

Reauthorize Elementary & Secondary Education Act (ESEA)

The reauthorization of the Federal Elementary & Secondary Education Act (ESEA) is THE COUNCIL'S top federal policy priority. This law has not been updated since passage of the "No Child Left Behind" act in 2001.

Current actions by the United States Department of Education, as well as inflexible standards requiring state waivers, have only made the reauthorization of this outdated law that much more of a necessity.

In reauthorizing ESEA, Congress and the President must also be careful to retain important elements of local control, reject privatization and "funds portability" schemes, and ensure an adequate funding mechanism that meets the goals of educating all the nation's children.

Further, our federal representatives should be cognizant of requirements that cause over-testing of students and create too great a focus on "teaching to a test."

This law must be reauthorized in a comprehensive undertaking, not in a piece-by-piece fashion. There are many significant issues within this federal education law which can only be addressed as a singular policy. This is why waivers have been so destructive and have undermined the current law.

Finally – and most importantly – THE COUNCIL believes that fully funding "Title I" of ESEA is absolutely imperative. It is unrealistic to expect students to achieve success without providing schools the necessary funding to meet higher standards.

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.

We urge the House, the Senate, and the President to work together to adopt a new ESEA that meets the needs of our nation's students and to accomplish this as quickly as possible.

Support for Education of Unaccompanied Minors

In 2014, New York State public schools saw an influx of unaccompanied minor students. These minors arrived at the US border without guardians and are allowed to remain in the country pending the outcome of their immigration cases. They were placed with family members or guardians

throughout the United States by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency (ICE) during this period.

Some school districts serving these students saw a 10% or more enrollment increase *after* the school year started due to this influx. By law, school districts are required to enroll and educate these students, and are happy to do so, however they do not have the immediate

funds to accept such large volumes of federally-placed students.

As these children were placed in these school districts by a function of federal policy, it is patently unjust that local districts should be made to shoulder this significant added cost. It is the federal government's responsibility to provide for the education and support of these students while they are here.

THE COUNCIL calls on our federal representatives to provide the necessary funding to these schools to cover the costs incurred by this federal policy.

Flexibility in School Nutrition

In 2012, the United States Department of Agriculture released updated regulations governing school nutrition standards. These standards included maximum calorie counts, minimum requirements for inclusion of fruits, vegetables, and grains as well as limitations on calories obtained from meat and dairy foods.

While these efforts to fight childhood obesity are laudable, the standards are overly rigid and do not allow for flexibility or acknowledge the different nutritional needs of different students.

They also remove elements of local control to supply locally-available seasonal products and even place restrictions on foods used in school fundraising efforts.

THE COUNCIL supports maximum flexibility in administering the federal school nutrition guidelines, including removing the meats/grains cap. An inflexible mandated system is not efficient or cost-effective in delivering high quality nutrition to students.

While the Department has offered a waiver process from certain mandates following public scrutiny, this process is cumbersome and does not go far enough to ease the burden on school districts.

THE COUNCIL asks that our representatives pursue flexibility measures within this currently problematic program.

Reauthorize and Amend IDEA

Some special education mandates are extremely costly for school districts. Federal laws, specifically authorized through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) drive much of the special education policy delivered locally.

IDEA has not been changed since 2004. It is time for this crucial law to be updated, with some key changes:

- Fully Fund IDEA. This is imperative. Current law requires a 40% funding (national average per pupil excess cost) of special education costs, however the federal government is currently providing less than 20%.
- Streamline the due process system to avoid lengthy hearings by placing greater focus on mediating a mutually-agreeable outcome where possible. The cost associated with the current hearing process is significant to both districts and parents.
- Place responsibility for privately serviced students on the home school district, not the district in which the private placement is located.

THE COUNCIL asks our representatives to support reauthorization and full funding of IDEA as soon as possible.