

Reinventing the Federal Role in Education: Supporting the Goal of College and Career Readiness for All Students

Introduction

Over the last few years, the problems in the nation's high schools have rightly risen to the top of the national education policy agenda. The nation seems to understand that its schools are not adequately preparing its students, particularly poor and minority students, for college and careers in the twenty-first century. There is also increased awareness of the long-term social and economic implications of an inadequate education for individuals, the communities in which they live, and the nation as a whole. As these consequences have become more apparent and as research, innovation, and emerging best practice have shed light on more effective approaches to high school improvement, the national discourse on high schools has begun to shift from one about the crisis to one about solutions, with growing consensus that there is a stronger federal role to be played in supporting those solutions at the state and local levels.

It is a unique moment in education policy. From the highest levels of leadership—the president and the U.S. secretary of education—there is a call to action to address the high school crisis, focus on the lowest-performing schools, and graduate students college and career ready. Over the last few years, congressional leaders have developed legislative proposals based on research and best practice that demonstrate possible ways forward for federal policy. The recent infusion of new funds from the federal stimulus program has opened the nation's eyes to new opportunities and reinvigorated efforts to improve education. And the state-led movement to develop common standards and assessments offers the nation an opportunity to trade incremental changes for collaborative efforts with the power to truly transform American education.

It is time to harness this progress and momentum, and convert commitment and proposals into a reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) strategically designed to address the high school crisis and move the nation toward the goal of all students graduating from high school ready for college and careers.

Given the severity of the high school crisis, the national imperative to graduate all students ready for college and careers, and the current momentum to achieve significant changes in education policy, federal policy-makers should make it a priority to reauthorize ESEA now. It is critically important that federal policy be updated, not only to maintain pace with the common standards initiative, but also to serve as a leader and partner in helping bring the potential of this and other efforts to fruition. The nation cannot afford to let another generation of students pass through the system, drop out, or exit unprepared for college and careers.

The time to act is now. ESEA reauthorization should

- establish college and career readiness as the common goal for all students;
- ensure meaningful accountability for high school outcomes designed around common indicators of college and career readiness and high school graduation;

- replace the current flawed, one-size-fits-all school improvement process with requirements for state- and district-led systems that are differentiated and data driven, and prioritize addressing the lowest-performing high schools;
- support strategies that are necessary to implement high school improvement at a much larger scale, including districtwide efforts, maximizing the role of entities outside of the school system with expertise to contribute;
- build the capacity of the system to implement innovative solutions—bold approaches to teaching and learning, school organization, and system structure that result in higher expectations and achievement for all students; and
- provide new funding for the implementation of innovative solutions to address low-performing high schools.

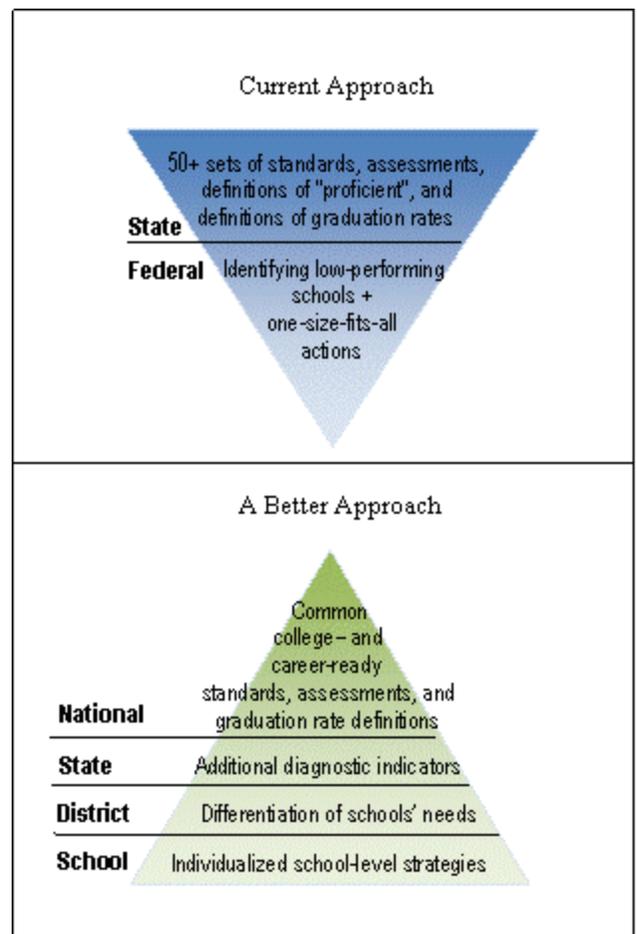
This brief will discuss these recommendations in more detail.

