

Upcoming dates of note

March 17th – Secretary of Education Arne Duncan testifies before the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee

March 17th – NEA President testifies before the House Labor, Health and Human Services, Education Appropriations Subcommittee

March 18th -- Anticipated vote on health care reform

March 18th – Secretary Duncan testifies before the House Labor, Health and Human Services, Education Appropriations Subcommittee

March 18th -- ED stakeholder meeting regarding blueprint

March 18th -- ED plans to release list of bottom 5% of schools (persistently low-performing); probably not a press event, but likely a press release or statement. News likely to trickle out in days prior to that release because as state applications are approved, they are posted online

March 23rd – closing date for responding to Survey Monkey regarding ESEA

March 26th – comments due to House Education and Labor Committee regarding Administration's plan regarding reauthorization of ESEA

March 27th – April 12th – Congress in recess

April 11 – 45th anniversary of the signing of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act by President Lyndon Johnson

The Administration ESEA Blueprint

March 13, 2010

Talking Points

A Blueprint Is Worthless Without a Solid Foundation:

- There is too much focus on states competing for dollars rather than laying a solid foundation of resources on which states and local districts can count.
- Because of devastating budget problems across the country, states are laying off educators and increasing class sizes. A competition for grants is a cruel hoax on state and local taxpayers, who desperately need a reliable stream of funding.
- The potential ramifications of moving from formula aid to competitive grants does not bode well for the ability of ESEA to deal with equity and is a great disservice to students everywhere. When adequate funding is lacking in states across the country, the first priority should be to provide adequate funding for EVERY student in EVERY school rather than creating more winners and losers.
- The Blueprint talks about promoting a broad education, yet the focus remains on math and reading test scores, which will do nothing to address schools' narrowing of curriculum.
- **NEA cannot support the Blueprint:** The National Education Association cannot support the Administration's plan at this time. We are disappointed by this first effort by the Administration to rectify the considerable problems in current federal education law.

Too Many Missed Opportunities for Students and Public Schools:

- What excited educators about President Obama's hopes and vision for education on the campaign trail has not made its way into this blueprint. We were expecting to see a much broader effort to truly transform public education for kids.
- Instead, this blueprint's accountability system still relies on standardized tests to identify winners and losers.
- We were expecting more funding stability to enable states to meet higher expectations. Instead, this blueprint requires states to compete for critical resources, setting up another winners-and-losers scenario.
- We were expecting school turnaround efforts to be research-based and fully collaborative. Instead, we see too much top-down scapegoating of teachers and not enough collaboration.
- We were expecting to see a continuation of the President's eloquent plea for parents to be more involved in their children's education, yet there is nothing in the blueprint that makes that any easier. At a time when unemployment is so high, schools are moving to 4-day weeks and raising class sizes due to layoffs, this blueprint seems tone-deaf to the realities parents, educators and students are facing everyday.

Wrong for Struggling Schools: The public knows that struggling schools need a wide range of targeted actions to ensure they succeed for every student, and yet the

Administration's plan continues to call for prescriptions before the actual problems are diagnosed. We need proven answers along with the deep insight of the experienced professionals who actually work in schools.

- **A Better Way: NEA Priority Schools Campaign – great public schools for every student**
 - NEA successfully worked with the administration to include the transformation model as a critical option. It is the only fully collaborative model and the only model that gives all the stakeholders in public education an opportunity to actually change the system for all students.
 - That model reflects successful work now supported by NEA affiliates, and the model is promoted through NEA's [Priority Schools Campaign](#). The campaign fosters what works and can continue to work in the long-term: *Strong leadership* – collaboration between administrators and educators on the range of issues facing Priority Schools; *Stable and well-trained staff* – educators with professional development, tools and resources; *Partnerships* – schools, families and communities working together and building lasting partnerships between schools and community organizations.

Shared Responsibility Is Key: We know that it takes all stakeholders working together to improve our schools. The Administration's plan leaves out students' first teachers – their parents. There is no attempt in the blueprint to support parents' and families' efforts to be more involved in their children's education.

Members' Voices Matter: We are sharing the blueprint with our members so their voices are heard. We intend to engage in a productive dialogue to meet the needs of students, educators and public schools. By working together, we are confident that we can come up with a better solution for students.

Major Concerns

Continues Test Focus with No Requirement of Multiple Measures

- The Administration's proposal still focuses the initial categorization of schools (reward vs. challenge schools) based on two standardized tests, plus graduation rates for high schools.
- Multiple, valid measures of student learning still are not required; states merely are permitted to add test scores from other content areas
- While the Administration is calling for better assessments that will take years to implement, schools will continue to be assessed on the existing, low-quality tests and labeled accordingly.
- Furthermore, the Administration's attempt to create better assessments will be done through another competitive grant process. Therefore, a few states will be developing what the Administration hopes are model assessments while all other states are destined to continue using the same poor quality standardized testing

systems. President Obama promised we would fix the testing system in all states, not just a few.

