



*Great Public Schools  
for Every Child*

# Great Public Schools for Every Student by 2020

Achieving a New Balance in the Federal Role to  
Transform America's Public Schools

July 2008

## **National Education Association**

The National Education Association is the nation's largest professional employee organization, representing 3.2 million elementary and secondary teachers, higher education faculty, education support professionals, school administrators, retired educators, and students preparing to become teachers.

### **NEA Executive Officers**

Reg Weaver, President

Dennis Van Roekel, Vice President

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Published July 2008

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## **The National Education Association**

We, the members of the National Education Association of the United States, are the voice of education professionals. Our work is fundamental to the nation, and we accept the profound trust placed in us.

### **Our Vision**

Our vision is a great public school for every student.

### **Our Mission**

Our mission is to advocate for education professionals and to unite our members and the nation to fulfill the promise of public education to prepare every student to succeed in a diverse and interdependent world.

### **Our Core Values**

These principles guide our work and define our mission:

**Equal Opportunity.** We believe public education is the gateway to opportunity. All students have the human and civil right to a quality public education that develops their potential, independence, and character.

**A Just Society.** We believe public education is vital to building respect for the worth, dignity, and equality of every individual in our diverse society.

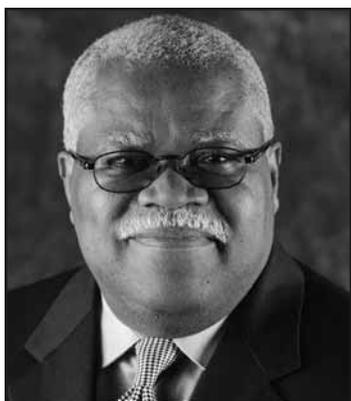
**Democracy.** We believe public education is the cornerstone of our republic. Public education provides individuals with the skills to be involved, informed, and engaged in our representative democracy.

**Professionalism.** We believe that the expertise and judgment of education professionals are critical to student success. We maintain the highest professional standards, and we expect the status, compensation, and respect due all professionals.

**Partnership.** We believe partnerships with parents, families, communities, and other stakeholders are essential to quality public education and student success.

**Collective Action.** We believe individuals are strengthened when they work together for the common good. As education professionals, we improve both our professional status and the quality of public education when we unite and advocate collectively.

# A Message from the President



It's a story as old as America itself.

Felicitas and Gonzalo Mendez wanted a better life for their daughter Sylvia. They knew that the “Mexican” school to which she was assigned was no place for Sylvia to begin her quest for the American Dream. The school was, after all, little more than a shack.

So Gonzalo Mendez, along with four other fathers in Southern California—Thomas Estrada, William Guzman, Frank Palomino, and Lorenzo Ramirez—went to federal court to gain access to the “White” school for their children. They bravely challenged the status quo of school segregation, but really their action was all about their children and their children’s future.

On February 18, 1946, the U.S. District Court in Los Angeles, Judge Paul J. McCormick presiding, ruled in favor of the Hispanic parents in *Mendez v. Westminster*, saying: “The paramount requisite in the American system of public education is social equality.” A year later, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit affirmed the District Court’s ruling.

Seven years later, in *Brown v. Board of Education*, in response to a lawsuit brought by 13 Black parents in Topeka, Kan., the Supreme Court of the United States declared that “the opportunity of an education ... where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms.”

Last year, the U.S. Postal Service issued a stamp honoring *Mendez v. Westminster*—and it bears the image of a Hispanic mother and father holding a book, with these words: “Toward Equality in Our Schools.”

And we all cheered. Toward equality in our schools.

But wait a minute. It's 2008. If Sylvia Mendez or Linda Brown were going to school today, could we guarantee them (or any other child in America) equal educational opportunity?

The answer is "no." Sixty-one years after *Mendez v. Westminster* and 54 years after *Brown v. Board*, the richest nation in the world still cannot guarantee that every child will receive the education he or she needs to survive and thrive.

That's disgraceful. It's a national embarrassment.

NEA thinks it is time that school districts, states, and, yes, the federal government put aside their differences, and act urgently, decisively, and collaboratively as partners to achieve equal educational opportunity.

And please don't tell us it can't be done. We all know it can. We all know that if America makes equality in our schools a national priority and does what it takes and pays what it costs to provide every child with access to a great public school, it will be done.

At America's launching, Thomas Paine declared: "We have it in our power to begin the world over again." And so we did. In that spirit, we can transform American public education, but only if we work together—educators, parents, citizen activists, and policymakers—local, state, and federal.

We have to coalesce into an irresistible and positive force for our children and young people, and for our future. The clock in our consciences is ticking.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Reg Weaver". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Reg Weaver  
President  
National Education Association

# Great Public Schools for Every Student by 2020

A highly conciliatory call for a partnership between educators, states and the federal government to insure that America's schools are top-notch!

– David C. Berliner, Regents' professor of education  
Mary Lou Fulton College of Education,  
Arizona State University

The National Education Association has taken a bold step and articulated a brave vision for redefining the federal role in education for the next president of the United States. *Great Public Schools for Every Student by 2020* challenges the nation by outlining a vision for educating America's children and assuring that the nation will provide "...liberty and justice for all." Our next president would do well to heed the words and wisdom reflected in this important document.

