin, for your efforts on behalf of the whole child, not just in Iowa but across the nation.

I am also pleased to note that Price Laboratory School was awarded the first ever Vision in Action: The ASCD Whole Child Award in March 2010 because of our efforts aimed at ensuring that all of our preK–12 students are healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged.

As Congress begins work on the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), it is critical that the current overemphasis on standardized tests, punitive accountability systems, and rigid mandates be replaced by a more student-centered, educator-supporting, instruction-driven model focused on teaching and learning and meeting the needs of all students, both in and out of school. We at PLS have embraced this model of providing a whole child education to our all our children and have seen tremendous results.

The Price Lab School is a preK–12 public school that is part of the College of Education at the University of Northern Iowa (UNI). PLS is home to 369 students, 53 faculty, and seven support personnel. The population is 71.5 percent Caucasian, 18 percent African American, 6 percent Asian American, 4 percent Hispanic American, and .5 percent Native American. Students with disabilities make up 7 percent of our population. Eighteen percent of our students qualify for free or reduced lunch prices. The majority of PLS students reside in Cedar Falls and 32 percent of our students attend through the state's open enrollment policy.

PLS is accredited by the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI) by meeting the high NCA standards for academic programs, learning materials, student needs, student interests, staffing, and facilities. PLS also works closely with the Iowa Department of Education to ensure that the PLS students and the UNI teacher education students experience the academic and character education standards required or recommended for the schools of Iowa.

In May 2009, the Price Laboratory School was designated Iowa's first statewide Research & Development (R&D) School. As such, PLS creates innovative curriculum and evaluates promising instructional practices to support Iowa's 472,000 K–12 students and 34,600 full-time K–12 teachers.

The Whole Child Initiative

In 2006, ASCD convened the Commission on the Whole Child—a group composed of leading thinkers, researchers, and practitioners. It was charged with the redefining a successful learner from one whose achievement is measured solely by academic tests to one who is knowledgeable, emotionally and physically healthy, civically inspired, engaged in the arts, prepared for work and economic self-sufficiency, and ready for the world beyond formal schooling. The Commission issued a call to action for educators, parents, businesses, health and social service providers, arts professionals, recreation leaders, and policymakers to forge a new compact with our children to ensure their whole and healthy development—a compact that strives to develop the whole child.

A whole child is intellectually active; physically, verbally, socially, and academically competent; empathetic, kind, caring, and fair; creative and curious; disciplined, self-directed, and goal-oriented; free; a critical thinker; confident; cared for; and valued. This is the goal of a whole child education. The Whole Child Initiative is built upon five basic tenets:

1. Each student enters school healthy and learns about and practices a healthy lifestyle.
2. Each student learns in an intellectually challenging environment that is physically and emotionally safe for students and adults.
3. Each student is actively engaged in learning and is connected to the school and broader community.
4. Each student has access to personalized learning and is supported by qualified, caring adults.
5. Each graduate is challenged academically and prepared for success in college or further study and for employment in a global environment.

Over the course of the last year, whole child advocates across the country have been working to spread the word about the need to provide each child with a whole child education. Several states have petitioned their state boards of education and state legislatures to adopt a resolution acknowledging the need to educate the whole child. I am excited to report that just this month, Senator Kay Hagan introduced S. Res. 478 designating March as National Whole Child Month and recognizing that making sure all children are healthy, safe, engaged, supported and challenged should be a national priority. We thank Senator Hagan for her efforts and ask that all of the members of this committee join us in our efforts to make the passage of this whole child resolution a reality.

Why focus on the Whole Child?

PLS has a longstanding tradition of focusing on the whole child, much of it delivered through the nuances of our school's climate and culture. Faculty, staff, students, and families alike foster an environment that promotes intellectual challenge, high standards of character, and the development of the whole child. This culture of support has been developed over many years, but can be traced to some specific catalysts.

Our school improvement process, NCA CASI, has a significant history of focusing not only on our students' academic goals but also on whole child goals. As part of this process, one of the areas our school chose to focus on in 1999–2000 was school climate. This decision was based upon a wide assortment of student, parent, and staff data. Using the data analysis from the 1999 and 2002 National Study of School Evaluation Teacher Opinion Surveys, the 1999 and 2002 NCA Student Surveys (Grades 5–12), the 1999 and 2002 NCA Parent Surveys (Grades preK–12), and our ongoing schoolwide NCA meetings, the following specific goal was determined. 2004 School Climate Goal: All members of the Price Laboratory School will demonstrate respectful, positive, and ethical behaviors in both verbal and nonverbal communication for the purpose of creating a positive school climate and effective schoolwide discipline policies. Specific schoolwide interventions in response to this goal were: the emphasis on respect in the Elementary Citizenship program, the PreK–5 "Be a Buddy, Not a Bully!" guidance curriculum and program, the Middle School Life Skills Class, the Notice of Concern and Notice of Success Forms for middle school and high school, the Character and Leadership Attribute Rating form for high school, and the development and implementation of the high school Extracurricular Involvement Plan.