Rethinking the Federal Role

For more than two hundred years, the federal government has provided critical support for educational improvement that has reflected national needs and interests. In order to develop an educated populace that supports a strong democracy, the federal government has traditionally taken action for three reasons: 1) to reduce poverty, increase equity, and serve the most disadvantaged; 2) to ensure national security and the country’s economic and competitive position; and 3) to advance research that supports state and district innovation, policies, and practices.

For all three of these reasons, federal policy is a critical component in the systemic reform of the nation’s high schools. However, thoughtful federal policy must reflect the complex nature of the federal-state-local structure that underpins the nation’s education system and support a balanced approach in which actors at all levels play appropriate and effective roles as necessary to achieve systemic success.

Unfortunately, the current federal role in the K–12 education system, and particularly high schools, does not reflect the strengths and weaknesses of these different levels of government, nor the needs of students, the school system, or the nation. Today, the nation relies on fifty sets of state standards and assessments that define expectations and proficiency in fifty different ways. As a result, expectations about what students should learn are dependent on their state of residence, zip code, and curriculum track rather than on a common understanding of the skills, content, and competencies necessary for success in college, careers, and life. Meanwhile, current federal pol-



icy mandates how educators should address low-performing schools by requiring a specific sequence of one-size-fits-all interventions that are not informed by the problems unique to the individual schools.

As a result, where the nation needs commonality—expectations for students and the system, measures of college and career readiness, definitions of vital indicators like graduation rates—there is diversity across states and districts. Where sharp instruments are needed to guide instructional and school improvement actions, there is a reliance on crude tools, like summative assessments and Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). And where individualization based on local context and information is needed, such as interventions for low-performing schools, there is only uniformity mandated by federal policies.

This approach must be reversed. Federal policy should establish college and career readiness as the goal for all students and support collaborative state-led efforts to define those expectations through common standards and assessments. Federal policy should require that state and local policymakers, administrators, and educators use that and other data to inform decisionmaking around policy and practice and to ensure improvement. However, it should leave those decisions—about what to do, when, and how—to the educators who are closest to students and schools. In other words, federal policy should be firmer and tighter in establishing overall goals and ensuring that they are met while being more flexible and less prescriptive in determining how educators meet those goals.

Adjusting federal policy to reflect this approach would result in the following differences, which are described in more detail in the following pages.

Current Federal Policy		Future Federal Policy	
<p>The goal is 100 percent of students proficient in reading and mathematics by the year 2014.</p> <p>Proficient is defined and measured through 50+ sets of state standards and assessments.</p>	Goals	<p>The goal is 100 percent of students graduating from high school college and career ready.</p> <p>College and career ready is defined and measured by a set of common standards and assessments aligned to college and career readiness. Graduation rates are defined and calculated commonly.</p>	
<p>Adequate Yearly Progress—with flawed measures of proficiency and graduation—serves as the only tool for measuring schools’ performance, guiding intervention decisions, and measuring progress.</p>	Accountability	<p>Adequate Yearly Progress—with improved indicators of college and career readiness and graduation—serves as a “check-engine light” to identify low-performing schools.</p>	
<p>High schools receiving Title I funding are subject to a one-size-fits-all-schools approach to improvement—the same actions in the same sequence—based solely on the length of time not meeting AYP, regardless of the cause of failure, the depth or breadth of challenges, or the solutions that might work to meet the schools’ particular needs.</p> <p>This federal system is layered on top of state and district systems.</p>	School Improvement	<p>Federal policy requires states and districts to implement coherent systems of school improvement that are data driven, differentiate among schools’ needs, and address a high school’s targeted or schoolwide challenges or replace it.</p> <p>Districts with low-performing high schools will also implement districtwide activities that support school-level activities.</p>	
<p>Only high schools that receive Title I funds are required to implement improvement actions.</p> <p>There is no dedicated funding for high school improvement.</p>	Funding	<p>Low-performing high schools enter the school improvement process whether or not they receive Title I funding.</p> <p>Targeted new funding is provided for high school improvement.</p>	



GOALS: College- and career-ready graduation must be established as the common goal for all students and the education system.

