

Federal Relations Report
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The 114th Congress is in session and a flurry of activity regarding the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (formally known as No Child Left Behind) is taking place. As many of you that have read this report over the past several years know, I have been writing concerning the lack of reauthorization of ESEA for six years. The reauthorization may actually happen this year and with it, changes in the requirements of the act.

The process began in early January with the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee chairman, Lamar Alexander's release of a discussion draft concerning testing and accountability. Alexander will hold three hearings over the next several weeks on several issues that are intended to HELP Fixing No Child Left Behind. The first hearing focused on testing and accountability and the next will focus on teachers and principals. The legislators are wrestling with the issue of reducing testing in schools, while maintaining strong accountability at the state level. One thought that has been proposed is to move from annual testing to "grade span" testing where students would be tested only once in the grade spans of 3 – 5 and 6 – 8 and once more in high school.

NAESP has recently conducted a survey of principals from across the country concerning testing and the survey indicated many principals have major concerns with the over-testing and the punitive nature of the accountability system. Many principals, in the survey, believe that annual testing would be acceptable as long as the assessments are used to inform teaching and learning and to measure student growth while not tied to high stakes.

NAESP is currently analyzing the Senate proposal to determine if, in fact, students (and principals) would be better off than current law. The association is currently drafting comments to provide official positions on several provisions contained in the ESEA reauthorization proposal. The proposed discussion draft would make several important changes to NCLB such as removing the arbitrary 100% proficiency requirements; eliminating the controversial "School Improvement Grant" program and "turnaround/transformation models" that require firing principals and teachers; removing the one-size-fits all punitive accountability system; and giving states exponentially more authority in making decisions about education systems within the state and local districts. While there is a lot that is good, there are major concerns – not to mention the "fix" for federal assessment and accountability.

Last year the House passed H.R. 5, the "Student Success Act" and it is anticipated the house bill will be reintroduced this year by house Education and Workforce Committee Chairman John Kline.

Late in February, the NAESP Leadership Conference will be held in Washington, DC with many of the NDAESP leaders attending. As part of this conference, we will be visiting with our congressional delegation to express our views on the proposed legislation. It is important for us to be able to bring to the legislators our stories – the stories of how federal legislation affects our schools and us as we work with the children of North Dakota. Please share your stories with us at Mid-Winter!