The well-known Elementary Citizenship Program grew out of a shared concern at the elementary level more than 15 years ago. In 1993, the elementary staff and administration expressed concerns about the students not transferring the level of respect they demonstrated in the classrooms to the more unstructured areas of recess, lunchtime, hallways, and before and after school. We collectively decided to move forward with a proactive response to instill the core tenets of citizenship. We taught students how to advocate for their own rights and the rights of others. Children are overtly charged with protecting our learning environment to ensure we always have a caring community. .

This program continues to transform in response to the current character education needs of our elementary students based upon input from students, parents, and faculty. For example, when PLS became a First Amendment School in 2005, we used the structure of the Elementary Citizenship Program to teach and reinforce the five freedoms of the First Amendment to all of our PreK–5 students. Our monthly citizenship themes and assemblies focused on what these five freedoms look like at our school.

The high school advisory program was developed in response to changing student demographics at PLS. Over the past 15 years, we have seen an increasing number of parents choose to enroll their children at Price Lab School as a "last resort." Some students enroll at PLS after being kicked out of other schools. Parents of children who have struggled academically and socially in other school settings choose PLS, hoping we would be able to meet their children wherever they were and move forward. This influx of "at-risk" students forced us to rethink what we do and how we do it.

We engaged in a process of determining our core beliefs, some of which include: believing every child can be ready for work, life and college; embodying a relentlessness that does not allow us to write off any child; and developing a professional efficacy that means we believe we have greater power than any external factor to influence student achievement and personal development. We

worked diligently to put these beliefs into action. We assigned our highest-need students to our strongest student advisors. We fostered a relationship between students and advisors through which our teachers act as “in-school parents” who not only advocate for the best interest of the student, but also demand the best from them.

Putting these core beliefs into practice also sparked changes in classrooms. PLS courses are grounded in a student-centered and inquiry-based curriculum where students are engaged in interactive and project-based learning. We believe that every child is a full and rightful member of our learning community. Faculty members are well seasoned in developing and delivering differentiated learning to meet the needs of each and every student.

In 2005, Dr. Jeffrey Cornett, the former Dean of the College of Education at UNI, taught us another value we strive to live out every day—“Care & Excellence.” He challenged us to be “two for two.” He explained that a lot of teachers care about kids and a lot of them have mastery of their teaching content, but many teachers are only one for two. The most effective teachers are two for two. *Care & Excellence* reinforces that if we don’t deeply care about every child—even those children whose behavior makes them tough to love—then we cannot give them the first-class education they all deserve. Teaching is as much listening to the tear-stained story of a hurting child as it is engaging him or her in rigorous academic experiences. It is both cheering the basketball team on to a state championship and promoting deep conceptual and procedural knowledge of necessary 21st century skills and concepts.

High standards and expectations for all students

The learning environment at PLS has established a tradition of students believing in themselves and setting high aspirations. We have had a 100 percent graduation rate for many years, and typically over 90 percent of our graduates go on to a postsecondary program of study. Our student-centered curriculum encourages all students to be engaged learners. As a result, we have very few issues with absenteeism and a no dropouts.

Our desire to promote a community of learners is not only an expectation for students, but is mirrored in our professional development (PD) as well. PLS and ASCD recognize that the two most important school-based factors affecting student achievement are the effectiveness of the classroom teacher and the effectiveness of the school principal. In order to address the evolving needs of our students, schools and districts must build the capacity to support all educators in gaining and sustaining the professional knowledge, skills, and training they need to be successful.

Over the past few years, the PLS faculty has adopted a variety of initiatives to support reflection and improvement in the design and delivery of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Of these initiatives, Authentic Intellectual Work (AIW) is designed for faculty to collaborate in small groups, scoring videos of instruction, student work, and the teacher-created activities students are engaged in. Our PreK–12 building allows faculty from a variety of grade levels and disciplines to work together to share ideas, revise lessons, and monitor progress in our students’ learning. The AIW initiative has been a helpful tool for our faculty to use to evaluate the success of our January Term (J-Term) projects. As the pilot school for the implementation of the Iowa Core Curriculum, PLS faculty have also centered our PD around revising courses and programs in order to ensure our students are prepared for success in the 21st century.