The mission of the public education system must shift from educating *some* students and preparing them for the *twentieth-century American* economy to educating *all* students and preparing them for the *twenty-first-century global* economy. Research from across the globe indicates a growing convergence between the content and skills necessary to be college and career ready.¹ For years, the higher education and business communities have pronounced America's high school graduates as being by and large unprepared for college and the workplace. In a world in which almost 90 percent of the new jobs in occupations with both high growth and high wages require at least some postsecondary training, all students need the option of pursuing postsecondary education or training.²

This means the new goal—for students and the education system—must be college and career readiness. The nation is beginning to embrace this. President Barack Obama and U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan have spoken passionately about the dropout crisis, called on students to set their sights on high school graduation, and challenged the nation to increase dramatically the number of American students going on to success in college.

Tremendous progress in this area has been achieved recently, with forty-six states and three territories joining a collaborative state-led effort to develop common college- and career-readiness standards that are internationally benchmarked. These efforts represent important first steps in a long-term effort that will require time, energy, money, and persistence and must be strongly and consistently encouraged and supported by the federal government. But they promise to yield a much-needed common understanding—shared by the K–12 education system, institutions of postsecondary education, and employers, parents, and students across all districts and states—of the essential knowledge and skills students must possess in order to succeed after high school.

Yet without drastic change in current law through the reauthorization of ESEA, federal law will work against these common standards. The current version of ESEA, known as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), establishes a goal of ensuring that all students be “proficient” in reading and math by 2014, and leaves this definition of proficiency to be defined independently by states through their standards, assessments, and performance goals. The entire federal accountability and school improvement system—accountability, annual goals, identification of low-performing schools, school improvement interventions, and funding strategies—is designed around this goal of proficiency, defined differently from state to state. As currently designed these policies, including the consequences for schools not reaching proficiency goals, have the unintended consequence of encouraging states to keep standards and expectations for students low. Ensuring that all students achieve true college and career readiness requires, in short order, a complete overhaul of these federal policies.

Specifically, federal policy must be amended to establish graduating from high school college and career ready as the goal of our public education system by doing the following:

- ***Establishing—as boldly as NCLB stated the “proficiency” objective—the goal of “100 percent of students graduating from high school college and career ready.”*** Several congressional leaders have developed legislative proposals embodying this, including the Miller/McKeon Discussion Draft of ESEA Reauthorization prepared in the previous congressional session by House Education and Labor Committee Chairman George Miller and the former ranking Republican on the Committee, Congressman Buck McKeon. ESEA reauthorization must establish college and career readiness as the goal and align the rest of its K–12 policies toward that goal.



- ***Supporting the state-led effort to develop common standards and assessments.*** Federal policy should offer incentives—financial and otherwise—for states to adopt and implement the standards resulting from the state-led process being coordinated by the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association, as well as long-term support for the development of common assessments and aligned instructional support. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) is a good first step. First, states accepting ARRA’s stabilization funds must demonstrate that they are working to improve their standards and assessments.³ Second, the administration has set aside \$350 million of ARRA’s competitive grant funds to support collaborative efforts to develop improved assessments aligned to the common standards.⁴ These strong first efforts to support the development of common standards and assessments must be complemented with an ESEA reauthorization that provides incentives for states to adopt and implement them. Secretary Duncan recently stated his commitment to doing so, saying, “[I]n reauthorization of No Child Left Behind, the administration will work with [state leaders] and with Congress to change the law so that it rewards states for raising standards instead of encouraging states to lower them.”⁵

ACCOUNTABILITY: Schools, districts, and states must be held accountable for student outcomes using common indicators of college and career readiness and high school graduation.

Accountability—policies that establish goals, measure and report performance and progress toward those goals, and trigger action based on that information—is a critical tool for improving schools’ performance, increasing student success, and closing achievement gaps. Accountability serves many purposes. Parents and community members are hungry for transparent information about the quality of their own schools. Educators appreciate benchmarks, progress measures, and access to data that can aid their efforts to help students succeed. And policymakers want to hold the system responsible for educating its students, target resources and interventions to the students, teachers, and schools that need support, and evaluate the effectiveness of policies. Accountability helps to force critical, but politically difficult, decisions and actions at all levels. It is particularly important at the high school level, where there are often perverse incentives to give up on struggling students.

