



Great Public Schools for Every Student

Meeting the Needs of the Whole Child

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) shifted the emphasis of public education from developing well-rounded individuals, prepared to succeed in life, to testing low-level, basic skills in just two subjects: reading and math. Immediate and dramatic change is needed to undo NCLB's harmful effects—to refocus our education system on developing a well-educated citizenry equipped to meet the challenges of the 21st century. To this end, NEA proposes a new ESEA purpose statement:

“The public education system is critical to democracy and its purpose, as reflected in this Act, is to maximize the achievement, skills, opportunities, and potential of all students by building upon their strengths and addressing their needs, and to ensure that all students are prepared to thrive in a democratic society and diverse, changing world as knowledgeable, creative, and engaged citizens and lifelong learners.”

A reauthorized ESEA should require states to develop comprehensive, peer-reviewed plans that include “whole-child” measures such as reforming academic standards, curricula, and assessment and accountability systems to address a broad, rich set of students' knowledge, skills and dispositions; increasing and enhancing parent, family and community engagement; and offering high-quality teacher preparation and professional development aligned with the whole-child concept.

NEA supports the work of ASCD and its call for a “whole child” approach to learning, teaching and community engagement. **Meeting the needs of the whole child requires:**

- Addressing multiple dimensions, including students' physical, social and emotional health and well-being.
- Ensuring equity, adequacy and sustainability in resources and quality among public schools and districts.
- Ensuring that students are actively engaged in a wide variety of experiences and settings within—and outside—the classroom.
- Providing students with mentors and counselors as necessary to make them feel safe and secure.
- Ensuring that the condition of schools is modern and up-to-date, and that schools provide access to a broad array of resources.
- Reducing class size so that students receive the individualized attention they need to succeed.
- Encouraging parental and community involvement.

Physical, Social and Emotional Health and Well-Being

Student health, safety, and physical and emotional well-being complement core academic skills. Meeting the needs of the whole child requires a comprehensive approach that addresses all of these critical factors. NEA supports efforts to remedy gaps in services for children from birth to school age in collaboration with community-based organizations, public health, and child care and social service agencies; provide health and nutrition services; increase access to family support services such as counseling, housing assistance, mentoring and social services; and provide after-school and wrap-around care for young children. We also support collaborative grants and local initiatives to provide full-day kindergarten for all children at age five; full-service community schools; and extended learning opportunities for students.

NEA supports the Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning Act (H.R. 4233), which would amend ESEA to include programming that meets the social and emotional needs of students as part of the School Dropout Prevention program and the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities program; we also support teacher and principal training in practices that address these needs as part of the Teacher and Principal Training and Recruiting Fund program. This bill would authorize a five-year grant to establish a National Technical Assistance and Training Center for Social and Emotional Learning. The Center would provide training and technical assistance to states, local educational agencies (LEAs), and community-based organizations to identify, promote and support evidence-based social and emotional learning standards and programs in elementary and secondary schools.

Equity in Educational Opportunity

Ensuring that the needs of the whole child are met means ensuring that the needs of **every** child are met. NEA believes that ESEA should require states to monitor and achieve equity, adequacy and sustainability in resources and quality among public schools and districts. Low-achieving or “priority” schools would receive intensive support and assistance to improve academic programs and address critical factors that affect student learning such as student health, safety and well-being; parent, family and community engagement; school facilities and conditions; and other necessary support for students and school staff.

Experiences In and Out of the Classroom

NEA believes that public schools should help equip all students with the knowledge and skills they need to participate fully in our democracy and to succeed in the dynamic world of the 21st century. All students should have access to a broad and rich curriculum that includes not only math and reading/language arts, but social studies, the arts, foreign languages, STEM (science, technology, engineering and math), civics, and physical education. In addition to mastering the content of core academic subjects, students should acquire problem solving, critical thinking, interpersonal and communication skills, and learn to tap their creativity and imagination.

NEA supports grants to develop and incorporate a 21st century standards and framework for education, with a particular emphasis on high schools. Funds could be used to develop new assessment instruments that allow students to demonstrate critical thinking, problem solving and communication skills; integrate 21st century skills and knowledge with the entire high school curriculum; support 21st century skills planning groups composed of teachers and others with wide-ranging experience, including educational and business endeavors; and provide professional development that equips educators to infuse 21st century skills throughout the curriculum.

Safe and Supported Students

Addressing the needs of the whole student requires a staff that includes dedicated and talented teachers and principals, as well as school psychologists, counselors, nurses, social workers, paraprofessionals, literacy specialists, library and media specialists, building custodians and other education support professionals. NEA believes that Congress should amend ESEA to reward and recognize exemplary schools and professionals who truly meet the needs of whole child.

Modern, Up-to-Date School Conditions and Access to a Broad Array of Resources

NEA supports the construction and modernization of classrooms, school libraries, health clinics, gymnasiums, science laboratories and other facilities that broaden and enrich students' educational experience, and make school campuses safe, comfortable and vibrant centers for 21st century teaching and learning.

Class Size Matters: Reduce It!

Common sense tells us—and research confirms—that the number of students in a class can make a real difference for students and teachers alike. Twenty years of research has demonstrated the substantial benefits of thoughtfully planned, adequately funded, long-term exposure to small classes in the early grades for students in American schools. The longer a student is in such classes, the greater the gain. Among the key findings:

- Extra gains from small classes in the early grades are larger in classes with 20 or less students than classes with more than 20 students.
- Extra gains from small classes in the early grades are retained when students return to standard-size classes in upper elementary school, middle school and high school.
- Although extra gains from small classes in the early grades are realized by all types of students (and appear to be the same among boys and girls), traditionally educationally disadvantaged students make the greatest gains.

