



Recommendations for Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education (Act)

KnowledgeWorks encourages federal policymakers to reauthorize ESEA during the 114th Congress to help states and districts better align their education systems with the demands of postsecondary and the workforce. We support a reauthorization that builds on the strengths of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) while empowering states and districts to build education systems that maximize student achievement and expand access to high quality educational opportunities.

KnowledgeWorks supports the following overarching principles for ESEA:

- Maintain a rigorous accountability system that disaggregates data by subgroup and asks states to set goals and performance targets to ensure high expectations for all students. Empower states to incorporate multiple measures and student growth to provide a comprehensive picture of school and district performance.
- Maintain annual assessments in grades 3-8 and once in high school to provide transparent and useful data for educators, students, and other key stakeholders and empower states to build better assessment systems that drive real-time improvements in student learning.
- Maintain a federal funding stream for school improvement but empower states and districts to design and build systems of support that build the capacity of low-performing districts and low-performing schools to continuously improve performance throughout the school year.
- Support states in the development of a robust professional development system that aligns to instructional competencies and strengthens the ability of educators and leaders to provide instruction in personalized learning environments.
- Encourage innovation to enhance the productivity and effectiveness of the education system and invest in the scale-up of research-proven practices and programs.

KnowledgeWorks also encourages Congress to include the following policy recommendations in ESEA to help states and districts advance high school reform, collective impact, and competency education.

High School Reform

Despite recent increases in the nation's high school graduation rate, the number of graduating students who place into remedial coursework in college is at a record high and more than 3.5 million jobs remain unfilled because employers cannot find workers with the necessary skills. The federal government must help states and districts tackle these problems by ensuring increased access to high quality secondary education in the next ESEA reauthorization. Federal policymakers can improve alignment between high school, postsecondary education, and the workforce by implementing the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1- Launch the Bridge to College and Career Program to strengthen the transition between secondary, postsecondary, and the workforce. This initiative would invest in partnerships of school districts, employers, institutions of higher education, and intermediaries to help test, replicate, and scale strategies that improve student outcomes by strengthening the transition between secondary, postsecondary education, and the workforce. The program should emphasize strategies that rethink traditional uses of time, school structures, and funding to provide students with a seamless pathway from secondary into postsecondary education and career. Key elements should include:

- a) An emphasis on strategies that disrupt traditional uses of time, such as those that enable students to pursue high school and college credit or industry certifications simultaneously, to pursue a continuum of work- based learning opportunities aligned to current labor market trends, and to advance through competency-based pathways.
- b) An emphasis on personalized instruction and applied learning opportunities.
- c) Evidence of increased postsecondary enrollment and persistence, increased access to advanced coursework and work-based learning experiences, and decreased achievement gaps among low-income and minority students.
- d) A tiered funding structure that provides higher levels of funding to take to scale strategies with a stronger evidence base.
- e) Meaningful reengagement and support of off-track and out-of-school youth in strategies to improve secondary, postsecondary, and career success.
- f) Evidence of stakeholder commitment demonstrated through matching funds.

Recommendation 2 - Include Disaggregated College and Career Readiness Outcomes in State and District Report Cards. Metrics should include secondary school graduation rates (including 4-year adjusted cohort graduation rates and extended-year adjusted

cohort graduation rates), dropout rates, advanced course work participation and completion rates, college credit participation and completion rates during high school.

Recommendation 3 – Ensure that states and Title I districts and high schools have a coordinated plan to transition students from high school into postsecondary and career. States and Title I districts and high schools should include a description in their Title I plans of a systemic plan to seamlessly transition students from secondary into postsecondary or careers without remediation. Each entity should specify the transition activities they will undertake, such as providing students with access to advanced coursework including opportunities to earn college credit during high school.