Federal policymakers have already embraced accountability as a mechanism for improving student outcomes and closing achievement gaps. Under NCLB, every school, district, and state is evaluated each year to see if it meets AYP—a state-set annual benchmark for the percent of students who should score proficient or above on the state assessment and who should graduate. This information is publicly reported; those schools that received federal Title I funding and do not meet AYP for two years in a row are considered low performing and enter the school improvement process (discussed on page 7).

Unfortunately, there are multiple flaws in the AYP system: it does not reflect the goal of graduating students college and career ready, nor does it provide a good measure of high school performance or progress. It is based on the percent of students scoring proficient or above on state tests—standards that do not equate to college and career readiness and vary significantly from state to state. The rules for determining AYP to date have not included a consistent method for calculating graduation rates, resulting in misleading and inconsistent graduation rate calculations. And while AYP reflects whether aggregate and disaggregated test scores increased over time, there was no requirement to increase graduation rates meaningfully over time or to consider the graduation rates of student subgroups. As a result, AYP determinations have not truly accounted for graduation rates. As a result, some of the nation’s lowest-performing high schools escape accountability and identification for improvement. For example, one analysis found that 40 percent of “dropout factories”—schools where there are consistently 60 percent fewer seniors than freshman and graduation is not the norm—made AYP, and therefore did not receive federally mandated attention, intervention, and support.⁶



Federal policy must align accountability provisions to the goal of graduating all students college and career ready. Its provisions should be designed to clearly measure and communicate 1) whether the school is graduating its students ready for college and careers and 2) whether the school is improving over time. To do so federal policy should:

- ***Require states to publicly report schools', districts', and states' performance in graduating students college and career ready.*** ESEA reauthorization should require states to publicly report overall and for each subgroup at the school, district, and state levels 1) the percent of students who have demonstrated college and career readiness through assessments aligned to the common standards, and 2) the percent of students graduating with a regular diploma according to the common definition provided by the U.S. Department of Education (ED) through its October 2008 regulations. This definition was also articulated in legislation known as the Every Student Counts Act, which was introduced and supported by influential members of Senate and House education committees and which would codify such provisions in federal law.
- ***Reposition AYP or its successor as a “check-engine light” to indicate how well schools are progressing toward the goal of graduating all students college and career ready.*** There are multiple ways to measure progress. ESEA reauthorization should require states to propose for approval an accountability model for measuring schools' progress in improving graduation rates and college- and career-readiness rates over time. These models should set annual benchmarks that represent aggressive and attainable improvement for both graduation rates and college- and career-readiness rates, such as annual targets (e.g., 70 percent in 2009, 76 percent in 2010) or annual growth goals (e.g., increase by 5 percent each year).^a ESEA reauthorization should require states to publicly report schools' and districts' progress.

The 2008 graduation rate regulations mentioned above did not establish specific long-term goals or annual growth targets, creating concern that states could continue to set (and ED approve) low goals and small growth targets. The Every Student Counts Act would address these issues through its proposal for increasing graduation rates as part of accountability.

- ***Require states to use this improved AYP to identify for improvement schools that are not performing or progressing.*** The state-proposed accountability model should also establish “bright lines” for performance and progress on graduation rates and measures of college and career readiness, such as a 90 percent graduation rate or a 2.5 percentage point improvement in graduation rates. Schools falling below those lines would not be deemed to have performed well enough or be progressing enough and would enter the school improvement process. In establishing these bright lines, ESEA reauthorization should require that states do the following: 1) equally weight college- and career-ready assessment scores with graduation rates, 2) take into account performance and progress, and 3) take into account overall and disaggregated data.

^a There are countless ways to measure progress on college- and career-readiness tests, many of which are quite complicated, and explanations of which are outside the scope of this brief.



SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT: Low-performing high schools should be addressed through state- and district-led improvement systems that are differentiated and data driven, and prioritize the lowest-performing high schools. Implementing high school improvement at large scale requires districtwide efforts, maximizing the role of entities outside of the school system with expertise to contribute, and building the capacity of the system to implement innovative solutions.

