



LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY

ADMINISTRATION RELEASES BLUEPRINT FOR ESEA REAUTHORIZATION

Prepared by:

Ellen Fern (efern@wpllc.net)

March 15, 2010

Secretary of Education Arne Duncan will appear before the House Education and Labor Committee and the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee on Wednesday, March 17, to share and discuss the Administration’s vision for reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). As was widely reported in the press this weekend, the Administration posted its *Blueprint for Reform: The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act*, on the Department of Education’s (ED) website Saturday. The following is an overview of the Blueprint. Various education stakeholders will certainly be analyzing the portions of the proposal that affect specific issues or programs in more detail in coming days and weeks.

BACKGROUND

On Saturday, March 13, the Obama Administration released its “Blueprint” for revising ESEA “to help states raise expectations of students and reward schools for producing dramatic gains in student achievement.” The 40-page document was released on the Department of Education’s website. In a statement accompanying the document, and reiterated in his weekly Saturday radio address, President Barack Obama established a new goal for the law—that every student graduates from high school well prepared for college and a career. This correlates to the President’s goal for the United States to once again lead the world in college completion rates by 2020. According to the President, “Every child in America deserves a world-class education... We must raise the expectations for our students, for our schools, and for ourselves.”

During a conference call with reporters over the weekend, Secretary Arne Duncan outlined three overarching goals of the Blueprint: 1) setting a high bar for students and schools; 2) rewarding excellence and success; and 3) maintaining local control and flexibility. The Blueprint provides incentives for states to adopt academic standards that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace, and to create accountability systems that measure student growth toward meeting the goal that all children graduate and succeed in college. According to Duncan, “We’ve got to get accountability right this time. We want to get rid of prescriptive interventions.” Under the Blueprint, states would be able to measure individual students’ academic growth, versus comparing

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different cohorts of students, as under current law. In addition, schools that fail to meet achievement targets would not be required to provide school choice or supplemental educational services (SES), as they are currently.

ED spokesperson, Massie Ritsch, noted, “We have attempted to weave together the best suggestions from stakeholders across the country with the key principles of President Obama and Secretary Duncan.” Initial reaction from Congress and education stakeholders to the proposal has been mixed. Representative George Miller (D-CA), Chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee, released a statement saying, “This blueprint lays the right markers to help us reset the bar for our students and the nation.” Representative John Kline (R-MN), Ranking Republican on the House Education and Labor Committee, also released a statement saying, “Secretary Duncan deserves great credit for his bipartisan approach to reform. His willingness to take on the special interests and shake up the status quo are vital first steps to producing meaningful school improvement. Yet the real test always comes when words are translated into policy.” Agreeing that “the devil is in the details,” Daniel Domenech, Executive Director of the American Association of School Administrators, said “We’re excited about this and would like to see it pass.” Susan Traiman, Director of Public Policy at the Business Roundtable, called the Blueprint a “really positive step forward” and noted the business community’s support for a K-12 education system that produces high school graduates ready for college and career.

Groups representing teachers were not as positive. Both the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) released statements fairly critical of the effort. “We are disappointed by this first effort by the Administration to rectify the considerable problems in the current federal education law,” said Dennis Van Roekel, President of the NEA; and Randi Weingarten, President of the AFT, added, “It appears from our first review that despite some promising rhetoric, this blueprint places 100 percent of the responsibility on teachers and gives them zero percent authority. For a law affecting millions of schoolchildren and their teachers, it just doesn’t make sense to have teachers—and teachers alone—bear the responsibility for school and student success.”

BLUEPRINT OVERVIEW

Building on ARRA Reforms

The Blueprint builds on the education reforms of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) in four key areas: 1) Improving teacher and principal effectiveness; 2) Providing data which enables educators to improve students’ learning and helps families evaluate and improve their children’s schools; 3) Implementing college- and career-ready standards and developing improved assessments aligned with those standards; and 4) Improving the nation’s lowest-performing schools by providing intensive support and effective interventions.

Key Priorities

Extending this framework, the Blueprint builds on the following key priorities:

1. College- and Career-Ready Students

- **Raising standards for all students.** Every student should graduate from high school ready for college and career, regardless of their income, race, ethnic or language background, or disability status.
 - i. States will be asked to adopt state-developed standards in English language arts and mathematics that build toward college- and career-readiness by the time students graduate from high school.
 - ii. States may either choose to upgrade their existing standards, working with their 4-year public university system to certify that mastery of the standards ensures that a student will not need to take remedial coursework upon admission to a postsecondary institution in the system; or work with other states to create state-developed common standards that build toward college- and career-readiness.
 - iii. States will continue to implement statewide science standards and aligned assessments in specific grade spans, and may include such assessments – as well as statewide assessments in other subjects, such as history – in their accountability system.
 - iv. States will also be required to develop and adopt statewide English language proficiency standards for English Learners, aligned so that they reflect the academic language necessary to master the state’s content standards.
- **Better Assessments.** The Administration’s plan supports a new generation of assessments aligned with college- and career-ready standards must be developed.
- **A complete education.** Students need a well-rounded education to contribute as citizens in a well-functioning democracy.
 - i. This includes a new competitive grant program for states, high-need districts and nonprofit organizations to improve the teaching and learning in all content areas – from literacy to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics to history, civics, foreign languages, the arts, financial literacy, environmental education, and other subjects.
 - ii. Priority will be given to applicants proposing to use technology to address student learning challenges; and at the high school level, to work with colleges or universities to ensure that coursework is truly aligned with those institutions’ expectations.
 - iii. Accelerated learning opportunities for students to make postsecondary success more attainable will also be a priority.

