



Recommendations to Support High School Reform In the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)

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.