

The Obama Administration's "Blueprint" for ESEA Reauthorization

Outline of Key Points

On March 13, 2010, the U.S. Department of Education (USED) released the Obama Administration's "Blueprint" for reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The 41-page document builds on the ESEA priorities included in President Obama's FY 2011 budget request (released last month) and kicks off an ambitious effort by the Administration to try to reauthorize ESEA this year – replacing the current No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) with the next model of federal education reform. While it's unclear whether a quick ESEA reauthorization is feasible, it is clear that intensive drafting, hearings, and debate will occur over the next several months.

The Administration's ESEA blueprint presents core themes and brief statements regarding the Administration's proposal in numerous areas of education reform. The devil, however, is in the details, and most details are not yet known. From here, the White House and USED will work with Congress – presently on a bipartisan basis – to draft specific legislative language, working with the Administration's blueprints but adding congressional priorities and ideas as well.

This paper presents a brief analytical outline of the Administration's ESEA blueprint – what is the Administration proposing, what does it mean, what important issues are unaddressed? We obviously don't have all the answers, and neither at this point does the Administration or Congress. But this paper provides an outline for discussion, and a more detailed analysis is forthcoming.

Core Themes. The Administration's ESEA blueprint demonstrates several core themes that will likely guide its specific ESEA recommendations:

- **College- and career-readiness.** The new focus of Title I. States required to align standards with college- and career.
- **Flexibility.** Move toward "tight on ends, loose on means." In general, greater state flexibility on assessment, accountability, interventions, etc.
- **Incentives.** Focus on carrots, not just sticks. Rewards for high-performing schools. Competitive grants for bold action.
- **Competition.** Big pots continue to be formula funded (Titles I, II, III). But new programs generally competitive grants (RTTT, I3, teacher and leader effectiveness).
- **Consolidation.** New, broader, fewer buckets for old and new programs (accelerated learning, well-rounded education, etc.)
- **Equity.** Scope unclear, but new focus on resource equity, equitable distribution of effective teachers and leaders, English proficiency standards and programs for ELL students, etc.

Key Areas. The Administration's ESEA blueprint includes brief text describing specific plans with regard to many areas of reform. In many cases, important details were not included. This summary focuses on select, key areas of reform.

- **Standards.** States required for Title I funds to align standards with college- and career-expectations, through common core or individual state action, with incentives for common core.

- **Assessments.** States required to continue annual assessments in ELA and math – for status and growth, and to support teaching and learning, likely at grades 3-8 and high school (as NCLB). Science assessments required for grade clusters Formula grants for improved assessments and competitive grants for common assessments.
- **Accountability.** States required to make annual accountability determinations for all schools and districts, with transparent, disaggregated reporting. No more "AYP." Accountability based on growth and status, with goal of all kids college- and career-ready (or on pathway?) by 2020. States seemingly required to make initial accountability determinations based on assessments, graduation rates, etc., but may design systems and include other valid student achievement data for all but highest and lowest performing schools. Proposal not fully clear. Language on states and districts being held accountable for school conditions and capacity.
- **Rewards.** New focus on Reward schools (and districts and states), including federal funds for high-poverty, high-performing schools.
- **Supports and interventions.** States required to identify three types of Challenge schools: (1) lowest performing 5% of schools for turnaround (per four models in School Improvement Grants, RTTT, etc.), (2) next lowest 5% for warning (and state-determined interventions), and (3) schools with persistent achievement gaps (for state-determined interventions). State discretion for supports and interventions in other schools (with some language on deeper diagnostic review). Increased federal investment in turnaround grants. Choice and SES become options, as well as extended learning time, etc.
- **Teachers and leaders.** Move from HQT to effectiveness. Title II to require annual evaluations (based in significant part on student growth) and periodic reporting. Competitive grants would incentivize *use* of evaluations for hiring, tenure, promotion, dismissal, etc. Additional grants for effective pathway programs
- **From choice to charters.** Choice not required for *all* underperforming schools (as in NCLB). But new focus and federal funding for charters and other innovative school models, including as part of turnaround and more generally.
- **RTTT and I3.** Big push to continue federal funding for state comprehensive reforms and local innovation.
- **Time.** Continued, reframed support for extended learning time, after-school, and community supports.
- **Community supports.** Community and family engagement a funding option in several consolidated programs and a focus of new "promise neighborhoods" program in high-need communities.
- **Literacy and STEM.** New competitive grants to support move to higher standards in both areas.
- **Early learning/school readiness.** Not a major theme in Blueprint, but new Literacy program starts at pre-K and some opportunities for weave-through.
- **Higher education/college access and completion.** Not a major theme, except for college readiness as core goal; emphasis on effective teacher and leader preparation programs; and grants for AP, IB, dual enrollment, early college programs, etc., with priority for partnering with higher education for portable credits.
- **Capacity.** Increased reservations for state and local capacity to meet increased responsibilities. Scope of funds and uses unclear.
- **Research and evaluation.** Research not generally addressed, except for continuation of I3 and cross-cutting theme.
- **Safe and healthy students.** Consolidated program to address school climate and wraparound supports for students.