

AFT-CAP Joint Statement of Principles on ESEA Reauthorization

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Through this document, the American Federation of Teachers and the Center for American Progress come together to announce a set of shared principles that we believe should guide the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, or ESEA. This is not a comprehensive encapsulation of all of our organizations' recommendations for the reauthorization of this critical legislation. Rather, this is a statement of the policies about which our two organizations agree in the core areas of accountability, the use of tests, and the need to elevate the teaching profession.

Our shared principles

We believe the goal of federal policy should be to ensure that disadvantaged students have access to the educational resources they need in order to be successful and to prepare future generations to compete in a global economy. To achieve those ends, we believe federal policy should be used to address funding inequities, to improve teaching and learning, and to support and elevate the teaching profession. While federal, state, and local policy are all contributing factors, throughout our nation—in too many schools—students are taking too many tests and feeling greater pressure with respect to them. As a result, in some places, the curricula are being narrowed, and the joy and creativity of teaching and learning are suffering.

We propose that in order to inform instruction, to provide parents and communities information about whether students are working at grade level or are struggling, and to allow teachers to diagnose and help their students, the federal requirement for annual statewide testing in grades 3-8 and once in high school should be maintained. In service of transparency and to identify where learning gaps exist, the results of those assessments should continue to be disaggregated for all subgroups and should be made available publicly. States should also continue to be required to measure their high school graduation rates and to disaggregate those results so that high school graduation rates are comparable across states.

However, we also believe it is critical to relieve the unintended yet detrimental pressure of high-stakes tests by basing federal accountability on a robust system of multiple measures. While these systems should include assessment results, states should only be required to include tests taken once per grade span—once in elementary school, once in middle school, and once in high school—in their school accountability systems. These systems should also include high school graduation rates at the high school level and other academic measures.

While academic indicators should be substantial factors, states should also—as some are doing currently—include qualitative criteria such as school-quality reviews, climate and safety measures, success of students on college-preparation curricula, and/or measures of social and emotional learning.

All accountability systems should be designed to help all students succeed and to identify and target interventions to schools with large achievement gaps or large numbers of low-performing, disadvantaged groups. The lowest-performing schools and districts should have to implement research-based, robust, and supportive interventions tailored to the needs of each school and community and be held accountable for doing so.

States and districts should also be held accountable for providing equitable resources and supports to all schools. Our inequitable system of school financing is a disgrace to our nation.

We also believe that raising the bar for entry to and through the teacher pipeline ought to be a central priority for any ESEA reauthorization and that doing so holds tremendous promise to raise student outcomes and improve our nation's economic competitiveness over the long term. In order to achieve that goal, the reauthorization should include major new investments—at least double the current \$2.4 billion investment under Title II, Part A of the ESEA—focused on creating incentives for states and districts to invest in systemic reforms aimed at elevating the teaching profession and supporting educators.

In exchange for this funding, states should be required to tackle and make systemic policy changes aimed at growing and maintaining a high-achieving and diverse teacher workforce in the following areas:

- Identifying and recruiting diverse teacher candidates with great potential to succeed and supporting initiatives that make teaching an attractive career option for them
- Raising the bar for teacher preparation and licensure
- Making teacher-preparation programs rigorous and relevant and identifying and rewarding high-quality programs through state approval and monitoring systems
- Offering teacher career pathways that include intensive, high-quality clinical residencies
- Creating career ladders that allow for differentiated responsibilities and professional pathways
- Providing significantly more time for teacher planning and collaboration and job-embedded professional development, coaching, and mentorship

- Recruiting and training stronger school leaders and providing support for their professional development
- Improving professional development so that it is aligned to student and teacher needs, as well as ongoing and job embedded
- Raising teacher compensation significantly so that educators are paid competitively with other professional occupations, such as doctors and lawyers

The Center for American Progress is a nonpartisan research and educational institute dedicated to promoting a strong, just and free America that ensures opportunity for all. We believe that Americans are bound together by a common commitment to these values and we aspire to ensure that our national policies reflect these values. We work to find progressive and pragmatic solutions to significant domestic and international problems and develop policy proposals that foster a government that is "of the people, by the people, and for the people."

The AFT represents 1.6 million pre-K through 12th-grade teachers; paraprofessionals and other school-related personnel; higher education faculty and professional staff; federal, state and local government employees; nurses and healthcare workers; and early childhood educators.