Providing pupil services

As the elementary school counselor at PLS for the past 27 years, I have provided pupil services in four main areas: curriculum, individual student planning, responsive services, and system support. In my role as a school counselor, I am fortunate to work with all of the students. They “carry” me with them from year to year as they move from teacher to teacher. Research shows that students do better academically when they feel supported by caring and qualified adults. Additionally, they are less likely to engage in risky, violent, or self-destructive behaviors.

Curriculum: In 2005, PLS developed a standards-based PreK–5 guidance curriculum, which is integrated into the classroom teachers’ curricula called the Buddy Circles program. Buddy Circles partners PLS 4th graders with their peers from a school for children with severe disabilities. The accompanying guidance curriculum emphasizes that all people have abilities and limitations, all people have feelings, and friendship is important for all kids. The program promotes social-emotional knowledge and skills. Pre- and postdata gathered each year through student interviews has shown that student empathy and compassion are heightened as a result of the program.

Individual Student Planning: School counselors are often the connecting link between students, parents, classroom teachers, special education teachers, school psychologists, and other support staff in developing and implementing individual learning and behavior plans. This kind of team support, coupled with setting specific goals and collecting data, has helped a group of 4th graders I work with to show significant improvement in being respectful, following directions, and getting their work done.

Responsive Services: In my capacity as a school counselor, I have been called upon to meet the immediate needs of students through individual and small group counseling, ongoing consultation with teachers and parents, and referrals to community agencies and programs for students and families. Recently, I teamed with PLS’s other school counselor in assisting a family with an elementary school student and a middle school student to get support from the Iowa Department of Human Services and the justice system to keep them safe from their father—a methamphetamine dealer and user who is prone to unpredictable behavior and violent outbursts.

System Support: I provide and participate in ongoing PD that includes school counseling, the school improvement process, school climate, and character education data-gathering and interpretation. Since 2008, I have worked closely with the Iowa Department of Education and the Iowa Area Education Agencies to survey all Iowa school counselors about their roles and responsibilities and the kinds of support they need to ensure that all students are successful learners who feel safe.

Pupil services providers are vital to fostering and sustaining a school climate that embraces the five tenets of the ASCD Whole Child Initiative—healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged.

Congress can best support the work of pupil service providers by establishing policies that promote:

- Innovative and useful reform that requires state and local governments to dismantle the obstacles to collaboration between and among school systems and the social, health, and safety services that support children.
- Alternate pathways to graduation that are available to all students.
- An adult mentor for every student—one who supports individualized learning opportunities that engage students in relevant curriculum and challenging education plans.

- The facilitation of school partnerships with community service agencies and other local entities.
- Flexible grouping and flexible time frames to measure success, which enables schools to develop alternative approaches to the Carnegie Unit and other traditional conventions such as the traditional school day and year.
- Publicly reporting the ratio of counselors and support staff to students—with an effort toward meeting the goal of the ASCA-recommended 250:1 student-to-counselor ratio.
- School turnaround strategies that incorporate the tenets of the Whole Child Initiative—with special attention to fortifying the relationships and interpersonal connections among students, staff, and families—to support student achievement.
- Content assessments that are valid, reliable, and comprehensible for English language learners and students with disabilities.

ASCD believes each student deserves access to personalized learning and support from qualified, caring adults. Research shows that, in addition to improving students' academic performance, supportive schools also help prevent a host of negative consequences, including isolation, violent behavior, dropping out of school, and suicide. Central to a supportive school are teachers, administrators, and other caring adults who take a personal interest in each student and in the success of each student.

Healthy

PLS and ASCD believe that each student deserves to enter school healthy and ready to learn about and practice a healthy lifestyle. Research has confirmed that students do better in school when they are emotionally and physically healthy. PLS is committed to a culture of wellness. The K–10 daily physical education program and K–11 weekly health program focus on students as engaged and reflective learners who possess the knowledge, skills, fitness, and dispositions to pursue physical activities and make healthy choices. This leads directly into our Junior/Senior Healthy Active Lifestyles course, which allows students to use the tools they have learned in their previous daily PE experiences to effectively manage their time and take responsibility for their own health and fitness in real-world experiences. It is my hope that as Congress looks to reauthorize the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act and ESEA, it will support policies that ensure physical education and health education classes emphasize lifetime healthy behaviors.

Our most successful effort at school wellness has been the creation of our Grassroots Cafe. We have gone from purchasing processed foods to supporting local farmers by buying fresh meat, produce, and beverages from their farms. Students have also become educated on food and how it affects their own health, the local community, and the world. Students have planted and harvested vegetables from their own garden on campus under the leadership of a PLS volunteer. The students also maintain a composting pile near the garden. Our average number of students eating school lunch increased from 160 to 220 this year.

