

2014 AASA Legislative Agenda

Proposed by AASA Executive Committee, Jan. 2014

Adopted by AASA Governing Board, Feb. 2014

Guiding principles for federal education policy

- The role of the federal government in education is to help ensure access to equitable educational opportunities and to supplement and support, rather than dictate, local efforts in education.
- Federal funding should prioritize addressing districts' existing challenges in serving vulnerable populations of students rather than promote new competitive grant programs.
- It is unrealistic to expect all students to achieve college and career readiness without providing districts the necessary funding to do this challenging work.
- Federal funding should support the total child, from physical and mental health to the development of fundamental lifelong learning skills.

2014 Legislative Priorities

Reauthorize ESEA: Reauthorization is crucial to providing the nation's schools with relief from current law, which is both broken and lacking in the flexibility that states and local school districts need to support student learning and achievement.

Fully Fund IDEA: By honoring its commitment to support the education of students with disabilities, Congress will enable districts to shift dollars towards new initiatives that address their local needs.

Eliminate Duplicative Data Requirements: Reduce the collection and appropriation of data that does not improve local educational practice.

AASA Positions on the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

Guiding Principles for ESEA should include:

- Allocation of funds via formulas based on the percentage of poverty;
- Limitation on regulations to ESEA programs;
- Reducing the reliance on one-time snapshot testing;
- Specification that federal government should supplement and support—not dictate—state's policies;
- Direction that a reduction in federal funds be accompanied by a reduction in federal mandates;
- Connection of children's health, mental health, and personal and social development to students and families;
- Direct allocation of funds to the local level; and
- Direction that school systems should not be required to spend state and local funds for federal mandates.

The following statements outline AASA's positions on a variety of education issues related to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. These statements guide the work of AASA's advocacy and policy efforts throughout the year.

Improving Standards and Accountability for Students Served with Federal Dollars

- Support for state-developed standards, which may include Common Core.
- Opposition to federally established national standards.
- Separate accountability and instructional measures: one test cannot serve both purposes, and tests for accountability should be based on multiple valid and reliable measures that document growth.
- Clear and accurate accountability measures.
- Less intrusive and costly testing for accountability.
- Tests for accountability need not be widely administered; Shift to sample method (like NAEP).
- Measure student growth for both accountability and instruction.
- Multiple sources of assessment and information for both accountability and instruction.
- Individualized Education Plans should shape assessment for students with disabilities.
- Assess ELL students in a language they understand.
- Support metric that reflects total ELL subgroup.
- Emphasize rewards not punishment – build capacity.
- Disaggregate student outcomes - adjust for new student categories.

- Eliminate mandatory set-asides, especially for SES & choice.
- Calculate graduation rates that recognize multiple pathways to graduation (including high school diplomas and GEDs) at the 3-, 4-, 5- and 6-year timeframes, without penalty.

Improving Struggling Schools

- Federal Title I reporting and accountability requirements apply only to schools receiving federal Title I funds.
- Focus state interventions on building capacity.
- Special consideration for alternative schools.
- Plan and implement state intervention in conjunction with school districts.
- Support a broad range of turn-around models.

Improving the Effectiveness of Teachers and Administrators

- Staffing and evaluation decisions and requirements are a state and local responsibility.
- Evaluations must be focused on improving instruction and building teacher capacity, rather than teacher ranking.
- Accountability for effectiveness is a state and local responsibility.
- Compensation decisions are a state and local matter.
- Evaluations must be created at the state and or local school district.
- Permit use of ESEA funds to encourage teachers and specialized instructional support staff to work in hard-to-staff schools.
- Provide additional ESEA funds for hard-to-staff schools.
- Distribute professional development funds by percentage of poverty.
- Local flexibility in professional development programs.
- Student performance should be part of evaluations but should include multiple measures of performance not a single test score.

Services for Special Populations and Conditions

- Distribute funds to school systems through formulas.
- Support current law related to equitable service for Title I students in private schools.
- Authorize and fund a dual-language pilot program for schools serving concentrations of low income and minority students.
- Increase funding for the extended day and year programs under 21st Century Community Learning Centers, including focus on providing funds direct to LEAs.
- Fully fund the Rural Education Achievement Program Reauthorization Act (REAP)
- Reauthorize REAP to maintain direct-to-district funding, with changes to update locale codes, and switch the poverty indicator to free and reduced lunch eligibility.
- Provide full funding of Impact Aid.
- Ensure transportation costs for foster children are the responsibility of child welfare agencies.
- Provide school districts immediate access to all relevant student data, including academic, social, emotion, criminal, and behavioral.

ESEA Waivers

- Oppose continued use and renewal of waivers in place of comprehensive reauthorization.
- Oppose overreach of USED to override local and state input in waiver process.
- Oppose any effort to provide regulatory relief through conditional waivers.
- Any regulatory relief should be targeted and direct to states and districts, without policy requirements.

AASA Positions on Federal Programs not in ESEA

The following statements outline AASA's positions on federal education programs outside of ESEA. These statements guide the work of AASA's advocacy and policy efforts throughout the year.

IDEA

- Mandatory funding for IDEA at 40 percent of the additional cost of education students with disabilities.
- Permit school districts to reduce local effort by up to 100 percent of federal funding increases.