– William "Buddy" Blakey, principal,  
William A. Blakey & Associates,  
PLLC, and chairman of the board,  
Council on Legal Education Opportunity (CLEO)

*NEA's Great Public Schools for Every Student by 2020* is a great start to a new conversation. Rebuilding our education system to meet the challenges of today's students, their families and their communities requires a "ground-up" reconstruction led at the local level, a top-down strengthening of the system framework and capacity, and an inside-out reinvention that begins in the classrooms.

– Douglas D. Christensen, commissioner of education,  
Nebraska Department of Education

NEA's Call to Action, [NEA's *Great Public Schools for Every Student by 2020*], is not only timely, but visionary. It provides a framework based on equal educational opportunity for every child in this nation. It is comprehensive and just. It embeds a legacy of hope, reiterates every child's birthright to a quality public education, and historically documents the American tradition of our democratic rights to a public education. We must never forget that our democratic nation hangs on the balance of its educated activist citizenry.

By investing and supporting the teaching profession, appropriating adequate funding, ensuring equal access to services, investing in authentic assessment and accountability, establishing high-quality research and development, and supporting innovation and best practices, infinite possibilities exist. The time is now.

– Barbara M. Flores, Ph.D.  
2007-2008 president,  
National Association of Bilingual Education  
Coordinator of Bilingual MA Programs  
College of Education, California State University, San Bernardino

[*Great Public Schools for Every Student by 2020*] is one of the most powerful, insightful, and forward-thinking documents on public education I have read in many years. Its cutting-edge proposal for a more expanded and enlightened version of accountability – one that includes such elemental inputs as the size of classes, availability of preschools, and conditions of school buildings – represents a major change in thinking that the leaders of our government must not ignore. The Five-Year Initiative, with its emphasis on equity, a transformation of the way we finance public schools, and the elevation of the role of teaching as a well-remunerated, highly honored, intellectual, and professional activity, is an utterly compelling, realistic, and essential first step in the right direction.

– Jonathan Kozol, educator and author, *Savage Inequalities*,  
*Letters to a Young Teacher*, and *Amazing Grace*



For our nation's classrooms to fulfill their potential as a bedrock of democracy and equality, the federal role must shift from testing and punishing to giving schools the help they need to improve. The NEA's *Great Public Schools for Every Student by 2020* frames critical changes such as overhauling assessment and accountability. Its thoughtful proposals make a valuable contribution to the public conversation about how to attain high-quality education for all our nation's children.

– Monty Neill, deputy director, FairTest  
National Center for Fair & Open Testing, Inc.

The NEA has offered a bold and compelling set of ideas for how to move our nation forward in insuring that every child has the opportunity to learn. In reconceptualizing an appropriate role for the federal government in public education, the NEA is also asserting the fact that education has become one of the most important of our inalienable rights and as such, it must be safeguarded, protected and guaranteed in order to be truly meaningful.

– Pedro A. Noguera, Ph.D.,  
executive director, Metropolitan  
Center for Urban Education, New York University

NEA's call for 'adequacy and equity' plans from the states would plug a major gap in the current NCLB by ensuring that all schools and all children are provided the basic resources they need to meet NCLB's demanding outcome goals. This approach nicely balances federal muscle with the experience that has emerged from the 'laboratory of the states' in the development of adequacy plans in the dozens of litigations that plaintiffs have won throughout the country.

– Michael A. Rebell, executive director,  
The Campaign for Educational Equity, Teachers College,  
Columbia University

The way No Child Left Behind overlays tests and sanctions across vast school funding inequity and blames the poorest schools and their teachers for disparities in achievement seems to me outrageous. I am grateful to NEA for reminding us that in the past a primary federal role in education has been to provide additional funding for schools serving poor children, special needs students and English Language Learners, and to use the power of the federal government to press states to expand educational opportunity. NEA is right that an important federal role should be to ensure that all levels of government—local, state and federal—are held accountable for making the investment necessary to provide for our neighbors' children the kind of opportunities we expect for our own children.

– Jan Resseger, minister for public education and witness,  
United Church of Christ Justice & Witness Ministries

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# Executive Summary

The National Education Association has prepared this paper to jump-start a new conversation with federal leadership about the federal government's role in accelerating public school improvement. We propose that a new balance be created in the partnership among federal, state, and local leaders and that we collectively commit to making *every* public school great by the year 2020.

Our public schools face huge challenges—and extraordinary opportunities. Americans agree that public schools should help prepare students with the knowledge and skills to participate fully in our democracy and to succeed in this dynamic 21st century world. Many of our public schools are remarkable and offer their students an excellent education.

But America's students do not have equal access to high-quality public schools. Achievement gaps persist. Teacher turnover is particularly high in public schools serving poor and minority students. Expenditures for K–12 students vary wildly, resulting in

disparities among schools. High school dropout rates, especially for Black and Hispanic students, are disgraceful.

NEA recognizes that there are many out-of-school factors that affect student success, and frankly, the impact of those factors—from poverty to health care, the availability of summer opportunities for students, and the stability of housing—has been wrongly downplayed in the national dialogue about school improvement. We urge that socioeconomic factors be addressed as part of well-crafted and comprehensive strategies to improve educational opportunity for every student. For too many poor and minority children, “at risk” describes their fate and not simply their circumstances. We are convinced that by improving both children's circumstances and their schools, we can change their fate.

Learning starts before elementary and continues after secondary school. NEA believes that federal leaders should look hard at how to support increased access to high-quality preK.

Further along students' learning lives, NEA values the essential role of the federal government in improving student access to higher education.