Truly addressing the dropout crisis and moving toward the goal of all students graduating college and career ready will require a systemic approach to improvement that also prioritizes addressing the lowest-performing high schools. At all levels, education policy must support data-driven, innovative strategies that reflect the individual needs of each school and its student population. These policies must provide ways for schools to demonstrate that they are making progress toward their goals and that their reform efforts are working rather than having external authorities continue to demand change for change's sake and creating a churn of ineffective reform. Efforts to successfully address the problems in low-performing high schools must contemplate—and perhaps even be led by—districtwide strategies that support school-level strategies. And a systemic approach to addressing the high school crisis will need to address capacity issues. These capacity issues include rethinking traditional roles within the system, developing human capital strategies to recruit and train teachers and leaders, and coming up with strategies to maximize the strengths of external partners—entities outside of the school system with expertise to contribute, including community-based organizations and technical assistance providers.

The federal government can play a helpful role here—not by imposing separate federal policies on top of existing state and district strategies^b—but by serving as a catalyst for data-driven, differentiated improvement systems at the state and district levels. Federal policy should establish a set of guidelines to ensure that these state and local systems drive innovation and improvement to low-performing high schools. These guidelines can help serve as a federal check on state and district policies that may continue to default to easier and less contentious (but less effective) strategies. They can make sure that traditionally abandoned schools and students receive attention and support for improvement, and federal policy guidelines can serve as political justification for state and local leaders who want to take more intensive approaches.

ESEA must be reauthorized with a new systemic approach to school improvement that reflects these principles; otherwise, current federal policy will continue to misdirect attention and resources to strategies that have not proved effective in improving low-performing high schools. To leverage the implementation of state- and district-led school improvement systems that are differentiated and data driven, and prioritize addressing the lowest-performing high schools, ESEA reauthorization should:

- ***Require states receiving Title I dollars to submit for approval a data-driven, differentiated system of school improvement.*** ESEA reauthorization should require these systems to:
 - a. *Use school performance data beyond existing AYP to differentiate among low-performing high schools, plan interventions, drive resources, and demonstrate progress toward college and career readiness.* ESEA reauthorization should require states to define a set of high school performance indicators with corresponding annual progress goals. These indicators must have an evidence base linking them to the ultimate indicators of graduation and college and career readiness. They also must be measured in a way that is valid, reliable, and consistent across districts. Moreover, they must be actionable at the school level, meaning that school staff can use them to make changes that will have a demonstrable impact on student outcomes.

^b For more information on how NCLB's current improvement process does not work for high schools, see the Alliance's 2007 publication *In Need of Improvement: NCLB and High Schools*.



- b. *Prioritize innovative solutions for the lowest-performing high schools.* ESEA reauthorization should require states to establish final consequences for chronically failing schools so that low-performing schools cannot be permitted to unsuccessfully implement improvement strategies indefinitely. ESEA reauthorization should establish a “bright line”—such as a graduation rate below 50 percent—that identifies chronically low-performing and not-improving high schools that districts must consider for these most intense strategies. It should require that states ensure that interventions for the lowest-performing schools are not solely governance changes, but comprehensive strategies that will drive improvements to teaching, learning, and student outcomes. ESEA reauthorization should encourage states and districts to collaborate to establish policy conditions that support change, such as providing some school leaders flexibility on decisions related to people, time, resources, and programs, and develop an organizing mechanism for supporting the lowest-performing high schools and their replacements.
- c. *Support strategies at the school level with districtwide activities.* This includes improving data analysis and use, supporting teachers’ development and use of formative assessments that provide timely data that can be used to inform instruction, improving educators’ ability to address adolescent literacy needs across the curriculum, developing multiple pathways for students, offering wraparound services, and equitably distributing teachers and leaders.

Federal policymakers have demonstrated their interest in moving toward a data-driven, differentiated improvement system that prioritizes the lowest-performing high schools. The previous administration recently approved nine states to participate in a pilot program to implement differentiated improvement systems that would create “a more nuanced system of distinguishing between schools in need of dramatic intervention, and those that are closer to meeting goals.” Congressional leaders have introduced various bills to advance thoughtful high school improvement strategies, including the Graduation Promise Act, which would authorize new, dedicated funding—outside of Title I—to support a differentiated high school improvement system at the state and district levels. Most recently President Obama and Secretary Duncan have challenged the nation to focus on transforming the five thousand lowest-performing schools, including the two thousand dropout factories.

