



Supporting Teachers, Leaders, and Local Innovation

BACKGROUND:

The *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965* (ESEA) has directed federal resources to schools for more than four decades to help ensure all children have equal access to a quality education. The most recent reauthorization—or congressional update to the law—occurred with the passage of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB). Although ESEA was due for reauthorization in 2007, NCLB has governed education policy in states and school districts for more than a decade. While waiting for Congress to complete its next reauthorization, the U.S. Department of Education has offered states flexibility from prescriptive provisions of the law that have become barriers to state and local implementation of innovative education reforms. ESEA flexibility moves away from top-down policies, instead supporting decisions informed by data and expertise at the state and local levels. All participating states must show how their reform plans advance all students' achievement by maintaining a high bar for student success, closing achievement gaps, improving the quality of instruction, and increasing equity by better targeting support and resources to schools based on need.

DISCUSSION:

ESEA flexibility was designed to provide states and districts with the freedom to offer teachers and school leaders tools and training that not only will support their states' vision for reform, but also lay the groundwork for significant instructional transformation. As part of their approved requests, states must invest in capacity-building strategies such as high-quality professional development, improved evaluation systems, and comprehensive support for teachers and leaders. States must ensure that teachers and principals receive targeted training to develop classroom and school practices designed to engage all learners in more rigorous coursework and to help all students become college- and career-ready. States also have the flexibility to improve evaluation systems so that they provide meaningful indicators of effectiveness and support teachers and leaders by considering both student growth and multiple measures of professional practices. To improve educator induction, many states are working with their teacher and principal preparation programs so that incoming teachers and leaders understand the high bar set by college- and career-ready standards and how best to ensure that all students meet them. It is essential that there are highly effective teachers and leaders in schools designed for success.

Through ESEA flexibility, the Department will both recognize states for demonstrating success—such as improving their systems of support and evaluation for educators—and challenge states that fall short of their goals to pursue rigorous reform efforts that focus on what is best for students.

*See the Definition Box.

Definition Box:

***Title II:** A federally funded program providing financial assistance to local educational agencies and schools for the purpose of preparing, training, and recruiting highly-effective teachers and principals.

***Race to the Top:** A federally funded competitive grant program initially established under the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009*, designed to advance state education reform efforts and spur education innovation.

History in Review:

Since it was enacted, federal funding for ESEA has provided billions of dollars for professional development. Currently, \$2.5 billion in ESEA Title II* funds are allocated for teacher and leader training each year, yet local educators have raised concerns as to how these dollars are being spent locally, and that effective professional development, training, and support systems are underfunded or not designed to engage teachers in meaningful work that transforms instructional practices. When adding state and local investments in this critical area, upwards of \$5 billion has been targeted annually, with little satisfaction or connection to student outcomes. ESEA flexibility will optimize the ability of states and local districts to apply professional development dollars to strategies that will serve to ensure all students are college- and career-ready.

STATES IN ACTION:

Examples of strong plans that have proposed to support innovative reform and instructional change follow.



Wisconsin is utilizing ESEA flexibility to build its capacity by:

- Creating two new centers that will develop high-quality curricular resources aligned with college- and career-ready standards that will become a critical component of the state's transition to new standards and serve as a hub of content experts to assist the whole state; and
- Using the centers to implement college- and career-readiness training for teachers, principals, and other school staff that will be accessed easily at low- to no-cost across its districts.



An early Race to the Top* state, **Delaware** is further aligning its reform efforts under ESEA flexibility to:

- Make use of the results and lessons learned from their evaluation system to drive teacher and leader professional development efforts; and
- Draw on their Race to the Top funds to support expert evaluators who will look across their school districts for common local issues and technical assistance needs.



Rhode Island's flexibility plan makes use of multiple measures to:

- Implement a blended teacher evaluation structure that accounts for student growth and classroom observations; and
- Incorporate student learning objectives based on a teacher's instructional goals for the school year.

Fast Facts:

- Through its Race to the Top initiative, the U.S. Department of Education has invested more than \$6.2 billion in education reform efforts at the state level, much of it to support teachers and principals.

“We worked tremendously hard to earn this waiver—working closely with our partners at the local, state, and the federal levels. This waiver provides our school districts with the necessary flexibility to improve student learning based on the students’ and their communities’ needs. And it recognizes the collaborative efforts the state undertook to reform teacher and principal evaluations.”

- Washington Governor Christine Gregoire
ESEA flexibility granted July 6, 2012