Prescribed and Limited Models of Reform

- The School Turnaround Models required to be used by the bottom 5% of persistently low-performing schools still are limited to four (transformation, turnaround, restart, and school closure)
- The Blueprint does not address whether it will back off of its current rules that undermine local decision-making around the selection of appropriate school improvement models. The regulatory language for the Administration's School Improvement Grant program arbitrarily limits the use of effective strategies for a particular school or district by restricting school districts with more than nine 5% schools. The "Rule of 9" provision states that if a school district has nine or more schools in the bottom 5%, then the district CANNOT use a single model for all of its identified schools; it must use more than one prescribed model regardless of what experts believe will fix the schools.
 - The current models do not reflect the shared responsibility that should be required in educational systems and should be promoted in the Administration's proposal
 - NEA opposes three of the models (turnaround, restart, and closure) because there is no evidence that they work and do not offer viable options for rural and frontier districts
 - The transformation model offers the best chance for long-term success

Teachers Effectiveness Based on Student Test Scores

- The Blueprint requires a statewide definition of effective teachers and principals that is based in significant part on student academic growth.
 - NEA believes that evaluation systems should be developed and implemented at the local level using components agreed to by educators that support professional practice and student learning.
 - These determinations will likely be made using the existing, poor quality standardized tests that are neither a full or fair judge of student performance, let alone a teacher's performance.
 - How will effectiveness be determined in subjects where traditional tests are not given?
 - For the federal government to mandate specific elements of a teacher evaluation or compensation system, it is a little like the federal government telling all mayors or corporations how to evaluate and pay their employees. It is not the federal government's role to get involved in individual employee performance or compensation issues.

Insufficient Efforts to Address Inequity Across each State

- The Administration's proposal falls woefully short of what is needed to remedy the inequities that run rampant in every state in this country. Equity does not merely mean the equitable distribution of accomplished educators.

- There is a corridor of shame in every state and the proposal does not do enough to eliminate them.
- NEA calls on the Administration to require states to provide them with the comprehensive plans to remedy inequities in education opportunities, tools, and resources as a condition of receiving federal funds.

No Engagement of Parents/Families

- There is no support of parents' efforts to be more involved in their childrens' education.
 - We all know that parents and caregivers are students' first teachers—we need to support their involvement in students education and encourage their involvement in school activities and plans.
 - The Administration's budget proposal—the document on which this blueprint is largely based--eliminates funding for parent resource centers.

Administration's Blueprint for Reauthorization

Below is a list of the key titles and headings which appear in the Administration's Blueprint for ESEA Reauthorization.

College and Career-Ready Students

- Raising standards for all students
- Better assessments
- A complete education

Great Teachers and Leaders in Every School

- Effective teachers and principals
- Our best teachers and leaders where they are needed most
- Strengthening teacher and leader preparation and recruitment

Equity and Opportunity for All Students

- Rigorous and fair accountability for all levels
- Meeting the needs of diverse learners
- Greater equity

Raise the Bar and Reward Excellence

- Fostering a Race to the Top
- Supporting effective public school choice
- Promoting a culture of college readiness and success

Promote Innovation and Continuous Improvement

- Foster innovation and accelerate success
- Support recognize and reward local innovation
- Supporting student success

High stakes testing weakens our schools

Earlier this week the Obama Administration revealed its blueprint for overhauling our education law. On closer inspection, it appears that while they may have moved a few walls in the building, they have done little to make the foundation any stronger. Instead of eliminating the dangerous and stressful system of high-stakes testing, the blueprint reinforces the idea of “reward” and “challenge” schools based on two standardized tests. As educators, we know the impact this has had inside our classrooms: children are frustrated, anxious and bored; teachers feel powerless and principals and administrators are bound in fear. It’s time for some real change in our schools—with a system that doesn’t blame teachers or stifle students. Let’s work together to re-draft the blueprint, and ensure our nation’s public schools are built on a rock-solid foundation.

Re-draft needed for real change

For nearly a decade, No Child Left Behind—the law that dictates how federal money will be spent in our schools—has labeled and punished students and schools. Our children have been tested more, but they have fared worse. As educators, we share the president’s goals—we want well-rounded children, who not only graduate, but who graduate set to take on the world prepared for both college and a career. We can’t make it there, however, if we continue to put test scores first and kids second. We applaud the President’s lofty ambitions, but hope he is open to re-drafting his blueprint so we can see real change in our nation’s classrooms.

Are we really putting kids first?

