



U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

A Better Approach to Accountability

February 2015

Coalition of Civil Rights, Business and Disabilities Organizations Offers Framework for ESEA

Over the past few months, leaders from eight civil rights, business and disabilities organizations have been working together to craft a framework for the accountability requirements of ESEA that will keep our nation moving forward in advancing the achievement of all groups of children, while providing much-needed flexibility to states and communities. The proposal that emerged from that work significantly improves current law.

Advantages:

- Preserves common, statewide annual assessments of all students in grades 3-8, and once in high school;
- Keeps the focus squarely on advancing academic achievement, but allows states to reduce the overwhelming focus on tests by adding into their school accountability systems other indicators of college and career readiness, as well as — on a limited basis — measures of school climate and parent and student satisfaction;
- Instead of dictating both goals and consequences from Washington, asks states to set ambitious but achievable goals for students overall and for the groups that are the special focus of the law, then to ensure action when schools and districts aren't progressing against state-set goals;
- Recognizes the importance of districts, holding them accountable for improving student achievement and for ensuring that schools — and especially those serving the poorest students — have the resources and support they need to be successful;
- Assures that all schools, rather than just the bottom five percent, have to work to improve the achievement of all groups of children they serve;
- Responds to concerns raised by both Republicans and Democrats, thus shows potential for bipartisan support.

Assessment, Transparency and Accountability:

Three Critical Elements of a Bi-Partisan Approach to Advancing both Excellence and Equity

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1. Assessments:

Continue current law, requiring annual, statewide assessment of all students in grades 3-8, and at least once in high school, in both reading and math. All students also must be assessed in science at least once, each, during elementary, middle and high school. All means all students taking the same test. Only students with the most significant cognitive disabilities should be assessed on alternate assessments on alternate achievement standards with strict limits.

2. Public Reporting:

Transparent, accessible reporting at the state, district, and school level of:

- a. The percent of students at each achievement level on the statewide assessment; accurate high school graduation rates, and all other indicators in the accountability system, overall, and for low-income, major racial/ethnic groups, students with disabilities, English Learners, gender, and cross-tabbed by gender and disability.
- b. Accountability ratings

3. Accountability:

Statewide accountability systems that expect and support all students to graduate from high school ready for college and career.

- a. Indicators:
 - Assessments (growth and reading, math, and science proficiency), accurate high school graduation rates, and other measures of college/career readiness must be predominant;
 - Other indicators (attendance, student surveys, school safety, parent satisfaction, working conditions, etc.) may be included, but must play secondary role.
 - Evidence of English proficiency and time in program should be taken into account for English learners.
- b. States must set public statewide improvement and gap-closing goals on at least assessments and graduation rates to improve student outcomes.
- c. Those goals must be translated into improvement targets for districts and schools for students overall and for all subgroups, with greater progress expected for groups that have been behind.
- d. Performance against those targets must be the predominant factor in statewide school accountability systems, with other indicators making up the rest. Performance against targets must also be a significant factor in district accountability systems, though these appropriately also include measures of support for schools, success with school turnaround, equity in distribution of key resources like dollars and teachers, and the like.
- e. States must specify how schools that exceed targets will be rewarded, and what the consequences — interventions, supports, ratings — will be for schools that don't meet their targets, including how students in persistently underperforming schools will get the supports they need to meet state standards.
- f. Where plans call for districts to be first responders, states must specify how they will monitor district performance and intervene for non-performance.