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350 New York School Superintendents Send Letter to Congress Calling for New Federal Education Act

Superintendents from across the State call for less testing, more local control and fair funding

350 School Superintendents from across New York State have joined together in calling on Congress to adopt a new federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) which will reduce testing, return control over education policy to the states and provide full and fair funding to New York's schools.

This week, the New York State Council of School Superintendents delivered [a letter](#) to New York's Representatives in the United States House and Senate calling for a new law to replace the expired *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)* law.

“Washington is eight years past due in reauthorizing the principal federal education law. The delay has led to the creation of an ad hoc waiver system that denies schools the opportunity to plan for federal policies they will be expected to implement in years to come,” said **Maureen Donahue, superintendent of Southwestern Central School District and president of the New York State Council of School Superintendents**. “Education is a national priority, the national government needs to meet its responsibilities -- by fixing defects in the old No Child Left Behind law and by matching funding to the priority it claims education holds.”

The letter outlines the necessary elements of a new federal education law and is signed by 350 current public school superintendents in New York State, representing more than half of the school districts in the state.

Among the specific requests made by the New York superintendents are full funding of Title I education programs, a fair funding formula that prioritizes the schools and students that need it the most, state-developed accountability and learning standards for schools (including a rewards system), rejection of vouchers or portability of federal education funds, appropriate use of designed assessments and an end to testing every child, every year in both math and English Language Arts (ELA) in grades 3-8.

In part, the letter reads:

The knowledge and skill set of the next generation is our nation's greatest commodity. Our students must not be left needing because of short-sighted austerity or political wrangling.

Our students must also not be subject to a one-size-fits-all policy approach to their futures.

We urge you, our elected federal representatives, to work together to adopt a new ESEA that meets the needs of New York’s students and to accomplish this as quickly as possible.

“Superintendents are looked to as educational leaders, but also as community leaders,” said **Bob Reidy**, **THE COUNCIL’S executive director** and a former superintendent for 32 years, “they feel strongly that federal overreach into the classroom and one-size-fits-all national education policies are detrimental to their schools and their unique communities. Congress must address this”

“Passage of a strong new federal ESEA is a necessity for New York’s schools,” said **Charles Dedrick**, **superintendent of Capital Region BOCES and co-chair of THE COUNCIL’S Federal Legislative Committee**, “Failure to reauthorize the ESEA has created a void in educational policymaking, that void is now being filled by unchecked regulatory action that is being used to mandate the tying of teacher evaluations to tests, influence curriculum in local schools, mandate unattainable standards for students with disabilities and English Language Learner (ELL) students and to punish low-performing schools. This has created considerable tumult in our classrooms. Shouldn’t we have a system of rewards for innovation and success instead of a system of punishment?”

“When we discuss what it means to be a school superintendent, one of the main reasons we do what we do is to help children attain future success,” said **Mary-Beth Fiore**, **superintendent of Elmira Heights Central School District and co-chair of THE COUNCIL’S Federal Legislative Committee**, “that means different things to different children in different communities. We must retain flexibility, creativity and local control in our schools. We can do this while maintaining very high standards and accountability measures. The majority of schools were doing this successfully prior to adoption of NCLB.”

Both the House and Senate passed their own versions of an ESEA bill in July which were similar in many respects but differed in a few key areas. A joint legislative conference committee – a contingent from each house which meets to resolve differences and reach a compromise – has yet to convene on the issue. The superintendents are hopeful that the conference committee will begin its work soon and reach accord quickly.

The superintendents are asking New York’s Congressional Representatives to work together to urge their colleagues and leadership to come to an agreement and pass a comprehensive bicameral bill as soon as possible.

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The New York State Council of School Superintendents is a professional and advocacy organization with over a century of service to school superintendents and assistant superintendents in New York State. The Council provides more than 800 members with professional development opportunities, publications and personal support while advocating for public education and the superintendency.