Our focus in this paper, however, is on the federal role for K–12 education. A federal role in education is as old as the nation and has evolved along with it. At times, the country's leaders have astutely used the levers of federal authority to address the educational needs of the nation. At other times, federal actions have missed the mark and done harm.

## **The Developing Federal Role**

The last century saw the federal government emphasizing guarantees of equity and opportunity, targeting assistance to students with unique needs, and supporting the nation's defense. The 1944 GI Bill sent nearly 8 million World War II veterans to college. The landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling shined a bright light on discrimination. The National Defense Education Act gave new support for teachers and students in the fields of science, engineering, and foreign languages. And in 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) took aim at inequity and directed resources to schools serving poor and minority children.

Congress codified a federal role in education when it established the U.S. Department of Education in 1980. This new department was to be the conscience that defended equal opportunity, a catalyst for state-led education improvement, and a center for quality research and best practices.

Despite the new federal role, problems beset many public schools. Funding remained inequitable. Networks to exchange best practices and other information were inefficient. And in spite of individual efforts, closing achievement gaps for poor and minority students remained the raw spot of the nation's educational performance.

In December 2001, a bipartisan Congress passed the No Child Left Behind law (NCLB), which expanded dramatically the federal role in K–12 education. NEA applauded the law's broad goals and its commitment to closing achievement gaps. We joined with other organizations in praise of the move to disaggregate data so that the performance of all groups of students, especially minority and poor children, is not swept under the rug. But NEA also has spoken out about the problems with this law. NCLB distorted earlier interpretations of the federal role (and arguably the Education Department's mission) and disregarded the realities of school, district, and state implementation and practice. It required unrealistic

outcomes without supplying the requisite inputs. This law must be fundamentally overhauled. In *It's Time for a Change: NEA's Positive Agenda for the ESEA Reauthorization*, NEA presents our vision for great public schools and a set of criteria to guide reauthorization.

Now, federal leaders have an opportunity to take stock of this history, learn from it, and recalibrate the role of the federal government.

### **Schools, Districts, States: Engines of Public School Transformation**

Schools, districts, and states—not the federal government—are the primary engines of public school transformation. Most of the leadership and responsibility for education appropriately rest at the state and local school district levels. Constitutionally, education is reserved to the states, and the majority of education funding is provided at the state level. In collaboration with districts, states frame the practice of public education by setting standards, developing assessments, requiring accountability practices, and disseminating data.

The inspiration for public school improvement comes from the school level and the actual work of faculty

and staff with students. Experience in the classroom offers insight into the practices and programs that work. This experience and knowledge that school professionals bring deserve the respect and attention of local, state, and federal partners.

Many school, district, and state-level efforts are transforming public schools into high-quality learning centers. But we do not suggest for a moment that the status quo is acceptable. States and districts should move quickly and aggressively to recognize problems, including within their own systems, and build the expertise and political will to surmount the formidable obstacles to public school transformation. There are enormous educational and fiscal inequities among public schools. States and districts continue to struggle with how best to help low-performing students. Assessment and data systems are inadequate. High-quality professional development and professional pay for teachers and staff often is lacking.

To accelerate the pace of transformation, states and districts need collaborative partners to give support and resources. Well-designed federal policies should supply the balance of support necessary to deliver great educational programs for every student in our public schools.

## **Framework for a New Federal Role in Education: Great Public Schools for Every Student by 2020**

We propose that the federal government set a goal that every student has a great public school by the year 2020. Achieving this requires collaboration, and the federal government should embrace its role as a supporter—not a micromanager—of state and district responsibilities. To reach the goal, we propose that the federal government start with a five-year initiative for public school improvement. This Transforming America’s Public Schools Initiative asks Congress to address six points.

### **1. Support the profession of teaching as a desired and complex field of study and practice.**

Teaching is a true profession. While respecting state and district responsibilities, federal policy should support teachers at every stage of their development, from promoting high standards for entry into the profession, to high-quality professional development for teachers and paraeducators, and supporting research and resources that help educators obtain additional skills and knowledge and contribute to improved teaching practices.

Teachers’ working conditions are their students’ learning conditions, and federal support should be directed to public schools in disrepair or in need of basic resources.

The federal government should collaborate with states to articulate meaningful policies that help attract, support, and retain qualified teachers and paraeducators to high-poverty and hard-to-staff schools. In addition, federal grants to states should aim to develop effective ways to prepare teachers, such as with residency programs; encourage partnerships among schools, colleges and other organizations to advance teacher quality; and support models that attract and retain diverse and talented teachers to the profession.

### **2. Federal guarantee for the sustained funding of Title I and IDEA and for special needs populations.**

The federal government should remedy the fact that Title I and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) have never received the federal funding that the original laws promised. The federal government should close the gap between its commitment and the actual funding so that shortfalls disappear. The federal government should commit additional resources to meet the needs of special populations of students, including English Language

Learner students. In addition, the federal government should increase monitoring to make sure funds are used for their intended purpose.

### **3. Equal access to educational services and supports.**

The federal government should require states, as part of their application for federal education funds under ESEA, to develop “Adequacy and Equity Plans.” Through these plans, states will demonstrate where there are disparities among districts and schools in educational tools and services, as well as opportunities and resources. The plans will outline steps underway or planned to remedy the disparities.

Because states already must submit applications to the Education Department to receive funds, the plans will be an additional component, *not* a whole new program. The Education Department will include as part of its monitoring process a review of whether states are meeting the provisions of the plans. The design of federal approval and monitoring should be one that sensibly supports adjustments and flexibility as states pursue their goals and work toward eliminating disparities, without ever losing sight of the fact that the richest country in the world can provide every student with a quality education.