Reducing class size in the early grades works, at least in part, because this is when children first learn the rules of standard classroom culture and form ideas about coping with education. Many children encounter difficulties and greatly benefit from regular, one-on-one interaction with teachers—more likely to occur in small classes. One-on-one interaction allows teachers to learn more about each student and his/her needs, which in turn helps students develop useful habits and ideas about themselves and their abilities. Learning to cope well with school is basic to educational success. Learning to do so at a young age conveys broad advantages: effective habits and positive self-concepts, which

serve students well in the later years of education and, presumably, the wider world beyond. (Bruce J. Biddle & David C. Berliner, "What Research Says about Small Classes and their Effects," *Policy Perspectives*, 2002).

Parental and Community Involvement

NEA supports a number of bills that address the development of full-service community school programs, including the Full-Service Community Schools Act (S.1655/H.R. 3545) and the Keeping Parents and Communities Engaged (Keeping PACE) (S. 1411/HR 3343) Act. These bills create or facilitate programs to coordinate the delivery of educational, developmental, family, health and other comprehensive services through community-based organizations, including public and private partnerships; give students, families and communities access to such services; support parent, family and community involvement in schools; and integrate services to ensure that schools function as comprehensive community centers.



Great Public Schools for Every Student

NEA's Criteria for Great Public Schools

NEA's Great Public Schools (GPS) criteria require not only the continued commitment of all educators, but the concerted efforts of policymakers at all levels of government. These criteria will prepare all students for the future with 21st century skills; create enthusiasm for learning and engaging all students in the classroom; close achievement gaps and increase achievement for all students; and ensure that all educators have the resources and tools they need to get the job done.

- **Quality programs and services that meet the full range of all children's needs so that they come to school every day ready and able to learn.**
- **High expectations and standards with a rigorous and comprehensive curriculum for all students.** Curriculum and assessments must focus on higher order thinking and performance skills, if students are to meet the high standards to which we aspire. Students will be better prepared for the rigors of life and citizenship after school if they have had access to a broad, rigorous, relevant curriculum that prepares them for a variety of postsecondary educational and career options. Students' access to core academic content areas that incorporate 21st century skills as well as fine arts, civics, and career and technical education helps inspire their creativity, helps connect their school work to their outside interests, and can help keep them engaged in school.

We must support innovative public school models of education that inform and accelerate school transformation efforts and prepare students for citizenship, lifelong learning, and challenging postsecondary education and careers. The federal government can play a critical role in increasing educational research and development and providing a clearinghouse for innovative promising practices.

- **Quality conditions for teaching and lifelong learning.** In an effort to obliterate the "corridors of shame" that exist and repair or rebuild crumbling schools, we also must focus resources on infrastructure. President Obama's administration and Congress already have taken a giant leap forward in this respect when they passed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). ARRA included billions of dollars in aid that can be used to help update schools. We are pleased that both the House and Senate have passed legislation to extend and strengthen this program.

We also know that if we are to revitalize our public schools, we must address the design of public schools. Schools today must work for students in rural, urban, suburban, and exurban areas. In rural areas, for example, broadband access is key to ensure students have access to virtual, supplemental material and support that is not available in their physical location. By creating this technology gateway, educators can also obtain high-quality professional development to which they might otherwise not have access.

Schools and classrooms designed for 21st century learning also must be designed for universal access to ensure the inclusion of the widest spectrum of students. Every effort should be made to reduce the barriers to learning so that every student reaches his or her potential and dreams.

- **A qualified, caring, diverse, and stable workforce.** Investments in teachers' and leaders' knowledge and skills are essential to all other reforms, and pay off in higher achievement. Strong preparation, mentoring, and professional development, as well as collaborative learning and planning time in schools, are the building blocks of any successful reform. We must ensure students have access to accomplished educators by requiring high standards for entry into the profession and by offering incentives to teach in hard-to-staff schools. We recommend creating a prestigious national education institute and provide incentives to states to create world-class teacher preparation programs that attract the top tier of college graduates nationally.

Teachers and education support professionals must be respected as professionals by ensuring they are part of critical decisions affecting students, schools and themselves. We also need to encourage school leadership to be effective in both operational and instructional leadership.

- **Shared responsibility for appropriate school accountability by stakeholders at all levels.** We must obtain the full commitment from all policymakers—at the federal, state, and local levels. We also must involve our communities and partners, including governors, state legislators, mayors, county officials, business partners, the faith-based community, the civil rights community, and parents and families, to name a few. It will take the concerted effort of all of these stakeholders working with superintendents, school boards, and educators to ensure that all of our schools become the modern, safe, vibrant centers of the community that they can become.
- **Parental, family, and community involvement and engagement.** Through more than 125 initiatives in 21 states, NEA's Public Engagement Project is demonstrating the essential role of school-family-community partnerships in student achievement. Our findings echo those of a six-year-long study of multiple data sources conducted by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University: such partnerships contribute to increased student attendance, improved performance on standardized tests, higher high school graduation rates, and college-going aspirations.
- **Adequate, equitable, and sustainable funding.** Resources must be adequate and equalized across schools. We cannot expect schools that lack strong and prepared leaders, well-qualified teachers, and high-quality instructional materials to improve by testing alone. We must ensure adequate and equitable funding for schools and fully fund critical programs such as Title I and IDEA and we must help states and districts to identify disparities in educational resources, supports, programs, opportunities, class sizes and personnel (including the distribution of accomplished educators) through required Equity and Adequacy plans.