The President recently released his ideas for re-vamping No Child Left Behind—the unpopular bill that has governed education policy for almost a decade now. He and other Administration officials claim the blueprint will hold “educators accountable, but will let them be creative.” Unfortunately, his blueprint still classifies whether schools are good or bad based on test-score results. How can we expect teachers to be creative if they are still required to teach to a test, take full responsibility for their student’s performance and live in constant fear that their jobs—especially in this economy—will suddenly evaporate.

The President’s blueprint requires that low-performing schools choose one of four models to turn their schools around—one option is to fire teachers, and another is to close the school completely. A district with more than nine low-performing schools would not be able to choose one particular model that works best for its schools. For example, a district with 14 identified schools could not choose the comprehensive “transformation” model, only some would be able to—leaving the others to either close down, fire teachers or become a charter school. In theory our education law would put the needs of our kids first, and give teachers more autonomy in the classroom. In practice, the President’s blueprint would do neither.



PRINCIPLES FOR THE REAUTHORIZATION OF THE ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION ACT (ESEA) 2010

The reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) must focus on policies that would help transform public schools into high-quality learning centers by recognizing the shared responsibility among local, state, and federal governments. Given the law's complexity, each proposed change must be carefully considered to fully understand its effect on our nation's schools and students. Therefore, the National Education Association encourages Congress to listen to the voices of educators in developing legislative proposals and offers these principles for ESEA reauthorization:

- **The federal government should serve as a partner to support state efforts to transform public schools.**
 - The 21st century requires a partnership among all levels of government—federal, state and local—to make up for the historic inequitable distribution of tools and resources to our nation's students.
 - We should support effective models of innovation (such as community schools, career academies, well-designed and accountable charter schools, magnet schools, inclusion of 21st century skills, and educational technology), and create a more innovative educational experience to prepare students for challenging postsecondary experiences and the world of work.
- **The federal government plays a critical role in ensuring that all children—especially the most disadvantaged—have access to an education that will prepare them to succeed in the 21st century.** The federal government should focus on high-quality early childhood education, parental/family involvement and mentoring programs, as well as quality healthcare for children to help overcome issues of poverty that may impede student progress. It should support community school initiatives in an effort to address these issues comprehensively; must invest in proven programs such as knowledge-rich curricula and intensive interventions; and must provide resources to improve teaching and learning conditions through smaller classes and school repair and modernization.
- **A revamped accountability system must correctly identify schools in need of assistance and provide a system of effective interventions to help them succeed.** The schools most in need of improvement deserve targeted, effective, research-based interventions designed to address their specific needs. States and school districts should be given significant flexibility through a transparent process to meet agreed-upon outcomes, using innovative data systems and a variety of growth models based on movement towards proficiency. School quality and student learning must be based on multiple valid and appropriate measures and indicators.
- **The federal government should respect the profession of teachers and education support professionals by providing supports and resources to help students succeed.** Hard-to-staff schools, especially those with high concentrations of disadvantaged students or those that have consistently struggled to meet student achievement targets, need significant supports and resources, including additional targeted funding to attract and retain quality educators; induction programs with intensive mentoring components; and professional development for educational support professionals.
- **The federal government should require states to detail how they will remedy inequities in educational tools, opportunities and resources.** Funding should be targeted to schools with the highest concentrations of poverty. To build on the historic investment through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the federal government should guarantee funding for critical federal programs, such as Title I of ESEA and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.
- **State and local collective bargaining for school employees must be respected.**
- **Targeted programs that support students and schools with unique needs—such as English Language Acquisition, Impact Aid, rural schools and Indian education—should be maintained and expanded.**
- **The federal government should serve as a research clearinghouse, making available to educators a wealth of knowledge about how best to teach students and help schools improve practices.**



**NEA'S MESSAGE TO MEMBERS OF CONGRESS
ON THE REAUTHORIZATION OF ESEA
March 2010**

The purpose of public education

The public education system is critical to democracy and its purpose is to:

- maximize the achievement, skills, opportunities, and potential of all students by promoting their strengths and addressing their needs
 - ensure all students are prepared to thrive in a democratic society and in a diverse and rapidly changing world as knowledgeable, creative, and engaged citizens and lifelong learners
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To fulfill the purpose of public education, we must:

1. PROMOTE INNOVATION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

- Support innovative public school models of education that inform and accelerate school transformation efforts and prepare students for citizenship, lifelong learning, and challenging postsecondary education and careers
- Increase educational research and development and provide a clearinghouse for innovative promising practices

2. PROVIDE STUDENTS WITH MULTIPLE WAYS TO SHOW WHAT THEY HAVE LEARNED

- Require the use of multiple, valid, reliable measures of student learning and school performance over time
- Replace AYP with a system that recognizes schools that make progress toward achieving learning goals and correctly identifies struggling schools in order to provide meaningful support instead of punishment
- Foster high-quality data systems that are both longitudinal and complete and that improve instruction and protect student and educator privacy
- Recognize the unique instructional and assessment needs of special populations, including students with disabilities and English language learners by designing standards and assessments that are accessible for all students