### **4. Support state-led public school transformation through authentic accountability that is publicly transparent.**

The federal government should use ESEA and other federal programs as mechanisms to induce states to devise comprehensive accountability systems that use multiple measures. Such systems should support efforts to guarantee that every student has access to a rich and comprehensive curriculum. These state systems should evaluate school quality and assess student learning in order to close achievement and opportunity gaps among groups of students. States should continue to report data on a disaggregated basis to the Education Department and to the public. The design team for these evaluation systems should include practicing educators to help ensure that the system can yield clear and useful results.

The input components of state accountability plans should encompass the conditions that ideally should be present for every student to succeed, such as students’ access to prekindergarten; to dental, vision, and other health care; to reasonable class size; and to safe facilities. NEA has highlighted these and other examples of conditions of success in its *Positive Agenda*.

## 5. Establish high-quality educational research and development as essential to educational improvement.

Currently, federal funds allotted for education research account for just 0.9 percent of the federal education investment. The federal government should quadruple the amount of R&D money in education.

The federal government also should decouple the current Institute for Educational Sciences (IES) from the Education Department and create an independent new National Institute of Educational Research (NIER), similar to the relationship of the National Institutes of Health to the Department of Health and Human Services, or as a separate agency altogether, such as the National Science Foundation. Such a move, with proper legislative safeguards, would help to remove NIER from political interference and foster high-quality research carried out by well-regarded professionals.

Working in partnership with regional laboratories, state and local governments, and national organizations and with input from classroom educators, NIER would disseminate best practice models to improve instruction and support locally based R&D.

## 6. Support innovation and best practices to accelerate state-based improvement efforts and improve student learning based on proven teaching strategies and programs grounded in sound teaching and learning research.

The Education Department should expand its services as a clearinghouse for best practices to help educators better teach their students and to help develop strong school leadership.

In addition, the federal government should:

- Continue the commitment to participate in international assessments, such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)
- Devote financial support to improving teacher preparation programs

- Expand the Blue Ribbon Schools program to disseminate information about model schools, districts and states, especially those that close achievement gaps
- Bring stakeholders together on a regular basis to highlight best practices in education so that transformative ideas germinate and take hold in other sites across the country.

### **NEA Commitment**

NEA believes the federal government has a vital role to play in advancing the quality of the nation's public schools. Federal leaders can help forge a new partnership with state and local authorities, parents and civic organizations, social service agencies and businesses, and NEA and our affiliates. Collectively, we can shape a type of American Renaissance in our public schools that will prepare our students to succeed as democratic citizens in a global economy.

NEA commits to:

- Supporting a White House Summit on Education
- Creating models for state-based educational improvement
- Developing a new framework for accountability systems that support authentic student learning
- Clearly representing our members' insights and views to advance policy that works in the classroom and school
- Fostering a constructive relationship with U.S. Department of Education leadership.

In a world of promise and uncertainty, students should develop a deep appreciation of our liberties and acquire the wide range of skills it will take to realize the American Dream. NEA and our affiliates already have begun work to transform our public schools. We are ready to contribute ideas, give aggressive support, and help unleash the creative energies that will create great public schools for every student in America.



## II. A National Call

Our public schools face huge challenges—and extraordinary opportunities. Public schools in America have continually evolved to help meet the country’s most pressing challenges. But public schools can and should make needed changes to better serve all students, especially those from low-income families and those with unique needs.

Some of our public schools are remarkable and offer their students an excellent education. But not all America’s students have equal access to high-quality educational opportunities. High school dropout rates, especially for Black and Hispanic students, are disgracefully high. There are disparities of resources from school building to school building. Expenditures for K–12 students vary widely, from average expenditures per student in Utah at \$5,551 to New Jersey at \$14,675.

And it can be nothing less than a national priority to close the persistent achievement gaps for minority students. In 2000, about two-thirds of children under 18 were non-Hispanic Whites. By 2040, projections show



dramatic changes, with over half of children coming from today’s minorities. These demographic changes already are manifest in many communities. For instance, *The Washington Post* reported that in Maryland schools this year, the “new majority belongs to Blacks, Hispanics, Asians and other minorities.” These new majority students must have the tools and supports to become successful citizens of our democracy.

Americans agree that public schools should help prepare all students with the knowledge and skills to participate fully in our democracy and to succeed in this dynamic 21st

century world. Students should master core academic subjects. They also should learn problem solving and critical thinking. And students should acquire interpersonal, creative, and imaginative thinking and communication skills, including those that involve the arts and the use of

...public schools can and should make needed changes to better serve all students...

technology. Today, students should be prepared to be lifelong learners.

Many entities have responsibilities for public school improvement: public schools; government, particularly at the state and local levels; the for-profit and not-for-profit sectors; parents and families; unions and citizens. As the nation's largest professional employee organization representing 3.2 million members who work at every level of education – from preschool to university graduate programs – and with affiliates in every state and more than 14,000 communities, NEA believes that we have a special responsibility. We are fully committing our energies to the collaboration and actions that will advance our students' and our country's dreams.

We recognize that many factors are essential to educational quality, and frankly, some of these factors have been wrongly downplayed in the national dialogue about school improvement. Experts point to the critical supports needed at different times. In our diverse society, these supports should be delivered with sensitivity to linguistic and cultural differences. For young people, the needed supports include health care, dental and vision care, counseling services, quality early childhood and preK instruction, healthy nutrition, stable housing, access to affordable postsecondary education, high-quality afterschool and summer opportunities, and programs for families in need.

