

National Perspective: State Leadership Opportunities for High School Innovation

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The process of reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)—also known as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act—is moving forward. Currently, the Committee on Education and Labor is working with a draft of [Title I, Part A—Disadvantaged Children Meet High Academic Standards](#), which it received in August from Representative George Miller, chairman, Committee on Education and Labor, and Representative Howard “Buck” McKeon, ranking member, Committee on Education and Labor. By the time you read this article, congressional hearings almost will certainly have been held, and committee members will have recommended changes to the proposal. The U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) is expected to receive a draft of the bill later in the fall. These actions indicate that Congress will make an attempt to reauthorize the law this year. If NCLB is reauthorized, it likely will get a new name and some of the proposed changes will result in resolving problems that have been found in the original NCLB implementation.

More Emphasis on High School Accountability

One noticeable change being proposed in the U.S. House version of the reauthorization is more emphasis on high school accountability. There has been a lot of discussion among business leaders and policymakers regarding their concerns with the ability of the United States to compete in a global economy and the preparation of high school students to become part of its future workforce. Some of their concerns are the national dropout rate and what is perceived to be a disconnect between high school students and high school education. It is inaccurate to generalize that their concerns apply to all high schools; however, the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) recently reported that in 2003-04, only 74 percent of public high school students graduated within four years with a regular diploma (Institute of Education Sciences, 2007). In addition, only 17 percent of students with disabilities completed high school between 1987 and 2003 (Institute of Education Sciences, 2007). These data have led policymakers to place more emphasis on high school accountability and to incorporate it into the reauthorization of NCLB.

The specific proposals in the U.S. House version that specifically apply to high school include the following:

- **Advanced Placement (AP).** First, in Title I, Part G, there is a provision to “support states and local school districts to increase access to AP tests, improve the AP programs, increase student achievement, increase the number of individuals who achieve a baccalaureate or advanced degree and decrease the amount of time such individuals require to attain such

degree.” Title I, Part G also includes a reference to the International Baccalaureate program.

- **School Dropout Prevention.** In Title I, Part H, grants will be given to states to strengthen and develop dropout prevention and school reentry programs and to raise student achievement. The grants are expected to challenge high school students to achieve their highest academic potential and ensure they have ongoing opportunities to achieve that potential through schoolwide programs proven effective in dropout prevention and school reentry. Part H also includes incentives to states to raise their graduation rates. States will be required to conduct a policy gap and impact analysis to determine how to strengthen existing policies to raise graduation rates while ensuring a rigorous secondary education.
- **Core Curriculum Development.** Other provisions of the proposal, such as Title I, Part I, include a new program to fund local education agencies to strengthen their instruction in music and arts, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, history, geography, and physical education and health.
- **Expanded Learning Time.** Another provision in the proposal that should stimulate considerable interest is Title I, Part J, which would provide funds to states and local education agencies to expand learning time aimed at improving student achievement and engagement.

The increased emphasis on high schools and the new opportunities for funding offer interesting opportunities for state education agencies, local school districts, Learning Point Associates, your regional comprehensive assistance centers, and the National High School Center. Through meaningful partnership work, we can develop new ideas to support the challenges that states and local school agencies confront on a daily basis.

High School Innovation: Opportunities for Collective Leadership

Some Learning Point Associates staff are discussing how compliance with federal laws can lead to more effective leadership and innovation. There are new theories of leadership that place more emphasis on the group rather than on individual leaders. How can we move that thinking into states to build a knowledge culture? As we delve more deeply into the concept of innovation, we find that the term *innovation* is often misconstrued to mean complex, technological products that make work more difficult. Real innovation is the ability to solve complex problems with simple solutions that make a task easier.

How can state leadership produce innovations in high schools that respond to the opportunities presented in the reauthorization proposal?
Share your ideas with the author at
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By working together, I would like to think that we can successfully achieve the goals that are being presented in the new law. Regardless of whether NCLB is reauthorized this year, the concepts being discussed provide exciting new opportunities for partnering on innovative ideas

to help high school students be better prepared for postsecondary education or the more challenging workforce competition they will face to get high-salaried jobs.

Reference

Institute of Education Sciences. (2007). *Fast facts: Back to school statistics*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved September 27, 2007, from <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=372>