3. ELEVATE THE PROFESSION TO ATTRACT GREAT EDUCATORS AND LEADERS FOR EVERY PUBLIC SCHOOL

- Respect teachers and education support professionals as professionals by ensuring they are part of critical decisions affecting students, schools, and their work lives
- Ensure students have access to accomplished educators by ensuring high standards for entry into the profession and by offering incentives to teach in hard-to-staff schools
- Encourage school leadership to be effective in both operational and instructional leadership
- Create a prestigious national education institute and provide incentives to states to create world-class teacher preparation programs that attract the top tier of college graduates nationally

4. CHAMPION ADEQUATE, EQUITABLE, AND SUSTAINABLE FUNDING FOR ALL PUBLIC SCHOOLS

- Ensure adequate and equitable funding for schools and fully fund critical programs such as Title I and IDEA
- Help states and districts to identify disparities in educational resources, supports, programs, opportunities, class sizes, and personnel (including the distribution of accomplished educators) through required Equity and Adequacy plans
- Provide support and foster research-based turnaround strategies for high priority schools

To view NEA's comprehensive agenda and priorities for ESEA Reauthorization, go to: www.nea.org/esea

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Promote Innovation in Public Schools BACKGROUND March 2010

It is clear that if we are to achieve world-class schools for every student within the next decade, we will need fresh approaches and ideas that produce dramatic leaps in achievement and growth among students, educators and communities. The federal government must embrace its role as a supporter of local and state initiatives to transform schools, rather than a micro-manager.

“Institutionalizing” innovation is a paradoxical goal, and yet this is the federal government’s solemn responsibility: it must craft policies that are strict in their flexibility, incentivize change as a fixed concept, and establish continuity in the pursuit of continuous transformation.

- **How can we promote innovation in schools?**

The federal government should increase and sustain funding in programs that are designed to foster innovation (such as the Investing in Innovation (i3) program funded under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009). Innovative proposals should be developed in collaboration with educators and include a sustainability plan. We believe that research, development, and pilot programs in the following areas are particularly useful and necessary:

- ✓ Unique governance models for public schools, including staff-led schools
- ✓ Wraparound, before- and afterschool, summer programs and services
- ✓ High-quality formative student assessments
- ✓ Curricular reform that includes 21st century learning skills
- ✓ Effective and rigorous teacher preparation and induction
- ✓ Education delivery systems for students in rural or low-income school districts
- ✓ Infusion of education technology into classrooms and schools
- ✓ Educator evaluation systems that are based on multiple, valid measures of performance and are used to improve educators’ practice through use of professional development systems that are job-embedded, aligned, and research-based
- ✓ Longitudinal data systems that assist in determining students’ instructional and other needs
- ✓ Alternative structures to the school day and calendar year designed to improve student learning
- ✓ Magnet and themed public schools – e.g., science, technology, the arts
- ✓ Flexible high school pathways that integrate preparation for career technical education and higher education

In addition to incentivizing pilot activities in the above areas, the federal government should sponsor its own research and establish a public clearinghouse for innovation and promising practices.

- **What kinds of innovative models of education have proven successful?**

We know that successful, innovative, and autonomous models of public school education already exist. Such models invariably include deep and mutually beneficial partnerships with government, higher education, parent and community organizations, education unions, and businesses or philanthropic entities. These models also have produced new and imaginative ways to develop professional development, deliver student instruction and assessments, and offer time for team curricular planning.

One promising example is the Math & Science Learning Academy, a new, union-designed, teacher-led public school within the Denver Public School System. Other examples of innovation that feature strong union-administrator-school district partnerships include:

- ✓ Say Yes to Education Foundation (Syracuse, NY)
- ✓ Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation (Evansville, IN)
- ✓ Hamilton County Public Schools (Chattanooga, TN)
- ✓ University of Connecticut - CommPACT Schools (Hartford, CT)
- ✓ Milwaukee Partnership Academy (Milwaukee, WI)
- ✓ Seattle Flight School Initiative (Seattle, WA)

- **Why should we care about school transformation as part of innovation efforts?**

School transformation is not a silver bullet. Rather, it entails numerous, coordinated, and aggressive changes in policies, programs, and behavior within school systems. School transformation must assess and thoughtfully address school organization and structure; leadership and governance; staff recruiting, development and retention; instructional and curricular practices; support services and resources; parent and community involvement; overall school infrastructure, culture, and climate; and other factors.