Nearly 17 percent of all American students live in poverty, and the National Center for Children in Poverty reports that 43 percent of children under 6 live in low-income families. Parents of these children tend to be younger and to have less education and work experience. Clearly, children in poverty and of low-income families need special support. We recognize that some of these supports are more likely to become available when parents are employed in stable, well-paying jobs that offer health and child care benefits.

Supports for the whole child are essential for students to succeed in their school work and personal development. We believe that education leaders and policymakers should continue to explore better ways of providing services that support the healthy development of children—and they should do so with urgency.

In addition, educators and policymakers should determine the best ways to provide a seamless and accessible system of learning. They should improve student access to high-quality preK programs. Because the connection between K–12 and higher education will become increasingly intertwined in the 21st century, educators and policymakers should foster linkages among high schools, institutions of higher education, and career and technical programs. And leaders and policymakers should improve the access of students to affordable postsecondary education.

The parent is the child’s first teacher, and we respect and emphasize the vital role of engaged parents and families and supportive school communities. In the 21st century, the family-school-community partnership needs to expand and strengthen. And this relationship should be two-way: public schools should reach out to

families and communities just as families and communities should become involved in their local public schools. Schools need to communicate about programs and performance, focusing on how the instruction supports individual students. Schools also should demonstrate fiscal accountability.

The factors we have just described are important and deserve thoughtful consideration. In this paper, however, we focus on the federal role in K–12 education. We look at how the federal government can act within an ambitious timeframe to help schools, districts, and states transform public schools and provide our most vulnerable students with equal access to critical educational services.

We place the student at the center of our thinking and value the strengths and potential each one brings to the classroom. We see public schools as places of great professional practice and as vibrant centers in their communities. We believe that public schools are the foundation of our education system and essential to our nation’s democratic society. Public schools serve the vast majority of all students. In contrast, voucher and privatization schemes divert public tax dollars to schools that are not accountable, and we unequivocally oppose such plans.

We also acknowledge that some of our public schools are falling far short of meeting the needs of students, especially low-income and minority students. For at least two decades now, little or no progress has been made in closing the achievement gaps or in reducing the number of dropouts, facts that should both haunt and motivate everyone involved in the education of our children.

The federal government, working in the public interest and accountable to the public, has an obligation to collaborate with state and local partners to realize school improvement. Of late, however, the federal government has misdirected its focus, forcing public school improvement off course and straining collaboration. It is time to get back on track.

To consider best steps forward, we start with a review of the development of the federal role. At times, the country's leadership has astutely used the levers of federal authority to address the educational needs of the nation. At other times, however, federal actions have missed the mark and sometimes done harm. We build on these historical lessons to offer better ways in which the federal government can move forward to support the work underway to transform our public schools.

## **A. Overview: Historic Role of the Federal Government in Education**

A federal role in education is as old as the nation and has evolved along with it. There have been moments of supreme importance to America's public schools when the federal government played a leading role as a catalytic and positive force for change and as a driver of equity. And there have been times it made profound errors.

In 1785, the Continental Congress established a survey system for the "western lands," reserving space for the "maintenance of public schools." Two years later, while the writers of the Constitution met in sweltering Philadelphia, the Confederation Congress convened in New York City and adopted the Northwest Ordinance. It declared that in the growing western territories "the means of education shall forever be encouraged to ensure the establishment of good government."

The Founding Fathers saw education as playing a crucial role in building a "new republican character" necessary for a representative government to survive. Education was placed in the "public care" to empower Americans—as Thomas Jefferson

wrote—to be the “guardians of their own liberty.” And James Madison warned: “Knowledge will forever govern ignorance: And a people who mean to be their own governors must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives.”

But it was a long time before this vision would apply to every American student. American Indian tribes, for example, were forcibly moved to reservations with substandard schools. Established in the latter part of the 19th century to carry out the federal government’s education commitment to the tribes, the Bureau of Indian Affairs’ purpose is to provide quality education opportunities for American Indian students. The responsibility for tribal schools fell within BIA’s Office of Indian Education Programs, now known as the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE). Despite this special responsibility, however, American Indian students still have not received the support they need for success.

In 1857, both houses of Congress passed legislation, introduced by Vermont Rep. James Morrill, to provide land grants to each state for education and training in agricultural and mechanical arts. President James Buchanan vetoed the legislation as an extravagant and unconstitutional encroachment of states’ rights. Morrill reintroduced the bill in 1862, and this

time, with Republican President Abraham Lincoln in the White House, the measure was enacted into law.

The Morrill Act laid the foundation for a national system of state colleges and universities—institutions which have, among other things, played a key role in the education and training of K–12 public schoolteachers.

The Reconstruction briefly saw a new role for the federal government. In 1867, President Andrew Johnson signed into law “The Department of Education Act” in response to support from the National Teachers Association, later to become the National Education Association, and other education proponents. The new department was to gather statistics and promote public awareness of the importance of education for all children. But the very next year, Congress, fearing “federal domination” of education, demoted the department to an office within the Department of the Interior, renaming it the Bureau of Education.

