

What I would say to Secretary Duncan after reading the *A Blueprint for Reform: The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act*
<http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/blueprint/blueprint.pdf>

DO NOT continue to use federal grants to fund necessary support

The original Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA – now called No Child Left Behind – NCLB – which no longer represents the intent of the law) targeted children from low-income families proven most in need of the supports essential to learning. Fund the “needs gap” based on what we know the needs to be for the children that need it.

All these years and all our dollars spent on NCLB, the only way any of it makes a lick of sense is if we HELP the schools we thought we identified as being in need of our help. We should feel obligated to go in and HELP THEM.

DO NOT promote the use of models or programs

Models and programs do not work, people with the right concepts, skills, and resources do work. Give people the right tools and they will change the system. They will narrow the “opportunity gap.”

Promote the concepts of best practices and the ideals that will make schools great. Ideas are free. That’s bad news for the big business of education but good news for the real business of educating.

CONTINUE exploring and developing achievement standards and teacher standards but DO NOT consider it a priority ahead of needy schools. And **DO NOT** apply standards to the classroom or system prematurely and without complete understanding of their purpose, usefulness, limitations, and potential unintended consequences.

Once developed, apply them to continuing education for educators (teachers, administrators, and other staff) and to teachers colleges and universities.

ACCOUNTABILITY? I must preface this next section by saying that I was NEVER in favor of standards and testing as an accountability weapon. If you had even an average ability to analyze numbers, you could identify schools in need of help. We NEVER needed NCLB for that purpose but we got it. So now, **DO NOT** negate the eight years of dollars spent on standards and testing by issuing waivers. Waivers will not force real change. We have some very real problems.

DON’T say this is a state or local issue. Inequality in access to quality education – because of the neglect of state and local folks – is why federal law was developed. Laws are to PROTECT. This was intended to identify children in need of protection. ESEA reauthorization should force us to ask, what is our next logical step in meeting our obligation?

ESEA was not an accountability measure. It was a helping hand to the War on Poverty. If you insist on using law to build accountability you must understand that accountability is based on TRUST and VIGILANCE.

Trust is established first through the accreditation processes of our higher education and secondary education institutions.

Vigilance can only be developed through an informed, involved public. Good luck. It won't happen until we learn to listen and respond to each other. And we must be given the facts.

Given human nature, trust in a system without vigilance makes for foolish endeavors especially when that system is dependent on lawmakers in a corrupted legislative institution like Congress.

A Goal of HIGH EXPECTATIONS — is not a statistically mandated goal of 100%. But we must define, clarify, and communicate our expectations otherwise we slip into mediocrity.

One lesson learned from NCLB should have been that we don't teach standards, we foster learning. The skills that we must aim for should give our students flexibility to choose a career path requiring further education or not, at any time. The skills to succeed in college include the ability to read, write and communicate in other ways, cooperate with others, critically evaluate, analyze, and be numerically and scientifically literate. In this "information age" we all need all those skills to keep up in the economic and social race of life.

"The normal variability of human ability" exists but isn't for us to judge, ever. Another lesson from NCLB (and other testing experiments) is that no test is sufficient in judging the power of individual human desire and determination once triggered and challenged to its limits. The adolescent is the perfect natural example of hidden treasures undetectable and at times unrecognizable until it emerges from that state and shows its true potential. They are also a perfect example of why we should never pre-determine their destiny or give up on them.

IN SUMMARY:

Return to the intent of ESEA by focusing on solving problems where they exist giving priority to high-poverty communities and their schools. Address the identified needs and provide funding related to the original four pillars of the law:

- ▶ teacher development
- ▶ instructional materials
- ▶ support programs resources
- ▶ parental involvement promotion

To accomplish this, use "solution teams" to assist communities in the improvement process: assessment, planning, implementation, and re-evaluation until the community is ready to maintain a continuous improvement process by themselves. Help them to help themselves.

In addition to these four focus areas that will deliver on the promise of opportunity to children, the government owes it to its citizens to investigate and make known their findings on the local

and state circumstances that created these schools. We have made mistakes and the only way to prevent them in the future is to dig until you uncover the root. In other words, assess the system not the student. But continue to monitor them, of course.

Done well, trust in government could be a bonus!

Until we the people have decided the proper role of the federal government in education, the accountability measures, standards, assessment development etc. can wait for another law or another day, children can't wait.

Make the reauthorization of ESEA an opportunity to produce a small readable bill with a narrow focus.

A Personal Note: I'm not a teacher; I am just a parent. And "just" is the proper descriptor for my circumstances. I (and many, many parents I know) have been shut out by our districts administration. And I have been disregarded by my state officials. NCLBs' parental participation was implemented on paper only in my district. The Blueprint presents parental importance more as an afterthought. We parents have not just been directed to the back of the bus, we have been shoved out the back door and left on the curb.

It is time to tap into that the almost universal desire of mothers - to secure a good education for their children.

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