Intervention models that call for replacing existing leadership and the majority of staff, reorganizing as a charter school, or closing schools should be viewed as methods of last resort, and are not feasible in many communities and regions. Moreover, the choice of an intervention “model” alone does not equal reform. In order to be successful, any interventions must be developed and implemented with shared responsibility among all critical stakeholders.

NEA Recommendations to Congress:

- **Support and promote innovative public school models and programs that accelerate school transformation efforts and prepare students for citizenship, lifelong learning, and challenging postsecondary education and careers**
- **Encourage innovation developed through partnerships—primarily between educators’ unions, administrators, and school districts—that focus on helping student thrive and develop critical 21st century skills**
- **Increase educational research and development to provide a clearinghouse for innovative and promising practices**



Provide Students with Multiple Ways to Show What They Have Learned

BACKGROUND

March 2010

There is widespread agreement that NCLB helped shine much needed light on the achievement gaps between advantaged and disadvantaged student populations. But it also wreaked havoc on schools by mislabeling successful schools as failing, under-serving those schools that are truly struggling, and placing undue emphasis on federally mandated standardized student assessments as the accountability yardstick for entire school systems. The harm caused by NCLB has provoked outrage among educators and parents.

The next iteration of ESEA must help educators and policymakers develop accountability systems that actually help improve student learning. That is, these systems must transparently identify and scale up valid measures of student learning, a much broader concept than student performance. New accountability systems must do more than simply measure student performance on a single test or even measure student growth on a series of tests. Instead, we must address all essential components of student learning by using reliable and varied sources of evidence, beginning with the professional assessment by the classroom teacher. These valid measures of student learning must then be analyzed as one, but not the only, important facet of overall school effectiveness.

Accountability systems must be an essential part of a continuous improvement system designed to improve instruction—not to punish schools or educators. We want to encourage more collaboration and sharing of promising instructional methods, and then to scale up what is demonstrated to be most effective. Assessment systems should be used to identify which schools are most in need of support, with the goal of delivering that needed support. Of course we measure school performance, but it must be done in a way that enhances, rather than stifles, the improvement or transformation process.

- **Can states develop authentic assessment systems that use multiple measures of student learning and school performance?**

A complete and balanced authentic student assessment system (designed as an assessment *of, for, and as* learning) is but one essential part of the educational improvement process.

Research shows that the current test-and-label system under NCLB is fundamentally flawed. Many education scholars and analysts are making the case that instead of having to demonstrate adequate yearly progress by group status or successive group improvement (currently NCLB “safe harbor”) that states be allowed to develop their own accountability systems using student growth models. Back in 2005, the U.S. Department of Education approved a pilot program to allow states to use growth models to measure AYP, and 22 states and the District of Columbia have since applied to use growth models. To date, 15 states now have approved growth models: Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Texas. We recommend that all states be encouraged to set attainable performance goals and that all students receive credit for academic progress.

In addition, we recommend three important changes to the current accountability framework:

- (1) Expand the current student growth models to include other valid indicators of student learning. Student growth on standardized assessments is but one of many indicators of student learning. Evidence of student

growth (as measured by accurate and reliable assessments and differentiated by subgroup) must be augmented with other measures, which may include district-level assessments; school-level assessments; classroom-level written, oral, performance-based, or portfolio assessments; grades; and written evaluations. All measures must be rigorous and follow common protocols to allow comparisons across classrooms.

(2) Require states to monitor multiple indicators of school performance in addition to student learning. These include graduation rates; postsecondary and career placement rates; attendance rates; student mobility or transfer rates; the number and percentage of students participating in rigorous coursework (including honors, AP, IB, dual enrollment, early college); the number and percentage of students with access to courses infused with 21st century skills (communication, critical thinking, collaboration, and creativity); and the number and percentage of students participating in STEM, humanities, foreign languages, creative and fine arts, health, and physical education programs. This robust system would provide a more complete picture of the performance of schools in communities and states, instead of the current system that holds schools accountable based solely on how many students reach an arbitrary cut score on a standardized test in reading, math, and science on a particular day.

(3) Replace the current AYP system¹ and corrective framework with a Continuous Improvement Plan that relies on multiple indicators to help states accomplish the following goals:

- recognize areas of growth in all schools and states (this is an essential part of the continuous improvement paradigm that recognizes that all students can learn and all schools can improve)
- identify schools and programs that may offer innovative approaches or platforms for other schools so that promising practices can be identified and evaluated
- provide feedback to all schools on areas of possible growth or improvement (including support in one or more areas, if warranted)
- identify which schools are either “persistently low-achieving” or that demonstrate “significant educational opportunity gaps” in order to direct intensive resources and intervention supports to them

High priority schools that are identified by the state would be required to collect and submit additional data related to key school climate and success factors, including: leadership and staff experience and turnover statistics; class size (student-teacher ratio); number of National Board certified teachers; number of certified counselors, nurses, and other support staff per student; school building and environmental ratings; school bullying violence statistics; descriptions of professional development and instructional improvement strategies; description of access to libraries, science laboratories, quality health care in the community, nutritional meals, before- and afterschool programs, and community and family engagement activities. Schools that need it would get extra support to collect this broad range of data. The primary purpose of gathering this information would be to direct appropriate resources and interventions to such schools. High priority schools would have to provide such additional data until they were no longer deemed a high priority school.

