



**Massachusetts Association  
of School Committees**

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**Massachusetts Association of School Committees Position Paper**

# REAUTHORIZATION OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION ACT

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), also known as “No Child Left Behind,” is expected to be the subject of reauthorization by the U.S. Congress in 2010. MASC and principled critics of the original legislation, including many Massachusetts educators have discussed and debated the merits of various elements of the bill. In addition, the assembled representatives of Massachusetts School Committees have approved a series of principles that we believe should direct the reauthorization of ESEA.

Based on our collaboration with our members, we propose several important reforms that will create an improved federal education policy.

## **Accountability**

The Congress should improve state accountability systems to more accurately evaluate the performance of schools and districts. This should be done by establishing vertically aligned state content and performance standards that permit using either adequate yearly progress as a measure of success or benchmarks for student progress that establish annual expectations for growth in achievement, based on progress of a sample of other students across the state.

These accountability systems should measure the academic growth of each student using a comprehensive battery of various assessment tools<sup>1</sup>.

Proficiency must be redefined as possessing the skills and knowledge necessary to be productive, informed, independent citizens in a global society. These skills and bases of knowledge should be defined at the state and local level and include ELA, math and other academic subjects such as the STEM subjects as well as 21st century skills that students need to be competitive in the global job market such as creativity, collaborative and interpersonal skills, tolerance, technology and media literacy, and problem-solving skills<sup>2</sup>.

## **Adequate Yearly Progress<sup>3</sup>**

We urge maintaining a system of reporting on student achievement by subgroup in order to have meaningful measures of advancement. However, we warn against a system now in place that gives schools numerous ways to fail and only one way to “make” AYP.

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<sup>1</sup>The “growth model” of accountability measurement is viewed as more helpful to educators in measuring real student progress as opposed to more standardized tests that offer snapshots of specific students at a specific point in time.

<sup>2</sup>This recognizes the importance of 21st century skills including creative, collaborative, and social skills in addition to those curriculum mastery skills now required.

<sup>3</sup>This addresses complaints that the current AYP measurements are rigid, punitive, and unreflective of more important measures of success. Currently, it is virtually impossible for schools in Massachusetts, with the highest proficiency standard in the country, to escape sanctions and, eventually, to suffer penalties under NCLB.

We support offering students with disabilities an alternate assessment for the purpose of determining AYP, provided that any such assessment is reflected in the student's Individual Education Plan and is based on the IEP team's evaluation and the services to be provided for that student and meets parent consent requirements for IEP's.

We would allow students with disabilities access to alternate assessments to include out of grade-level tests and we support basing AYP on gain/growth or adjusted scores.

We support judging the success of districts and schools based on the achievement of students served under Title I of ESEA and limit sanctions only to those served under Title 1. In the alternative, we support allowing drastic school wide sanctions such as school choice to apply only to schools who have not met AYP in the aggregate for three consecutive years based on a "growth model" method of determination of AYP.

We urge counting the performance within the subgroup, for an appropriate period of time, those students who recently transitioned out of an applicable student subgroup in the subgroup accountability determinations.

### **High School Graduation**

We believe a more reasonable measure is to extend measurement of graduation rates to within five years of entering high school and to 21 years of age for special education students who complete high school with a state-approved exit document<sup>4</sup>.

### **Educator Credentials<sup>5</sup>**

States should set the appropriate educator standards, not the Federal government.

The Federal government should encourage states to adopt reciprocity agreements with other states to allow educators to easily transfer employment across state lines.

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<sup>4</sup>This recognizes that districts should not be penalized for students who graduate eventually, rather than in four years. Advocates for students note that some students require more time.

<sup>5</sup>This asserts state rights to set teacher credentialing standards and encourages states to accept credentials of educators certified in other states.

<sup>6</sup>This addresses the federal mandate to use ESEA funding for private schools and applies pressure to private schools receiving federal money to perform at higher levels.

<sup>7</sup>This would require involvement of actual educators in setting of voluntary national standards applicable at the state level.

<sup>8</sup>This addresses delays in reporting of scores. Currently, students tested in May may not receive scores until after the start of the next school year, delaying important remediating services.

<sup>9</sup>This would be an expansion of the US Education Secretary's "Race to the Top" grant process.

### **Funding<sup>6</sup>**

We support requiring all public schools, charter schools and nonpublic schools receiving federal funds to use the same state assessment and meet the same state criteria for determining AYP.

We urge allowing states to authorize a cessation of Title I support to a nonpublic school whose Title I students as a whole do not make AYP and perform at lower levels than the area public school(s) for three years or more.

### **National Standards**

The Federal government should encourage states to adopt voluntary national standards developed by professionally qualified national organizations and practitioners.<sup>7</sup>

### **Data Systems and Reporting**

The Congress should target federal funds on upgrading test delivery and scoring technology to yield quicker and more accurate data to districts, parents and schools<sup>8</sup>.

### **Best Practice Districts<sup>9</sup>**

Grants should be available to districts willing, able and capable of becoming Best Practice Districts. Such districts must be demonstrating high quality practices that improve student learning and are able to be replicated in other districts. Furthermore, the district must possess the requisite capacity to promote the dissemination and implementation of the practices to other schools and districts.

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