In the 19th century, the federal government was deeply involved in the education of American Indians and Alaska Natives. By 1887, the Department of the Interior operated over 200 schools that enrolled more than 14,000 students, most of whom were taken from their families. The

federal government's effort to get Native Americans to abandon "their Indian ways" and assimilate into the mainstream White culture was in full swing. Students returning home from the boarding schools often found that their formal schooling alienated them from tribal values and practices of the community.

In the 20th century, the federal role in education significantly evolved with an emphasis on ensuring equity, opportunity, targeted assistance, and national defense. For example:

- With the 1917 **Smith-Hughes Act**, vocational education (known now as career and technical education) became the next major area of federal aid to schools, in particular high schools.
- The **Lanham Act of 1941** provided federal assistance to local governments for construction of facilities, including schools, in areas where population was swollen by increased military personnel and defense workers; and the Impact Aid laws in the 1950s expanded this assistance.
- In 1944, the **GI Bill** authorized postsecondary education assistance that sent nearly 8 million World War II veterans to college.
- The **National School Lunch Act**, signed into law by President Harry Truman in 1946, created the National School Lunch Program to help schools serve children nutritious lunches each school day.
- The landmark ***Brown v. Board of Education*** ruling (1954) revived the ideals and practices of equal education on a national scale, shining a bright light on discrimination and making clear that separate was not equal education.
- The shock of *Sputnik* spurred Congress to pass the 1958 **National Defense Education Act** to give new energy and support to teachers and students in the fields of science, engineering, and foreign languages.
- In the 1960s and 1970s, Congress enacted laws to ensure access to quality education, such as through **Title VI** of the **Civil Rights Act** of 1964, **Title IX** of the **Education Amendments** of 1972, and **Section 504** of the **Rehabilitation Act** of 1973.
- In 1964 as part of his War on Poverty, President Lyndon Johnson signed the **Economic Opportunity Act**, which led to the creation of Head Start as a comprehensive program for low-income preschool children that included health, nutrition, education, social services, and parent involvement components.

- The next year, in 1965, President Lyndon Johnson signed the **Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)** to reduce inequity by directing resources to poor and minority children and signed the Higher Education Act (HEA) to provide more opportunities and access to postsecondary opportunities for lower and middle-income families. “Poverty has many roots,” Johnson said, “but the taproot is ignorance.”
- In 1975, Congress passed and the president signed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act. Over the years, it has been significantly expanded and is now known as the **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)**.

Congress codified a federal role when it established the U.S. Department of Education, strongly supported by NEA. Founded in 1980, the department’s mission is to:

- Strengthen the federal commitment to ensuring access to equal educational opportunity for every individual
- Supplement and complement the efforts of states, the local school systems, and other instrumentalities of the states, the private sector, public and private nonprofit educational research institutions, community-based organizations,

parents, and students to improve the quality of education

- Encourage the increased involvement of the public, parents, and students in federal education programs

The new Education Department was to be the conscience that defended equal opportunity, a catalyst for state-led education improvement, and a center for quality research and best practices.

- Promote improvements in the quality and usefulness of education through federally supported research, evaluation, and sharing of information
- Improve the coordination of federal education programs
- Improve the management of federal education activities
- Increase the accountability of federal education programs to the president, the Congress, and the public.

This new Education Department was to be the conscience that defended equal opportunity, a catalyst for state-led education improvement, and a center for quality research and best practices.

Concerns about education quality mounted. The federally funded National Commission on Excellence in Education released its report—*A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*—in April 1983. The report’s ringing rhetoric impacted education policy debates for a decade: “If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war.”

In 1989, President George H.W. Bush invited the nation’s governors to attend an Education Summit in Charlottesville, Va. On Thomas Jefferson’s inspirational campus, a remarkable consensus emerged. The nation’s governors, in cooperation with the White House, focused attention on seeking solutions by establishing six National Education Goals. In 1994, Congress enacted the **Goals 2000: Educate America Act**, which identified the arts for the first time in federal policy as a part of the core curriculum. These goals gave visibility for a range of programs, but the nation failed to provide the resources to attain them.

Over the past several decades, the federal share of public K–12 school funding has been small and has fluctuated. From a high level of

providing 9.2 percent of revenues for public elementary and secondary education in 1980–81, the federal share of revenues declined to a low of 6.1 percent in 1989–90. It was not until the 2004–05 school year that the federal share of revenues again reached 9.2 percent for public elementary and secondary education.

Even so, the federal government failed to meet its financial obligations for the laws it had passed. As an example, the cumulative gap between the funding levels authorized in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and the actual funding received by states and schools for implementing NCLB’s mandates between fiscal year 2002 and fiscal year 2008 is a staggering \$71 billion.

Since the 1980s, policymakers, public school practitioners, unions, and other educators, with the scaffolding of federal programs such as ESEA, the Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, Head Start, and IDEA, worked to create a system of public schooling to better serve all students. State-based innovations increased the focus on improving student learning and the profession of teaching. States worked to develop coherent and useful standards, improved assessments and accountability systems, and better professional development.

All the while, however, problems beset many public schools. Funding of education remained inadequate, inequitable, and unreliable. Networks to exchange information on best practices and valuable research were inefficient. And—in spite of some brilliant and heroic individual efforts—the ability to raise poor and minority student achievement to high levels remained the raw spot of the nation’s educational performance.