- **Can states and/or districts establish reliable longitudinal data systems that inform student learning and instruction in a timely manner?**

The NEA supports state and local efforts to achieve high-quality longitudinal data systems. We see the benefits as twofold: connecting early learning to postsecondary (P-16) education systems and providing timely and accurate information to educators about students in order to improve instruction. We support key aspects of high-functioning data systems, provided that such systems sufficiently protect both student and educator privacy. No educational or performance data related to any individual should be made public, nor should ratings or levels be made public if there is a significant possibility that individuals could be identified through such publication. In order for the data to be used for

¹ NCLB currently requires schools to attain 100% student proficiency in math and literacy (and more recently science) by the 2013-14 school year. Schools must demonstrate AYP by setting and attaining increasingly higher target goals. Improvement must occur for every subgroup of students, i.e., low socioeconomic status, racial and ethnic groups, students with disabilities and students with limited English proficiency. Schools that receive Title I funds and consistently fail to make adequate progress are then subject to a series of progressively harsher sanctions that range from allowing students to transfer to higher achieving schools and funding private tutoring to reconstitution, dismissal of staff, or even closure.

its intended purpose of improving instruction, all data systems must be associated with job-embedded professional development and planning time.

- **Can current efforts to revamp standards and assessments actually improve accountability systems?**

The NEA supports the current effort by states to band together to voluntarily adopt a common core of high-quality standards in English and mathematics and high-quality assessments aligned to those standards. It's critical that standards and assessments be aligned with each other and with curricula, as well as with teacher preparation and professional development. Standards must address the whole student, and they must foster critical and high-order thinking skills and knowledge that will prepare students for a global and interdependent world in the 21st century and beyond. Assessments must include both formative and summative components, designed from the outset to accommodate the needs of special populations, such as students with disabilities and English language learners. NEA looks forward to the development of standards for other content areas as well as standards for preparing students for various career paths.

- **Can we revise accountability systems to recognize the individual needs of students, such as those with disabilities or who are English language learners?**

There is a critical need for valid, reliable, unbiased methods for conducting high-stakes assessments for all students, including those with disabilities and students who are English language learners. But before you can appropriately assess students, you must first ensure they have an equal opportunity to learn.

To appropriately assess students with disabilities and those who are English Language Learners, states should: 1) ensure that appropriate accommodations are available for students who need them, 2) use the principles of universal design for learning (UDL) in developing assessments for all students to increase accessibility, 3) ensure that valid, alternate assessments are available for those students who are unable to participate in regular assessments, 4) ensure that Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams understand the impact of alternative assessments on students' programs and graduation options, and 5) include measures of growth toward grade level targets, such as growth models that represent student progress over time.

NEA Recommendations to Congress:

- **Require the use of multiple, valid measures of student learning and school performance**
- **Use student growth over time as one measure of student learning (rather than relying on a one-day snapshot of standardized test performance)**
- **Replace AYP with a Continuous Improvement Plan system that recognizes schools that achieve growth and correctly identifies schools that are struggling so that meaningful support can be provided**
- **Foster high-quality, longitudinal data systems that can be used to improve instruction and that require protection of student and educator privacy.**
- **Recognize the unique instructional and assessment needs of special populations, including students with disabilities and English language learners**



**Elevate the Profession to Attract
Great Educators and Leaders for Every Public School
BACKGROUND
March 2010**

A growing body of research confirms what school-based personnel have known for years—that the skills and knowledge of teachers and education support professionals (ESPs) are the most important factors in how well students learn. In turn, the presence of strong and supportive school leaders is critical to recruiting and retaining accomplished teachers and ESPs. For too long, we have paid too little attention to ensuring that today’s best and brightest choose teaching as a career. As an entire generation of educators nears retirement age, there is an urgent need to address all aspects of working in public schools. It is time to elevate the profession.

How do we do that? Federal and state policies can help draw new talent to teaching careers, but that won’t be enough. What we need is a bold new initiative to raise the profile and status of the teaching profession—such as creating a national education institute. Such an entity would be in a position to attract top college graduates and talented second-career professionals all over the country.

Also, we know that all teachers, even the most accomplished, are more effective when they are supported by skillful instructional leaders. We need more top-notch principals and other school leaders serving as mentors and coaches for classroom educators. Federal policies, therefore, must foster well-prepared and effective school professionals of all ranks and positions, including administrators. And it is time to recognize and truly value the work of all education professionals: administrators, classroom teachers, aides, office staff, cafeteria workers, and others. Every one who works in a school is essential to that school’s success.

