



## ***Agenda for the Reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act***

On behalf of all of America's secondary school students, and in particular for the more than six million who are most at-risk of academic failure, the Alliance for Excellent Education (the Alliance) calls on Congress to complete a No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) reauthorization this year that includes the following recommendations. These policies will build on the ideals of "no child left behind" and help to lead the nation toward "every child a graduate."

**1. Leverage higher standards and better assessments aligned to college and work readiness:** NCLB set the goal that all students would be proficient by 2014, and requires annual improvement toward that goal. Unfortunately, the currently used state tests often measure tenth-grade proficiency, not college and work readiness. It is clear that for students to compete in the twenty-first century workforce, they must graduate with the skills and knowledge to succeed in postsecondary education and the workforce. The reauthorization should include incentives for states to work together to establish and adopt common standards and high quality assessments aligned to twenty-first-century college and work readiness.

***Congressional action:*** The 2007 *Miller-McKeon Discussion Draft* clearly stated that college and work readiness is the goal to which everything else should be aligned.

**2. Ensure meaningful accountability for high schools, including graduation rates:** Under current law, there is little to no accountability for high school graduation rates. As a result, adequate yearly progress (AYP)'s ability to hold high schools accountable and, more importantly, to serve as a way to identify low-performing high schools and target assistance to them, is undermined. In fact, a high percentage of "dropout factories"<sup>1</sup> actually make AYP, despite graduating fewer than 60 percent of their ninth graders within four years. The reauthorization should include graduation rates that are defined consistently, disaggregated by subgroup, and required to improve significantly over time as part of AYP for high schools. Also, AYP should equally weight proficiency measured by college- and work-readiness standards and graduation rates, and through that process, identify low-performing high schools so that they can be targeted for assistance.

***Congressional action:*** Both the *Every Student Counts Act*, introduced in the House (H.R. 2955, twenty-four cosponsors) and the *Miller-McKeon Discussion Draft* would improve graduation rate accountability.

**3. Support state and local systems of high school improvement:** NCLB's federally mandated "school improvement" process is fundamentally flawed when it comes to high schools. First, without graduation rates as part of AYP, many of the schools and students most in need of assistance are not being identified as in need of improvement, and thus not getting needed assistance. The one-size-fits-all actions for low-performing schools—school choice and supplemental education services (SES)—have little impact on low-performing high schools. And there is no funding directed specifically to support high school improvement. The reauthorization should include a thoughtful new approach to high school improvement: differentiated systems designed and managed by states and districts. These systems should be driven by the use of multiple, research-based indicators of school and student performance and needs. Schools and districts should use that information to determine the specific level and types of interventions needed in each identified low-performing high school—targeted interventions, whole school reform efforts, or replacement. States and districts should receive federal funds to provide the support, technical assistance, and resources necessary to turn those schools around.

***Congressional action:*** The *Graduation Promise Act* was introduced in the Senate (S. 1185, nine cosponsors) and the House (H.R. 2928, sixty-seven cosponsors) and was included in the *Miller-McKeon Discussion Draft* as the Graduation Promise Fund.

**4. Target new funding to turn around low-performing high schools:** Only 8 percent of the Title I funds that trigger interventions for low-performing schools under NCLB make it to high schools. As a result, there is little to no funding targeted to helping local educators turn around the highest-challenged and lowest-performing high schools. The reauthorization should include a new \$2.5 billion fund for turning around low-performing high schools.

**Congressional action:** The *Graduation Promise Act* included a \$2.4 billion High School Improvement and Dropout Reduction Fund and the *Miller-McKeon Discussion Draft* included a Graduation Promise Fund authorized at an unspecified amount.

**5. Invest in longitudinal data systems and professional development to use data to improve policy and practice:** Educators and policymakers are increasingly recognizing the value of better information as an essential tool for education policy and practice. There is a critical need to invest in the collection, availability, and use of high-quality longitudinal student data to improve student achievement and outcomes. Absent these systems it is impossible to determine a true graduation rate, or other critical data points. The reauthorization should require and invest in state longitudinal data systems to help improve the collection, reporting, and use of education data, including training and support for educators in every state.

**Congressional action:** Such provisions are included in Senate (S.2014, three cosponsors) and House (H.R. 3253, nine cosponsors) legislation, and throughout the *Miller-McKeon Discussion Draft*

**6. Ensure students have the literacy skills to succeed in middle and high school:** Seventy percent of students enter ninth grade reading far below grade level, significantly hampering their ability to succeed in high school courses and in life after graduation. Unfortunately, the federal investment in reading (the Reading First program) disappears after third grade, which is exactly the point at which expectations for student literacy increase. The reauthorization should authorize the Striving Readers program, starting at \$200 million and increasing to \$1 billion over five years, to help districts and schools in every state develop literacy plans to assist educators in ensuring students have the literacy skills they need to handle rigorous coursework.

**Congressional action:** The *Striving Readers Act* introduced in both the Senate (S. 958, twenty-four cosponsors) and the House (H.R. 2289, forty-one cosponsors) was incorporated into the *Miller-McKeon Discussion Draft*.

**7. Support innovation and research in secondary schools:** Secondary schools must be redesigned to prepare every student for college, with rigorous and relevant coursework and with supportive relationships for all students. Without the opportunity to try innovative approaches to increasing student achievement and graduation rates, the nation's middle and high school students will continue to be ill-prepared to succeed in the twenty-first-century workforce. To create models of innovation in secondary schools, the federal government must invest in research and in disseminating best practices. The reauthorization should include a new \$500 million Secondary School Innovation Fund to support partnerships in creating innovative approaches to secondary school education that improve student achievement and outcomes.

**Congressional action:** The *GRADUATES Act* was introduced in both the Senate (S.1920, six cosponsors) and the House (H.R. 3763, four cosponsors).

**8. Create support for turning around low-performing middle schools:** The middle grades provide students with critical transition and preparation for the demanding coursework of the high school learning environment. Unfortunately, far too many students do not receive the preparation to succeed in high school. Researchers have determined key factors that identify the students most likely to become dropouts as early as sixth grade, creating an opportunity to intervene and get them on track to success in middle school. The reauthorization should include a new grant program to direct funding for turning around low-performing middle schools that feed into the nation's worst high schools.

**Congressional action:** The *Success in Middle Act* was introduced in both the Senate (S. 2227, three cosponsors) and the House (H.R. 3406, twenty-three cosponsors).

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<sup>i</sup> "Dropout factories" are the name given to high schools identified by researchers at Johns Hopkins University that have extremely weak promoting power; i.e., 60 percent or fewer seniors are enrolled than entered the school as freshmen four years earlier. Approximately 15 percent of America's high schools (about 2,000 schools) qualify as dropout factories by that definition. Although not a graduation rate, low promoting power may serve as an indicator that unacceptably large numbers of students are not making steady progress to graduation.