Recommendation 4 – Ensure that Students in Title I High Schools Receive their Fair Share of Funding. Only 10 percent of Title I funding supports low-income high school students despite the fact that high schools educate almost one-fourth of the nation’s low-income students. One of the primary reasons for this disparity is that free and reduced priced lunch is an inadequate measure of poverty in high schools because adolescents are less likely to turn in the necessary paperwork to secure the designation. The federal government should fix this disparity by allowing secondary schools to calculate the number of low-income families attending their school by applying the average percentage of students in low-income families that attend feeder elementary schools to the number of students enrolled in the secondary school. Title I should include a hold harmless provision to ensure this proposal does not reduce Title I allocations for elementary schools.

Recommendation 5- Maintain designated federal funding for school improvement activities and provide states with the flexibility to use these funds on systemic feeder pattern activities. Many of the challenges plaguing low-performing schools are not the direct result of recent events, but instead, stem from academic or behavioral challenges that began to emerge earlier in the educational continuum. Districts can determine whether a feeder pattern approach is necessary in a low performing school by reviewing data on the following feeder pattern indicators: Attendance, behavior (suspensions & expulsions), reading at the proficient level (3rd grade), and course completion and course grades (for all grades 6-12). ESEA should clarify that states and districts may use federal school improvement funds to support aligned feeder pattern activities if a data analysis of the previous indicators reveals that the challenges facing a school are systemic.

Recommendation 6 – Ensure that Title II, Part A plans, professional development activities, and teacher residency provisions prepare teachers and leaders to deliver advanced coursework including early college high school courses that prepare students for postsecondary education without the need for remediation. This will help states and districts build an education workforce capable of accelerating and

deepening learning to ensure that all students, especially low-income and first generation college-going students, are prepared for postsecondary education.

Recommendation 7 – Establish a Fast Track to College Program to Help States and Districts Establish and Support Early College High Schools and Other Dual and Concurrent Enrollment Programs Serving Low-Income Students.

This would help states and districts expand access to high quality educational experiences that have a strong evidence base for helping low-income, first generation college students enroll and persist in postsecondary education at higher rates than their peers. Key elements of the program should include:

- a) Grants to partnerships of school districts and institutions of higher education to support new or existing early college high schools or other dual and concurrent enrollment programs which allow students to earn a high school diploma and one to two years of college credit, including an associate's degree – tuition-free.
- b) Grants to states to provide planning, technical assistance, community outreach, data collection and evaluation, and other support services to early college high schools and other dual and concurrent enrollment programs.
- c) An emphasis on equipping students with the skills needed to succeed in a 21st century economy by encouraging cooperation between schools, colleges and universities, nonprofits, industry, and labor.

Collective Impact

Hundreds of communities across the country have adopted the collective impact framework to improve outcomes for America's children and youth. These communities have established partnerships of cross-sector leaders behind a common vision and are using evidence-based strategies and existing resources to close local disparities in achievement. Federal policymakers can support the impact of these partnerships by adopting the following recommendations in the next ESEA reauthorization.

Recommendation 1- Follow These Six Steps to Remove Barriers to Effective Implementation of Collective Impact. The best way policymakers can support local collective impact partnerships is to ensure that government laws and programs do not create unintended barriers to effective implementation. Any legislation impacting children and youth, including ESEA, should include the following six elements to ensure legislation is collective-impact friendly.

- 1) Incorporate Planning Time into Competitive Grants to Promote Shared Accountability.** Any competitive grant program impacting children and youth should include a planning year for first-time grantees to encourage collaboration, identification of the problem, and commitment to the solution. During this process, applicants should engage a cross-sector group of stakeholders in the community to develop an accountability process with shared vision, outcomes, and metrics and clearly defined roles for each. All stakeholders should remain engaged throughout the design, implementation, continuous improvement, and evaluation process.
- 2) Encourage Grant Applicants to Establish a Coordinating Entity for Management of Grant Activities.** Federal programs should encourage applicants to select an independent, coordinating entity to guide the initiative including managing the monitoring progress, ensuring the collaborative adheres to the common vision, establishing shared management practices, and mobilizing external resources.
- 3) Support Effective and Responsible Data Sharing and Use.** Prioritize applicants that have established data sharing agreements to integrate data between local government agencies and community partners so stakeholders can track student education and workforce outcomes in a way that respects student and educator privacy.