## **B. NCLB: Losing Balance**

In December of 2001, in a time of extraordinary national unity that followed the September 11 terrorist attacks, a bipartisan Congress passed the No Child Left Behind Act, which expanded dramatically the federal role in K–12 education. President George Bush signed the bill in January 2002 with a flourish as his signature domestic achievement. NCLB increased national recognition of the collective failure to adequately serve poor and minority children and underscored a federal commitment to equity. But NCLB radically altered and expanded the role of the federal government, making it far more intrusive than it had ever been. This in turn threw a wrench into education reform efforts in the states.

NEA applauded the law’s broad goals and its commitment to closing achievement gaps, even while we were deeply concerned about the construct of the law, in particular its overemphasis of testing and sanctions. A wide array of leaders and groups, including NEA, praised the move to

NCLB prescribes a one-size-fits-all system to the most changeable and diverse of any population: growing children.

disaggregate data so that the performance of all groups of students—especially minority and poor children—would not be swept under the rug. This new openness, it was hoped, would lead to improved instruction and additional support for low-performing students.

Yet, the reality of the law’s implementation proved NCLB was so fundamentally flawed that it spawned consequences that ran counter to its very purpose. NCLB distorted earlier interpretations of the federal role (and arguably the Education Department’s mission) and disregarded the realities of local, district, and state

implementation and practice. Instead, NCLB established top-down, overly prescriptive, federally defined testing and accountability mandates with rigid timelines for state compliance. Additionally, it mandated narrowly defined, harsh consequences without any evidence these would be effective.

Six years of NCLB has shown that:

- It does **not** improve student preparedness for democratic society, postsecondary studies, or employment because of its narrow emphasis on low-level basic skills.
- It has **narrowed** the educational experience of students by reducing access to a rich, inspiring, and comprehensive educational curriculum.
- **It turned the purpose of testing on its head**, changing it from being a useful instructional tool for teachers to determine how to support students to being a punitive policy without resources.
- It prompted **educationally inappropriate testing** that placed ELL students and students with disabilities at a disadvantage.
- It works to the **detriment of both high- and low-performing students** because of the law's overemphasis on a single score point on a single state test, pushing schools to focus on students who are near the required state proficiency level.
- Its emphasis on standardized tests **hurts the quality** and richness of instructional practices in the classroom.
- The rigid definition of "adequate yearly progress" **distorts the process of identifying and targeting resources** to help struggling schools.
- Its **one-size-fits-all sanctions and punishments** have failed to significantly close achievement gaps.
- The federal government **failed to provide sufficient resources** to meet the mandates and accomplish the goals of the law—to raise student achievement and help close achievement gaps among various groups of students. The federal government demanded unrealistic outcomes from schools without providing the requisite inputs.

NCLB shifted the emphasis of public education from developing well-rounded individuals who are prepared for success to a focus on low-level basic skills and test scores in reading and math. Furthermore, NCLB does not account for the extraordinary range of personal experiences that make up the daily lives of students in public schools, from those blessed with family income and stability, to those with disabilities, to students living in neighborhoods of poverty, to the sons and daughters of immigrant families who need to learn a new language when they arrive at school. NCLB prescribes a one-size-fits-all system to the most changeable and diverse of any population: growing children.

This law has failed, and it must be fundamentally overhauled. NEA issued a publication in July 2006 entitled, *It's Time for a Change: NEA's Positive Agenda for the ESEA*

*Reauthorization*, that outlines our vision for great public schools and a set of criteria for the reauthorization of ESEA. We also have issued a variety of proposals for revising the law, most recently a set of principles for ESEA reauthorization. These principles and our "Great Public Schools" criteria are attached, and additional information is available on [www.nea.org/esea](http://www.nea.org/esea).

Federal leaders should take stock of the situation and recalibrate the role of the federal government. The federal government should serve as an effective partner with public schools, districts, and states in making public schools great. Success in such an endeavor requires—at the highest levels of the federal government—an appreciation of the facts and respect for the realities of practice as reported by professional and dedicated educators in hundreds of thousands of classrooms across the country.



### III. Schools, Districts, States: Engines of Public School Transformation

Schools, districts, and states—not the federal government—are the primary engines of public school transformation. Most of the leadership and responsibility for education appropriately rests at the state and local school district levels.

Constitutionally, education is reserved to the states, and the majority of education funding is provided at the state level. The federal role, therefore, should act as leverage to support and accelerate transformation in the states.

While not taking away from the impact of effective state leadership, we want to be clear: the inspiration for public school improvement comes from the school level and the actual work of faculty and staff with students.

Reform begins and ends in the school and the classroom. Experiences in classrooms and within school communities offer insight into the practices and programs that work, and these deserve the respect and



attention of all local, state, and federal partners. Carefully nurtured, these inspirations can feed public school transformation. Without flexibility and freedom to innovate and tailor instruction to the needs of individual students, however, the creation of ideas at the school level is stifled.

Districts should implement efforts that improve teaching and learning in public schools. Some districts have

done so, often in close partnership with NEA affiliates, particularly those with the advantage of collective bargaining. These improvements include providing systemic help for students who are struggling academically, planning for the inclusion of students with unique

The federal role...should act as leverage to support and accelerate transformation in the states.

needs in the public school system, and identifying appropriate and needed professional development for staff. Additionally, districts should play a significant role in strengthening links among schools, educators, and students' parents and families.

Beyond this instructional leadership, districts manage operational requirements, such as hiring staff, building community relationships, and negotiating collective bargaining and contracts that improve and support a professional, high-quality teaching and learning environment.

States should—and sometimes have—set goals and parameters for public education quality. In collaboration with national content groups, educators, academicians and others, states frame the practice of public education by:

- Setting standards
- Developing authentic assessments
- Requiring sound accountability and school improvement practices
- Collecting and disseminating data that inform collaborative decision-making.

