



March 26, 2010

The Honorable George Miller
Chairman
Committee on Education and Labor
States House of Representatives
2181 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Kline
Ranking Member
Committee on Education and Labor United
States House of Representatives
2101 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Miller and Ranking Member Kline:

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), which represents over 50,000 teachers, appreciates this opportunity to provide comment on the upcoming ESEA reauthorization. Our comments highlight four key components of ESEA that are critical to the success of K-12 education in our country.

ESEA must support investment in literacy instruction and learning from birth through grade 12

Comprehensive literacy plans in every state will enable coordination and collaboration across academic levels and subject areas. Being literate is at the heart of learning in every subject area. Because students engage more deeply with those subjects as they progress through school, they must be taught by teachers who know the substance of their subject area and the ways in which knowledge in their subject area are represented. An integrated and sustained approach to literacy will assure a learning progression for all students that prepares them for college, career, and civic life.

ESEA must support teaching as a profession through defining teacher effectiveness as professional practice

The definition of teacher effectiveness must not only reference student learning outcomes, but also encompass engaging in professional practices that have been shown to have a powerful influence on student success. Those practices include:

- Applying deep content knowledge
- Using teaching and assessment strategies that enable diverse students to meet learning goals
- Participating in teacher learning communities to plan, assess, and improve instruction
- Growing as a professional by continuing to learn about content and pedagogy across a career span
- Incorporating current technologies in learning and teaching
- Engaging families and community members as partners in educating students
- Using evidence about student learning to improve instruction

ESEA must support professional teachers through job-embedded, continuous opportunities to continue their own learning

Just as doctors and lawyers must keep up with new developments in their fields, teachers must learn what is newly known about their increasingly diverse students, about cognition, about research findings in their field, and about the science of learning. To set the circumstances for such professional growth, ESEA should support and invest in

- Providing time in the school day for teacher and school leaders to examine student work and share best practices
- Establishing communities of practice that bring early career and more experienced teachers together for sharing and enriching teaching practice
- Enhancing teachers' understanding and use of assessments and related data to differentiate instructional approaches to reach every learner

ESEA must support assessments that both foster learning and better describe student achievement, teacher effectiveness, and school performance

Disproportionate emphasis has been placed on assessment as an accountability measure, with disastrous results for students, teachers, and schools. Teachers must be supported in guiding student learning through the use of formative assessments that they develop or choose. Specifically, the Act must:

- Fund the development of a balanced assessment system that includes and validates the use of formative assessment, performance-based assessment, growth models, and summative assessment to create a more in-depth portrait of student learning for the purposes of determining accountability and fostering student growth.
- Create accountability measures that are developmentally, linguistically, and culturally sensitive to the particular needs of English Language Learners and students with disabilities.

The National Council of Teachers of English welcomes the opportunity for a continuing dialogue with you during the coming months about these and other components of ESEA. NCTE can contribute research findings, evidence from practice, and the reach of an organization with members in every state. Please contact Barbara Cambridge, Director of NCTE's Washington office (bcambridge@ncte.org), with specific requests for participation in discussions or materials that can be helpful in your work. We appreciate your bipartisan efforts and will be pleased to contribute to them in any way we can.

Sincerely,



Kent Williamson, Executive Director
National Council of Teachers of English