- 4) **Maximize Impact by Investing in What Works.** Federal programs should require applicants to identify and invest in the practices and programs that have the greatest positive impact on outcomes for children and youth. Applicants should not only provide strong evidence for grant proposals, but should collect and analyze data continuously throughout the term of a grant to ensure that resources support practices and programs with the greatest potential to advance program outcomes. The federal government should also expedite the process for grant revisions when data demonstrates a shift in programmatic delivery will achieve a more impactful result.
- 5) **Tier Eligibility for Federal Programs According to Where a Community is on Its Path to Reform.** In order to leverage federal resources toward sustainable reform, federal programs should tier funding based on key benchmarks. This structure will help communities build capacity while safeguarding federal investments to ensure maximum impact on program outcomes.
- 6) **Provide Federal Grantees with Flexibility to Blend Funding Streams.** Federal programs should enable grantees to bring together different grants from different funding streams to advance a common vision for education reform as is currently done in the Performance Partnership Pilots for Disconnected Youth which were established by the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2014. ESEA programs should provide grantees this flexibility to maximize the impact of federal investments and better align reporting and accountability requirements.

Recommendation 2- Maximize Impact and Sustainability of School Improvement

Efforts. The federal government can help states and districts build capacity for education reform in low-performing schools and districts by incorporating the following policies into state school improvement plans.

- a) **Sustainability Plan** – States should ensure that low-performing districts have a plan to sustain impact of school turnaround efforts. The plan should demonstrate broad community ownership for the vision, goals, and outcomes, clear roles for community partners, and a plan to secure external resources to support long-term results.
- b) **District Turnaround Plan** – States should have a plan to transform districts with a significant number or percentage of students enrolled in a persistently low-performing school. The plan should emphasize alignment of student and community services into a more efficient education system that supports students throughout the education continuum.

Recommendation 3 - Launch an Education Pay-for-Success Initiative to support strategies that improve education outcomes for children and youth.

This initiative would model the pay-for-success initiatives increasingly adopted by local and state governments, as well as the federal government through its Workforce Innovation Fund, to tackle challenging social problems. The initiative would shift the traditional federal funding structure to pay for outcomes instead of services, ensuring that taxpayer dollars directly benefit education outcomes for children and youth. Key elements of this initiative include:

- a) A local partnership would enter into a contract with the U.S. Department of Education to deliver a set of services to improve target education outcomes for children and youth. The local partnership must consist of a private entity that has agreed to provide financial capital to fund services until target outcomes are met.
- b) Once the partnership achieves all target outcomes, the U.S. Department of Education would release grant funding to the partnership which would in turn pay back the private investor.
- c) The investor would receive a return on investment for any project that exceeded the projected cost savings, but would receive no funding if the project failed to meet its target outcomes.

Competency Education

Competency education provides a framework for learning with the goal of mastery of academic standards through personalized learning and differentiated supports for every student. Federal policies should focus on enabling competency by removing barriers for those states and districts that are ready to do it, and by creating the right incentives in the accountability system to focus on student growth to mastery.

We define competency education with the following five elements:

1. Students advance upon mastery.
2. Competencies include explicit, measurable, transferable learning objectives that empower students.
3. Assessment is meaningful and a positive learning experience for students.
4. Students receive timely, differentiated support based on their individual learning needs.
5. Learning outcomes emphasize competencies that include application and creation of knowledge, along with development of important skills and dispositions.

Federal policymakers can support the growth of competency education in K-12 education by adopting the following recommendations in the next ESEA reauthorization.

Recommendation 1- Pilot Competency-Based Accountability and Systems of Assessments in up to Five States.