Finally, we must ensure that every school, whether high- or low-achieving, has access to great educators. The federal government must develop policies and provide funding to enable struggling schools and districts to offer incentives and conditions that will attract and retain accomplished and effective educators.

- **Is this really a pipeline issue?**

Yes. Research shows that infusing the educational system with great educators requires attention be paid to each segment of the educator pipeline—from promoting education as a career to rigorous standards for entry into the profession. It also includes induction and placement, certification and licensure, mentoring, professional development, advancement, and retaining accomplished educators. Ultimately, we must develop systems to recruit legions of top undergraduate students and professionals leaving other professions, to prepare them effectively, and to nurture and safeguard their path to careers in education.

- **Can we foster excellence while establishing attainable standards within the teaching profession?**

Teachers need more than high-quality preparation from schools of education because much of their learning comes from their real world classroom experience. We need policies that foster continuous learning in the form of high-quality, job-embedded professional development, mentoring programs, common planning and reflection time, and timely and continuous feedback from peers and school leadership.

More teachers need financial support to become certified by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, and those who earn this credential should be deemed highly qualified.

Federal policy also should recognize that some teachers— rural, special education, or elementary and middle school teachers—must teach multiple subjects. Therefore, teacher quality standards also must provide accommodations for teachers in special circumstances and give them reasonable, common sense opportunities to improve or increase their skills and breadth of certification.

- **What can we do to improve school leadership?**

We must ensure that school principals and other administrators—as well as teachers and education support professionals—receive adequate preparation, mentoring, and continuous professional development and support to improve their craft. They must receive timely and useful feedback from school staff as well as other administrators and be evaluated fairly and comprehensively. And they must have the resources and the staff necessary to create and maintain a successful school.

We also must look for ways to promote the leadership skills of teachers and education support professionals. All staff benefit from such opportunities.

- **How would a national education institute fit in with state and local reform of teacher and principal preparation programs?**

Elevating the profession means ensuring that the most talented individuals in the nation have access to world-class education preparation programs. Establishing a National Education Institute (NEI), a highly competitive public academy for the nation's most promising K-12 teacher candidates in diverse academic disciplines, would allow the federal government to attract top undergraduates as well as second-career professionals and prepare them as leaders of school reform around the nation. NEI would provide an intensive one-year path (free tuition, room, and board in exchange for a seven-year commitment to service in select public schools) to full licensure, school placement, induction, along with lifetime professional development and mentoring opportunities from NEI faculty/ graduates/master teachers.

NEI also would partner with existing teacher preparation programs to establish a highly competitive "National Scholars" program in select universities that would foster regional and local excellence in teacher preparation, licensure and induction. Additionally, NEI would sponsor a principal or leadership development program for top candidates who have served as teachers for at least three years and wish to enter an intensive program to become a principal or school leader in a hard-to-staff school.

- **Can we do more to recognize and support education support professionals?**

Education support professionals (ESPs) comprise a critical part of the education team. They include school secretaries, custodians, bus drivers, teacher aides, food service personnel, paraprofessional laboratory technicians, telephone operators, medical records personnel, bookkeepers, accountants, mail room clerks, computer programmers, library and reference assistants, audio-visual technicians, and others. Schools cannot function without top notch ESPs. The federal government should create incentives and provide funds to recruit certified and qualified ESPs and ensure they are included in job growth and professional development opportunities.

- **Can we recruit and create incentives for high-quality educators to work in hard-to-staff schools?**

The NEA supports financial and other incentives to encourage top educators to work in hard-to-staff schools. Such incentives are most effective when they are voluntary, locally agreed upon, and include non-financial incentives such as access to continuous professional development, mentoring, paraprofessional assistance, effective school leadership, sufficient resources, planning time, class size reduction, and other factors that improve job quality and effectiveness. Inexperienced or new teachers should not automatically be placed in hard-to-staff schools because they need to be prepared to deal with the challenging environment.

NEA Recommendations to Congress:

- **Focus on undergraduate preparation and educator recruitment, preparation, certification and licensure, induction, professional development, mentoring, tenure, advancement, and retention**
- **Foster continuous learning and rigorous yet attainable standards for all school staff**
- **Develop and support school leadership at all levels and positions within schools**
- **Create a prestigious national education institute and provide incentives to states to create world-class teacher preparation programs that attract the top tier of college graduates nationally**
- **Recognize the contributions and achievement of education support professionals**
- **Offer both financial and non-financial incentives to those who teach in hard-to-staff schools**



Champion Adequate, Equitable, and Sustainable Funding for All Public Schools

BACKGROUND

March 2010

States and local school districts play a critical role in providing adequate and equitable resources to all of their schools. Likewise, the federal government must play an active supporting role to ensure that a student does not miss out on key opportunities by virtue of their zip code. Programs like Title I and IDEA must be fully funded because they are critical in providing necessary and sustained funds to schools serving disadvantaged students and special populations. States must be required to develop Adequacy and Equity plans that would measure and address disparities in educational resources, opportunities, programs and quality among communities and districts. Additionally, the federal government should reserve a portion of its funds to provide intensive support to struggling schools and provide research, assistance and guidance to help sustain high-quality education programs, even in times of economic hardship.