I'd like to thank Chairman Harkin and Senators Murkowski, Brown, Casey, and Bennet for their leadership on efforts to improve the nutritional content of school meals provided by the federal school lunch program. While not every school has the same access to local farmers and high-quality, nutritious foods as we do at PLS, every child deserves to have meals that are healthy and nutritious and that promote good eating habits.

ASCD suggests Congress can promote healthy students by enacting policies that

- Use state report cards to measure and publicly report on the health, safety, and education of children and families and that offer a comprehensive look at the circumstances (e.g., hunger, poverty, crime, literacy, and health) of children and the factors that influence student success.
- Establish coordinated school health advisory councils as part of schools' improvement efforts.
- Ensure that physical education and health education classes emphasize lifetime healthy behaviors.

Safe

PLS and ASCD believe that each student deserves to learn in an intellectually challenging environment that is physically and emotionally safe. Children who don't feel safe at school can't concentrate on their studies, don't connect well with their classmates, or don't go to school at all. At PLS, we have a well-established comprehensive and developmental school counseling program based upon the ASCA model, which addresses the academic, career, and personal/social development of every PreK–12 student.

Two licensed Iowa school counselors serve the PreK–12 enrollment of 370. This student-counselor ratio allows the counselors to get to know all of the students and families they serve. These counselors developed a PreK–5 bullying prevention program—Be a Buddy, Not a Bully!—that has been successfully used at PLS as well as other schools throughout Iowa, the U.S., and the world. The *Des Moines Register* reported in 2008 that graduates of PLS ranked second for grade point average in the most difficult courses and in the Top 10 for overall freshman grade point average at the three Iowa Regents universities. The 2007 and 2008 National Schools of Character Finalist evaluation reports cite the PLS school counseling program as a crucial link in this intellectually challenging environment and caring community.

To promote school settings that are physically and emotionally safe for every student and adult, ASCD proposes that Congress develop a set of more comprehensive indicators of student well-being in ESEA:

- Disaggregated statistics about student security, discipline, and support to help inform teacher professional development activities and integrate climate and culture strategies into school improvement plans at the school and district level.
- Publicly reported survey data from students, staff, and families on the school climate, parent satisfaction, and family outreach.
- Evidence of family communication and engagement plans at both the district and school level.

Engaged

PLS and ASCD believe each student deserves to be actively engaged in learning and connected to the school and broader community. To help facilitate this type of connectedness, PLS offers January and May Term courses that engage students in project-based learning. This year, J-Term was a pilot for all elementary, 8th grade, and 11th grade students. May Term will be for all PreK–12 students. We

anticipate this becoming a standing practice at PLS. Students propose a project or choose from a variety of teacher-developed projects.

The 11th grade J-Term projects included hosting a talk radio show, investigating string theory, engaging in multiple service learning experiences, job shadowing, and learning how to play the guitar. The 8th graders participated in The Empathy Project for J-Term. In small groups, students are effecting positive change in our school and community by developing films that create awareness, engender empathy, and call viewers to action. Elementary students created games to teach others about the floods in response to the widespread devastation in our community; planned and held a garage sale they titled “Hope for Haiti,” where they earned \$313.09 they donated to the Red Cross; and engaged in Spanish cooking to complement what they learned in their elementary Spanish classes. These project-based learning experiences help PLS students develop 21st century skills such as demonstrating initiative and self direction, using individual talents and skills for productive outcomes, effectively managing time, and performing work without oversight. They also increase student options and voice in what they learn, as well as how they learn and demonstrate what they’ve learned.

I was actively engaged in the overall planning and implementation of the J-Term and May Term projects at the elementary level. I also cotaught a course to 3rd through 5th graders titled, “The Tibetan Culture: Building Community Through Compassion,” in preparation for the Dalai Lama’s visit to UNI in May 2010. Our group of 3rd through 5th graders had the opportunity to visit with the Venerable Geshe Thupten Dorjee, an ordained Tibetan Buddhist monk from Drepung Loseling Monastery in southern India. They also did Tibetan cooking and music and created their own mandala with Tibetan students studying at UNI.

According to ASCD, Congress can support systemic reforms to promote student engagement, such as intellectually challenging school environments; opportunities for community service, apprenticeships, and internships; a relevant and exploratory middle-level curriculum; high school redesign that includes a rigorous curriculum and meaningful relationship with caring adults; and incentives to businesses and local community services to become more involved in the educational process.

Supported

PLS and ASCD believe each student deserves access to personalized learning and support from qualified, caring adults.