Establish a set of state level pilots that will allow up to five states the flexibility to test, refine, and scale statewide accountability and assessment systems that enable promising competency-based school and district models. States should build a system that assesses students throughout their educational experience and addresses the following elements:

- a) Focus on high quality implementation of competency-based approaches that emphasize mastery while closing achievement gaps between subpopulations of students.
- b) Create a shared accountability structure where each level of the system – state and local – has ownership in student success.
- c) Establish a system of assessments that emphasizes mastery of standards, aligned competencies, and social and emotional skills based on evidence-based learning progressions toward college and career readiness and provides annual summative student performance data gathered in one of the following ways:
 - A statewide summative assessment administered at least once annually in each of grades 3-8 and once in high school;

- A statewide summative instrument administered at least once annually in each of grades 3-8 and once in high school administered as multiple assessments throughout the year;
 - A combination of a statewide summative assessment and or local summative assessments administered at least once annually in each of grades 3-8 and once in high school, so long as:
 - The assessments provide, at a minimum, annual information about student performance to inform determinations about accountability and supports and interventions;
 - The statewide assessment occurs at a minimum of once in elementary, once in middle, and once in high school;
 - The assessment items are aligned to college- and career-ready state academic standards;
 - The local assessment instruments produce comparable results across the state that are of high technical quality and validity; and
 - The system of assessments incorporates multiple sources of evidence of student learning, including performance-based tasks.
- d) Provides districts with the flexibility to administer the summative assessment(s) when students are ready.
- e) Includes real-time information about student growth to help stakeholders determine whether students are progressing at a sufficient pace to remain on-track to graduation.
- f) Aligns to the state's accountability and supports and interventions systems to drive continuous improvement of student learning, as well as state, district, and educator performance.
- g) Implement a statewide personalized and adaptive system of learning and supports to close achievement gaps and ensure all students get back on track or remain on-track to graduation.
- h) Identify what works and continuously improve competency-based approaches to maximize success.

Recommendation 2 - Support Systems of Assessments That Align to Competency-Based Approaches. In Section 1111, permit states to use multiple statewide assessments during the course of the year that can provide a summative score of individual student academic growth. ESEA should also permit states to use funds reserved in Title VI, Part A, Subpart 1 for the development and implementation of competency-based assessment systems.

Recommendation 3 - Include System of Supports and Interventions in State Title I Plans.

In Section 1111, ensure that state Title I plans include a framework for a robust state and local system of supports and interventions that incorporates personalized learning strategies to ensure all students are able to reach mastery with targeted support to get on-track or remain on-track to graduation. The state should ensure that its statewide system of supports and interventions provides all Title I schools with real-time data and diagnostic support to help schools improve academic outcomes throughout the school year.

Recommendation 4 - Support Learning Infrastructure to Enable Competency

Education. Help states and districts build the aligned learning infrastructure necessary to support competency based instruction including integrated student information systems, learning management systems, and assessment functions to support student learning. This should be done in two ways:

- a) Provide states and districts with flexibility to use state and district activities funds in applicable formula and discretionary programs to establish or improve learning infrastructure and;
- b) Provide funding to help states and districts with the start-up costs of building an aligned learning infrastructure.

Recommendation 5 - Support Educators and Leaders to Build Capacity for

Competency Education. Reform Title II Part A to ensure that states establish a robust professional development system that strengthens the ability of educators and leaders to provide instruction in personalized learning environments. Key features should include:

- a) States should ensure that professional development opportunities are aligned to statewide instructional competencies (which build capacity for K-12 competency-based, personalized learning environments). Professional development for educators and leaders should be customized so educators and principals can fill in learning gaps and advance at their own pace.
- b) Ensure that States have the flexibility to dedicate Title II Part A funds to prepare the states' education workforce to implement a competency-based accountability and assessment system.
- c) Incorporate a program in the National Activities section of Title II Part A that would enable states and/or districts to test, replicate, and scale strategies that will help districts and external partners support teachers and principals in the implementation of school-wide competency-based models. The program should emphasize, at a minimum, the following strategies:
 - Empower teachers and principals to translate real-time instructional feedback into improvements in student learning.
 - Enable teachers to deepen and accelerate mastery of statewide instructional competencies.