- **What is the federal role in ensuring adequacy and equity in schools?**

The original goal of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act—to provide educational opportunities to poor and disadvantaged students—remains essential. While most educational funds come from state and local coffers, the federal government must step up its consistent funding in schools where students lack the same opportunities and resources as other schools. In addition, it can help states bridge gaps in educational, skills, and opportunities among schools.

Finally, the federal government can develop policies that encourage states to play a more active role in monitoring and addressing (through Adequacy and Equity Plans) specific success factors and disparities in schools that are persistently low-achieving or that have significant educational opportunity gaps. By requiring states to detail plans for helping close these fiscal and resource gaps, the U.S. Department of Education and the public can begin to provide critical support for state and local efforts to provide adequate and equitable funding for all schools.

- **Can we reserve our most intensive focus and resources for our high priority schools?**

The Title I School Improvement Grants (SIG) Program should be revamped to require the exclusive use of research-based models of school reform to help meet the needs of more priority schools—those at risk of becoming persistently low-achieving or that have significant educational opportunity gaps. The SIG program should be modified to allow state and local educational agencies clear and immediate access to use local, state, or regional turnaround teams, to provide for intensive team teaching and collaborative instructional strategies rather than firing staff, and to require parental/caregiver and community engagement rather than closing a school or turning it over to a charter management organization. The program also should eliminate the arbitrary cap on the use of the appropriate intervention strategies to be used within a district.

NEA Recommendations to Congress:

- **Ensure adequate and equitable funding for schools, and sustain and fully fund critical programs such as Title I and IDEA**
- **Help states and districts identify disparities in educational resources, supports, programs, opportunities, class sizes, and personnel through Equity and Adequacy plans**
- **Support and foster research-based turnaround strategies for high priority schools**



Great Public Schools for Every Student

EMBARGOED UNTIL 8 PM. March 13, 2010

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**NEA president to Administration:
'Takes working together to improve schools'**

'Blueprint' proposal needs redrafting if it is to fulfill America's education promise

WASHINGTON—The White House has announced that the Obama administration's "blueprint" for reauthorization will be forwarded to Congress on Monday, March, 15, 2010. The following statement can be attributed to Dennis Van Roekel, president of the 3.2 million-member National Education Association:

"We are disappointed by this first effort by the Administration to rectify the considerable problems in current federal education law.

"What excited educators about President Obama's hopes and vision for education on the campaign trail has not made its way into this blueprint. We were expecting to see a much broader effort to truly transform public education for kids. Instead, this blueprint's accountability system still relies on standardized tests to identify winners and losers. We were expecting more funding stability to enable states to meet higher expectations. Instead, this blueprint requires states to compete for critical resources, setting up another winners-and-losers scenario. We were expecting school turnaround efforts to be research-based and fully collaborative. Instead, we see too much top-down scapegoating of teachers and not enough collaboration.

"The public knows that struggling schools need a wide range of targeted actions to ensure they succeed, and yet the Administration's plan continues to call for prescriptions before the actual problems are diagnosed. We need proven answers along with the deep insight of the experienced professionals who actually work in schools.

"We know that it takes all stakeholders working together to improve our schools. The Administration's plan leaves out students' first teachers – their parents. There is no attempt in the blueprint to support parents' efforts to be more involved in their children's education.

"The National Education Association cannot support the Administration's plan at this time. We are sharing the blueprint with our members so their voices are heard. We intend to engage in a productive dialogue to meet the needs of students, educators and public schools.

For more information about NEA's principles for the reauthorization of ESEA, visit www.nea.org/eSEA.

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The National Education Association is the nation's largest professional employee organization, representing 3.2 million elementary and secondary teachers, higher education faculty, education support professionals, school administrators, retired educators and students preparing to become teachers.

Dennis wants to hear from you.

Please ask your members to five minutes to fill out this 10-question survey. We want Dennis to be able to say that the members of the NEA have spoken and this is what they want to see in any reauthorization when he speaks to the press or testifies in front of Congress.

Please post the url on **your** website. Include it in a member email communication.

Deadline for submissions is March 24.

You can access the survey at: <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/2ZWS8NR>