- ***Build capacity to implement the state- and district-led systems and innovative solutions at scale.*** Federal policy must also recognize that asking the education system to perform at much higher levels—graduating all students college and career ready—requires increased capacity in many areas throughout the education system. ESEA reauthorization can take some steps to build this capacity by:
 - a. *Investing in innovative strategies to recruit and train individuals specializing in leading and improving or replacing the lowest-performing high schools.*
 - b. *Encouraging states and districts to collaborate with effective external partners and invest in innovative efforts to expand the pool of effective external partners.*
 - c. *Investing in state and district data systems that can collect and analyze student, school, and system performance data.* There is also growing support for data systems: through three rounds of the federal Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems program, forty-one states have received funding to design, develop, and implement statewide longitudinal data systems. Congressional leaders have introduced legislation, including the METRICS Act and S. 2014 from the 110th sessions, to expand and improve this program. Significant funding for the program was included in the 2009 stimulus package, and there are signals that support will continue through the annual budget and appropriations process.



FUNDING: Funding must be targeted to the implementation of innovative solutions to address low-performing high schools.

At the federal level, Title I funding serves as the trigger for attention, intervention, and support. Unfortunately, as a result of underreporting of poverty levels at the high school level, district-level decisions about the allocation of funds, and overall underfunding of Title I, high schools are less likely to receive Title I funding. While high schools serve 23 percent of the nation's low-income students, they receive only 10 percent of the funding federal policy intended to serve that population.⁷ The average Title I allocation per low-income high school student was 40 percent lower than in elementary schools.⁸ As a result, too many low-performing high schools that do not receive Title I funds are not required to be considered for attention, intervention, or support.

The nation must ensure that high schools—and their students—are no longer left behind in the education system. Policies must drive systemic reforms to low-performing schools, regardless of whether or not they receive Title I funding. This requires recognizing that eligibility for free and reduced-price lunch is a flawed indicator at the high school level. It also requires new investments outside of the Title I framework to address the problems in low-performing high schools. However, there is no value in merely making an ineffective system more expensive. Instead, new funding must be allocated and used efficiently and effectively to drive improvements in low-performing high schools. This also requires that policies encourage coordination of funds from multiple, disparate sources to implement coherent strategies.

Given the national imperative to address the dropout crisis and ensure that all students graduate college and career ready, federal policy must demonstrate leadership and dedicate funds to addressing the problems in low-performing high schools. There are promising signs that federal policymakers understand the importance of having dedicated funding for school improvement. ARRA included an extra \$10 billion for Title I—which translates to \$400 million that can be set aside for school improvement—and \$3 billion for the separate School Improvement grants. Combining these amounts with FY 2009 appropriations for these authorities, states have approximately \$4.5 billion in funding for school improvement. It remains to be seen how states and districts will implement this unique infusion of funding. However, Secretary Duncan has expressed his interest in leveraging Title I funds to stimulate significant change.

Fortunately, federal policymakers have also shown leadership in ensuring that such funding for school improvement is targeted to high schools. Legislative proposals described previously would authorize significant new funding for systemic high school improvement (Graduation Promise Act, \$2.5 billion) and for partnerships to implement innovative solutions in low-performing secondary schools (Secondary School Innovation Fund, \$500 million). Elements of both proposals were reflected in the Miller/McKeon Discussion Draft of ESEA Reauthorization. The conference report accompanying the final version of ARRA recommended that 40 percent of Title I funds be set aside for secondary schools. And as part of his FY 2010 budget request, the president called for a new \$50 million High School Graduation Initiative for addressing the lowest-performing secondary schools and, reflecting the ARRA requirement, that 40 percent of his requested \$1.5 billion in Title I School Improvement grants be directed to secondary schools.