2. Great Teachers and Leaders in Every School

- **Effective teachers and principals.** States and districts will be asked to develop and implement systems of teacher and principal evaluation and

support, and to develop a definition of “effective teacher and principal” at least partially based on student growth and other factors. In addition, the Administration proposes a new program to support efforts to recruit, place, reward, retain and promote effective teachers and principals and enhance the profession of teaching.

- **Our best teachers and leaders where they are needed most.** Maintaining a focus from ARRA on the equitable distribution of teachers, the Administration’s proposal provides funds to states and districts to develop and support effective teachers and leaders with a focus on high-need schools.
- **Strengthening teacher and leader preparation and recruitment.** States will be asked to monitor the effectiveness of their traditional and alternative preparation programs, and will be asked to link and invest in programs whose graduates are succeeding in the classroom, based on student growth and other factors.

3. Equity and Opportunity for All Students

- **Rigorous and fair accountability for all levels.** All students will be included in an accountability system that builds on college- and career-ready standards, rewards progress and success, and requires rigorous interventions in the lowest-performing schools.
 - i. Performance targets, based on whole-school and subgroup achievement and growth, and graduation rates will be established. States, districts and schools that are successful in reaching performance targets, significantly increasing outcomes for students and closing achievement gaps, or turning around the lowest-performing schools will be identified as *Reward schools* and *Reward districts*. This group will have the most flexibility in its use of federal funds.
 - ii. Those not meeting performance targets will be classified as *Challenge states, districts and schools*. Within this classification, several different categories of *Challenge schools* will be identified based on student academic achievement, student growth, and graduation rates. Depending on the classification, different interventions will be allowed and/or mandated. For all *Challenge schools*, districts may implement strategies such as expanded learning time, supplemental educational services, public school choice, or other strategies to help students succeed.
- **Meeting the needs of diverse learners.** Schools must support all students, by providing appropriate instruction and access to a challenging curriculum along with additional supports and attention where needed. This includes English Learners, students with disabilities, Native American students, homeless students, migrant students, rural students, and neglected or delinquent students.

- **Greater equity.** To give every student a fair chance to succeed, and give principals and teachers the resources to support student success, the Administration will require that schools and districts more clearly demonstrate how resources are between distributed to high- and low-poverty schools.
4. Raise the Bar and Reward Excellence
- **Fostering a Race to the Top.** The Administration will propose the continuation of the ARRA’s Race to the Top program at the state level and expand eligibility to school districts.
 - **Supporting effective public school choice.** The expansion of high-performing charter schools and other autonomous public schools will be encouraged.
 - **Promoting a culture of college readiness and success.** Increased access to college-level, dual credit, and other accelerated courses in high-need schools and support of college-going strategies and models that will help students succeed will be proposed.
5. Promote Innovation and Continuous Improvement
- **Fostering innovation and accelerating success.** The Administration will propose the continuation of the ARRA’s Investing in Innovation Fund program to encourage the discovery of new breakthroughs in education reform and the ability of these proven practices to be brought to scale.
 - **Supporting, recognizing, and rewarding local innovations and not national programs.** Shifting away from past support for nationally authorized programs, the Administration proposes fewer, larger, more flexible funding streams around areas important to student success. This reflects the Secretary’s view that states and districts need more flexibility with funding streams to focus on local needs. Directed funding for national programs will be replaced by new competitive funding streams, and districts will have fewer restrictions on blending funds from different categories.
 - **Supporting student success.** The Blueprint supports investments in new models that keep students safe, supported, and healthy both in and out of school, and that support strategies to better engage families and community members in their children’s education.
 - i. This includes a redesign of the federal afterschool program known as the 21st Century Community Learning Center Program, turning it into a new competitive grant program for states, school districts, nonprofit programs and partnerships to implement in and out of schools strategies that provide students with additional time and supports to succeed.
 - ii. The Blueprint includes a special emphasis on programs that include a comprehensive redesign of the school day, week, or year,

that promote community schools or that partner with community-based organizations.

- iii. A new competitive grant program for states, school districts and their partners is proposed to focus on assessing school climate and such factors as student engagement, school safety and school environment. This information will be required to be publicly reported.

CONCLUSION

Secretary Duncan will present this plan to lawmakers later this week. It is unclear when, or if, any legislative language might be forthcoming. As has been previously reported, Chairman Miller and Senate HELP Committee Chairman Tom Harkin (D-IA) have outlined ambitious plans for acting on ESEA reauthorization legislation, with Committee action scheduled for May. Surely this Blueprint will influence their respective proposals.

For more information, and to review the entire *Blueprint for Reform: The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act*, visit:

<http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/blueprint/index.html>.