- Eliminate the requirement for parental consent for Medicaid reimbursement.
- Ensure districts have greater flexibility to reduce local maintenance of effort levels if the provision and quality of services for students with disabilities is unaffected.
- Reform the special education due process system to provide more effective, less costly and less litigious means of resolving disputes.

Perkins Career and Technical Education (CTE)

- Maintain current formula for distributing funds as well as minimum grant allocations.
- Keep separate Perkins funding streams for secondary and post-secondary systems.
- Encourage partnerships with higher-ed and economic development councils.
- Oppose efforts to narrow uses of Perkins funds to specific industries.
- Encourage districts to work with industry councils to ensure CTE programs are credible and relevant.
- Provide funding to ensure districts offer career-planning and counseling to all students.
- Reduce the data collection burden requirements in Perkins and focus on amassing appropriate, existing information to determine effectiveness of CTE programs and students.

Funding for Public Schools

- Direct limited available federal funding to formula programs that target students in need, rather than using competitive grants.
- Include students eligible for early education in the Student Count for the Free/Reduced Meal program.
- Deep and/or across-the-board cuts in federal funding should be absorbed at the state level, not passed in their entirety to local districts.
- All schools receiving federal funding must be subject to the same reporting and accountability requirements (including IDEA and ESEA).

Early Childhood Education

- Make available federal funding that supports high-quality early education opportunity (including head start, Pre-K, early education, professional development for personnel, and more), with ample flexibility for local authority in implementation.
- In expanding and delivering early education, public schools must be a core partner in all stages of planning, implementation and evaluation.
- Support expansion of access to early education to all children.
- Improve access to high-quality child care programs for poor families.
- Tax incentives for employers to provide support for child care and after-school care.
- Coordinate early childhood programs regardless of funding source/agency.

Health Care

- Permit schools to claim reimbursement from Medicaid.
- CMS should develop uniform methodology for claiming reimbursement from Medicaid and streamline the process.
- Increase Medicaid reimbursements for low-income students.
- Ensure school districts have access to mental health services funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.
- Continue the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP).
- Within the Affordable Care Act, re-define a full-time employee as a person who works 40 hours/week.
- Exempt substitute teachers and other variable hour employees from coverage under the Affordable Care Act.

E-Rate and Instructional Technology

- Raise the funding cap for E-Rate to meet demand.
- Continue to include the E-Rate program in the Universal Service Fund.
- Reduce the paperwork requirements for E-Rate.
- Expand broadband to all parts of the country and support community planning and coordination related to expanded connectivity.
- Permanent exemption from the Anti-Deficiency Act.

- Ensure that ESEA provides for education technology-related professional development (such as the ATTAIN Act or Transforming Education Through Technology Act).
- Failure to provide funding for education technology while requiring the adoption of computerized assessment is an unfunded mandate.

Vouchers

- Oppose federal funding to non-public schools.
- Oppose special education vouchers.
- Permit the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program, to expire.
- Oppose tax credits for K-12 scholarships to non-public schools.
- Oppose Title I portability.

School Climate and Student Safety

- Fund professional development to improve school climate and implement school-wide positive behavioral interventions and support systems.
- Provide grants to districts to reduce the disproportionate suspension and expulsion rates of minority students and students with disabilities, decrease bullying and harassment incidents, and minimize the use of seclusion and restraint.
- Permit engagement of parents regarding safe and appropriate seclusion and restraint in Individualized Education Plans and Behavioral Intervention Plans.
- Allow monitored seclusion and restraint as an option of last resort.
- Reinstate funding for the Safe and Drug Free Schools program. Schools and states annually pay billions of dollars to address the results of substance abuse, school violence and unaddressed mental health needs through local and state funding. Reinstatement of the Safe and Drug Free Schools program represents an important federal investment in successful prevention and intervention efforts.
- Re-establish funding for the Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools grants designed to help schools prevent and manage emergencies.
- Restore funding for programs such as the Secure our Schools grant program and the COPS in Schools program, which provided grants for security equipment, security assessments and school resource officers.
- Increase funding for mental health counselors and services in schools. Access to these services is a crucial component of any effort to prevent/respond to a school emergency.
- Ensure existing federal policy gives local school districts the flexibility to use resources to fund student services personnel (including counselors, psychologists and therapists). Wrap-around services are central to addressing the needs of the total child, and flexibility in existing federal policy will better enable local school districts to use limited federal dollars in a way to maximize student support.
- Provide funds for districts to upgrade their facilities if internal safety audits require improvements.
- Oppose any new private right of action for students.

School Construction

- Make Qualified Zone Academy Bonds and Qualified School Construction Bonds more marketable.

School Food Service Programs

- Provide reimbursement to schools when federal food service requirements result in loss of revenue.
- Make all licensing and certification requirements for school nutrition workers a state responsibility.
- Avoid federal overreach into nutrition policies, which are best addressed at the local level.

Charter Schools

- Support public charter schools operating under the governance of local public school boards and subject the same reporting and accountability requirements as traditional public schools.
- Aggressively defend against all actions that undermine public education, including charters that are not publically accountable.
- Ensure that the creation/expansion of charter schools does not have an adverse effect on the quality of the existing public schools.