In 2005–2006, after participating in a book study of *Nobody Left to Hate* by Elliot Aronson, the PLS middle school teachers made the shared decision to revitalize the Advisory Program for grades 6–8. Our goal was to ensure that each student felt valued and respected at school. We decided to transition the advisory groups from meeting once a month to meeting daily. The PLS middle school students and teachers have benefited from an established meeting time every day of the week. Each day, the advisory groups meet in cooperative learning groups to participate in developmentally appropriate activities and moral discussions in order to meet the social-emotional needs of each student. The success of the PLS Middle School Advisory Program continues to be seen on a daily basis as trusting relationships are formed between students and teachers. It has been said that the students often view their advisor as an “in-school parent.”

Middle school is a difficult stage for many young people. Research tells us that this is where many of our students either make the unconscious decision to continue their journey toward high school graduation or begin the process of becoming a dropout. Numerous warning signs such as chronic

absenteeism and truancy, behavior problems, and academic struggles prove to be early indicators of their academic future. It is with this in mind that I want to thank Senator Hagan and Senator Klobuchar for their leadership on combating middle school truancy. The Student Attendance Success Act's recognition of the need for a whole child approach to combat truancy reflects a true understanding of the complexities of this issue and the comprehensive solutions needed to deal with it.

I teach guidance units to the PreK–5 classes. This provides a wonderful foundation for me to get to know all the students and a venue for me to teach them critical life skills through topics such as feelings, friends, differences and similarities, social skills, conflict resolution, diversity, choices, and so forth. I also facilitate many small groups to support children dealing with divorce, death of a loved one, family members with a serious illness, family members with addictions, friendship concerns, social skills needs, worries, and perfectionism. I provide individual counseling to many PreK–12 students to support them through difficult times in their lives.

Challenged

PLS and ASCD believe each graduate deserves to be challenged academically and prepared for success in college and further study and for employment in a global environment. To succeed in college, other postsecondary education, civic society, and the workplace, students need higher-level thinking, communication, and problem-solving skills. In order to prepare our students for success in their postsecondary experiences, PLS has created a multi-component Junior/Senior Options Program to serve as a launching pad for students to success after high school, whether in work, college, the military, or another experience.

The Junior/Senior Options Program consist of viable alternatives for students to personalize their own curriculum that relates to and helps order their future plans. Some of the options students can choose to participate in are dual enrollment university courses, individualized study courses, internships with local businesses/industry/organizations, cadet teaching, and a senior project designed and implemented by the student. The scheduling flexibility and personalized curriculum provides students the opportunity to refine their organizational skills, time management skills, and independent decision-making skills. Approximately 84 percent of the current seniors and 66 percent of the current juniors are participating in at least one of the Junior/Senior Options. From the 2009 graduating class, 94 percent took the ACT and went on to further their education at two- or four-year colleges or universities. These statistics strongly correlate with the number of students participating in the Junior/Senior Options Program.

Innovative approaches to keeping secondary students engaged in their learning, coupled with flexible programs that incorporate various different student skills and school and community stakeholders, have proven effective to help students find relevance in their learning and encourage them to complete their studies. I want to thank Senators Bingaman, Dodd, Reed, Murray, Brown, Casey, Hagan, Merkley, Franken, and Bennett for their leadership on the Graduation Promise Act and the Secondary School Innovation Fund Act. These two pieces of legislation are aimed at providing the challenging learning environments all students deserve, by promoting the types of innovative approaches that we at PLS are incorporating into our practice..

ASCD has recommended that the next iteration of ESEA include growth model accountability for each child, college- and career-readiness standards that go beyond proficiency solely in reading and math but include all core academic subjects, and enactment of the Secondary School Innovation Fund Act.

Conclusion

We can no longer afford to develop the range of education and noneducation policies affecting children or operate the resulting programs serving them in isolation; we must work to coordinate and integrate them for the benefit of students rather than the interests of adults or bureaucracies. Building this synchronization into policies at that outset will lead to more efficient and effective results for children.

Pupil services providers such as school counselors, school psychologists, school social workers, and school nurses can be a constant force in developing and maintaining a positive school climate and a culture of caring where all students feel connected, safe, and able to learn.

I want to close with the words written to me by two of our graduates:

“I was just thinking about elementary school and what it meant to me and you were the first person to pop into my mind. Visions of puppets and smiling children, small group and big group sessions. The more I thought about this the more I realized what a major role you played in my childhood and for that I am most grateful.”

“Thank you for all the opportunities you gave me to grow and experience new things like mentoring the little kids.”

Children who are hurting, hungry, scared, and disengaged cannot learn. We cannot focus on achievement alone. Join with me to ensure that each child is healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged.