

ESEA

Engaging Summer for Education Agenda

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President Obama remains steadfast that his administration is committed to reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), currently known as No Child Left Behind, within the year. In fact, the President indicated that he wants the reauthorized ESEA submitted for his signature prior to students' return to classrooms next school year. In March at Kenmore Middle School in Arlington, Virginia, President Obama stated: "I want every child in this country to head back to school in the fall knowing that their education is America's priority. Let's seize this education moment. Let's fix No Child Left Behind."

Fast-forward to May. On May 1st, President Obama announced Osama bin Laden had been killed by United States forces. May 21st came and went without the Rapture and Judgment Day coming to fruition. Then, on May 23rd, President Obama caught up with old family and friends over a pint of Guinness in a pub in Moneygall, Ireland. What a month!

But, all good things must come to an end. Now the undeniable reality is that there is a mountain of work to engage over the coming summer months if a new ESEA is to materialize. The members of Congress better put away their sunscreen and Bermuda shorts as the month of June and the entire summer that follows will need to be less about celebratory moments and idle hours on a barstool and more about hard work.

On the positive side, there are some signs of Congress waking up. The chairman of the House Education and the Workforce Committee, Rep. John Kline, is currently leading the effort to chunk the intricate puzzle into smaller pieces as he and his colleagues take baby-steps towards President Obama's charge. Last week, Rep. Duncan Hunter, chairman of the House Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education introduced the *Setting New Priorities in Education Spending Act*. This bill proposes to repeal more than forty education programs which the House Education & the Workforce Committee have deemed wasteful. On the negative side, this action reads like night-before-the-big-due date, just-get-everything-down-on-the-paper-and-submit, procrastinator stuff. Cherry-picking budget lines will fall short of seizing this education moment.

The strictest of educators everywhere would accept the paper late in this case. They would much rather wait to see a submitted product that reflects a comprehensive overhaul and holds new

promise... for them and their students. In a recent story on *60 Minutes*, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates stated, “The hardest thing for me to deal with is leading a department that is organized to plan for war, but not to fight a war.” NCLB looked good on paper. But, contrary to popular belief, educators are not simply grading papers. They are living realities. NCLB may have been near the top of the class in theory and maybe even in effort. However, when it unfolded in the trenches, NCLB was glaringly organized to plan for war, not to fight a war.

If the reauthorized ESEA does not go in a different direction very soon, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan will be left to echo Secretary Gates.

The following list is a cheat sheet for members of Congress towards developing a new direction. The ideas could serve as anchor concepts for their impending conversations and considerations. The cheat sheet could serve as a rudder to position our life-boat with the wind behind its sails.

- **Re-envision the Grade 12 Exit Strategy:** reflect the knowledge that completion of a meaningful and purposeful secondary education does not necessarily culminate at the end of a student’s twelfth year of schooling; create flexibility and funding for schools who substantiate that certain students appropriately need their services and programs beyond Grade 12; recognize and incentivize schools that, on the other end of the spectrum, graduate students in fewer than four years (i.e. encourage and support them to develop and/or adopt innovative programs outside of minimal requirements and typical high school offerings, increase synergy with and connections to higher education, and seek expanded opportunities outside of the classroom for structured learning experiences, service projects, and experiential learning)
- **Develop New Generation Graduation Requirements:** encourage states to develop multiple pathways to a high school diploma; design pathways as diverse as our students while being practically and fiscally responsible; allow for requirements and pathways to differ among districts as well as among states to honor the nation’s vast array of needs and demands; empower educators to create authentic programs that enact and enable student passions and strengths; envision the future sustained by the nature of Graduate Opportunities rather than Graduation Requirements
- **Level the Stakes for All-Inclusive Measures of Student Performance:** build accountability through locally designed assessments, national and international assessments, portfolios, experiential and service learning projects, personal academic – social – emotional and/or – behavioral plans, report cards/grade reporting marks, etc.; guide ongoing improvement through transparent and easily understandable reporting systems; design measures of student performance to assess what we value
- **Build Capacity of School Leaders, Educators, & Students:** design and support professional development for elevating professional performance and student achievement; use data from evaluation systems and accountability measures to steer

professional development and to inform practices; focus professional development on closing gaps in learning as well as gaps in opportunity for all educators and students

- **Ensure that Triage Care & Long-Term Learning Care Flow to Learners Quickly:** equip educators with the ability to systematically personalize the education of each and every student; generate policies and funds for developing more effective and streamlined systems for providing assistance to students while limiting cumbersome and time-consuming processes, piles of paperwork, and countless meetings; spend less time on generating labels and legal mandates and more time on learners and accompanying barriers to learning; implement proactive and empirically-supported systems of interventions that could be tailored for unique needs of individual districts, classrooms, and students
- **Cultivate, Measure, & Celebrate Growth:** create a system of education driven by efforts to cultivate, measure, and celebrate continual growth; monitor and recognize the collage of annual learning gains in addition to performance on snapshot assessments; reward districts, schools, and educators when they meet targets through demonstrated growth by offering them greater autonomy in the schooling they design and provide for their communities
- **Deepen Relationships Between Schools & Communities:** spawn a new – or perhaps a renewed – purpose for schools in communities; collaborate with community members, business/labor leaders, elected officials, and representative constituents to transform education systems and build enriched communities; forge partnerships with primary-needs’ services (primary health and dental care, mental health, family counseling, child care, job and career training, etc.) and other entities/organizations to support the whole child and the 24/7/12 (24 hours per day, 7 days per week, 12 months of the year) environment which is responsible for the whole child’s growth
- **Invest With the Future & Priorities In Mind:** avoid unsustainable allocations of funds; provide ongoing funding to states to recruit, develop, and retain highly effective school leaders and educators for all schools; fund federal mandates and allow schools to use state and local funds to meet the needs of their school communities and innovative projects; maximize the amount and flexibility of funding which directly connects to students and their learning environments

In March of 2010, The United States Department of Education released “A Blueprint for Reform: The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.” The forty-one page document outlined five key priorities: (1) College- and Career-Ready Students, (2) Great Teachers and Leaders in Every School, (3) Equity and Opportunity for All Students, (4) Raise the Bar and Reward Excellence, and (5) Promote Innovation and Continuous Improvement. All

in all, the priorities and the overall blueprint are commendable. The priorities are supported by the above cheat sheet.

Looks good on paper. Unfortunately, we cannot hole-up forever in the basement Situation Room and rehearse the plan over and over again.

There is a war to be won.

If the reauthorized ESEA incorporates and reflects the cheat sheet's concepts and blueprint's priorities, I will treat President Obama to his next pint of Guinness.

* Previous articles by Brian P. Cory can be accessed under **Contact** at <http://www.librarymedia.net/dmp/contact.html>.