ESEA reauthorization is a significant opportunity to ensure that new funding for high school improvement is authorized and inextricably tied to systemic reforms. Specifically, ESEA reauthorization should:

- ***Include a new high school improvement fund to support the school improvement efforts leveraged by the state- and district-led school improvement system described above.***



- ***Include a new secondary schools innovation fund to support collaboration between districts and external partners to implement innovative solutions in low-performing high schools.***
- ***Include funding to states and districts to develop and implement strategies to improve literacy skills of adolescents.*** Seventy percent of students enter ninth grade reading below grade level, significantly hampering their ability to succeed in high school courses and in life after graduation. Unfortunately, too many secondary school teachers and leaders lack the knowledge and capacity to improve their adolescent students' literacy skills. The reauthorization should include funding to help districts and schools in every state develop literacy plans to assist educators in ensuring that students have the literacy skills they need to handle rigorous coursework.
- ***Ensure that disparate funding streams will be implemented strategically.*** The inclusion of multiple new federal funding streams to address the problems in our high schools creates a new challenge: ensuring that various funding streams are used in strategic ways to support cohesive solutions and keep the focus on addressing low-performing high schools. ESEA reauthorization should address this concern, and ED's implementation should require states and districts applying for various funds to describe how the funds will be used in concert. Also, to ensure transparency around the allocation and use of funds, and accountability for results, ESEA reauthorization should require accessible and easy-to-understand reporting of all funding allocations and uses. It should also require longitudinal studies and evaluations of the uses of these funds.

Conclusion

The crisis affecting America's adolescent students and the consequences of not graduating college and career ready—not only for individuals, but for the nation at large—creates a national imperative for systemic policies that drive innovative solutions that result in significantly increased student success. The time is right for bold federal leadership in advancing this issue—leadership in proportion to the magnitude of the crisis and in line with the tradition of federal action to address areas of compelling national interest.

“Every child a college- and career-ready graduate” is a challenge for the twenty-first century that can no longer be ignored: it is the only path for the nation's long-term economic and political security. Federal policy must not stand in its way; it must lead the way. The Alliance for Excellent Education calls on Congress and the administration to reauthorize ESEA sooner rather than later. The reauthorization should align with the goals and aspirations of America's students for an education that will prepare them for a bright future. It should reform federal accountability and school improvement systems so that they are data driven and focused on college and career readiness as the goal for all students. And it should authorize the funding needed to transform our nation's lowest-performing high schools. A law that embodies these principles will position the nation—and its students—to be fully engaged in creating a prosperous future.



Endnotes

- ¹ ACT, *Ready for College and Ready for Work* (Iowa City, IA: Author, 2006).
- ² U.S. Department of Labor, *America's Dynamic Workforce* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2008).
- ³ U.S. Department of Education, *ARRA Uses of Funds and Metrics* (Washington, DC: Author, April 24, 2009), <http://www.ed.gov/policy/gen/leg/recovery/presentation/funds-metrics.ppt#273,9,Slide 9> (accessed TK).
- ⁴ Arne Duncan, "States Will Lead the Way Toward Reform," remarks at the National Governors Association Education Symposium, June 14, 2009, <http://www.ed.gov/news/speeches/2009/06/06142009.html> (accessed TK).
- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ R. Balfanz et al., "Are NCLB's Measures, Incentives, and Improvement Strategies the Right Ones for the Nation's Low-Performing High Schools?" *American Educational Research Journal* 44 (2007): 559–93.
- ⁷ U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service, *State and Local Implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act, Volume VI—Targeting and Uses of Federal Education Funds* (Washington, DC, 2009).
- ⁸ Ibid.

The mission of the Alliance for Excellent Education is to promote high school transformation to make it possible for every child to graduate prepared for postsecondary learning and success in life.

The Alliance for Excellent Education is a national policy and advocacy organization, based in Washington, DC, working to improve national and federal policy so that all students can achieve at high academic levels and graduate high school ready for success in college, work, and citizenship in the twenty-first century.

The Alliance has developed a "Framework for Action to Improve Secondary Schools," that informs a set of federal policy recommendations based on the growing consensus of researchers, practitioners, and advocates about the challenges and solutions for improving secondary student learning.

The framework, shown graphically here, encompasses seven policy areas that represent key leverage points in ensuring a comprehensive, systematic approach to improving secondary education. The framework also captures three guiding principles that apply to all of the policy areas. Although the appropriate federal role varies from one issue area to another, they are all critically important to reducing dropouts and increasing college and work readiness.