States also collaborate with one another in pursuit of systems and approaches that support great public schools.

States and districts are in the best position to collect and respond to citizens' views about public schools. As David Tyack, the Vida Jacks Professor of History and Education of Stanford University (Emeritus), has pointed out, public schools occupy unique civic spaces in which citizens express their hopes for the future. NEA contends that such civic engagement can best be done through a combination of state and local mechanisms.

This means that the transformation of public schools into high-quality learning centers is taking and should continue to take place at the local, district, and state levels.

### **A. Transformation Work in North Carolina**

An inventive and smart approach is found in North Carolina. The state Department of Public Instruction (DPI) has changed the public education system paradigm by building a new framework for the comprehensive support of public schools and students. DPI now deploys a model that focuses on offering preventive and proactive support for school districts rather than its former model that focused on reactively providing assistance to schools.

The DPI first administers a needs assessment and then provides targeted support, such as coaches to support curriculum development and alignment, a training program for principals, induction programs for educators, a comprehensive recruiting strategy, facilities master-plan, or a parental/community outreach campaign based on the results. DPI follows up with systematic

effectiveness reviews to determine if adjustments are needed. This is one of many other investments that North Carolina has made. Some others are professional development schools, raising salaries for teachers, and professional development.

### **B. Transformation Work in Ohio**

Other states have launched initiatives that will enable them to follow suit. The state of Ohio is engaged in a promising “Transformational Dialogue for Public Education Initiative.” This aims to realize systemic change in public education that will transform the public school system into a robust knowledge-era model able to meet the demands of modern society.

A group of 13 education leaders have joined into a “Dialogue Nucleus Group” in order to clearly articulate the core purpose and core values that define public education and identify operating principles that will govern their working relationship. These leaders comprise key decision makers, including the Office of the Governor, the Chief State School Officer, the Board of Regents, and representatives from the Ohio Education Association and the Ohio Federation of Teachers.

The group will explore how to best address student needs and enhance local capacity, for example, by investing in curriculum and assessment systems that focus on higher-order skills and in teacher preparation and retention initiatives. The group will engage school communities in a dialogue about common purpose. These state leaders aim to work with people at the school level to envision, strategize, and implement their highest aspirations.

The group will collaborate on designing a new system and then focus on implementing, testing, and validating it and ultimately create sustaining structures. This serves as a model of shared responsibility for a student-centered approach to school improvement, transcending the outdated top-down model.

NEA is committed to expanding this transformation dialogue to all 50 states.

## **C. Transformation Work in Other States**

A growing number of states, including Maine, Massachusetts, North Carolina, South Dakota, West Virginia, and Wisconsin, are working with NEA and the Partnership for 21st Century Skills. Started in 2002, the partnership is a public-private organization that is creating successful models of learning and incorporating 21st century skills into the education system. The partnership encourages schools, districts, and states to advocate for the infusion of 21st century skills into education and provides tools and resources to help facilitate and drive change. The focus of this work is to ensure that U.S. students learn core subjects, such as history, math, science, and reading, as well as emerging content areas such as financial literacy, while gaining other essential skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, and self-direction. The partnership also emphasizes the ability to communicate well, use tools such as information technology, and learn through hands-on experiences and real-world examples.

## D. Obstacles to Transformation

These developments are encouraging. They directly address student needs—with a commitment to serve every student—while enhancing local school district capacity to diagnose problems, make improvements, and strengthen partnerships. Transformation of public schools into high-quality learning centers is taking place.

But we do not suggest for a moment that the status quo is acceptable, and we recognize that states confront formidable obstacles to public school transformation. First and foremost are the enormous educational and fiscal inequities among public schools that state and local systems have helped create and perpetuate. In some instances, the courts forced states to combat fiscal inequities by judicial intervention, which led to school improvement. For example, in New Jersey, 68 out of 81 schools identified in need of support under the *Abbott* court order have risen out of the low-performing category. States should muster the political will to acknowledge and overcome enormous educational and fiscal inequities among their public schools. Without this, inequalities will persist.

States continue to struggle with how best to help low-performing students. State assessments are inadequate for the purpose of measuring or supporting high-quality educational practices and outcomes. Data systems are often inadequate. Funds are short for the construction, repair and modernization of public schools. Arcane and politicized procedures for identifying and selecting principals and other school leaders are too common. High-quality professional development for public school educators and staff is often lacking.

States do not have the resources and support to address all the challenges they face. Most of these efforts will require federal, state, and local leadership and organizational capacity, and clearly a lack of collaboration with key partners can be an additional obstacle.

Well-designed federal policies should supply the balance of necessary support to deliver great educational programs for every student in public schools. And as this support is delivered, federal policymakers should be vigilant in making sure that other policies, such as the important federal efforts to address health care, do not have the unintended result of drawing state resources from the commitments and programs to improve education.



## IV. Framework for A New Federal Role in Education

We have seen that, at its best, the federal government's role in education has been to strengthen democracy, seek equality of educational opportunity, and help citizens become economically and socially successful. These reasons remain as valid today as they were in 1787, 1862, or 1965.

Today's challenges bring a new sense of urgency to guarantee that every student has a great public school. The federal government should help achieve that goal by the year 2020.

The federal government should reassert the mission of the U.S. Department of Education, but do so in ways that meet the needs of 21st century students. The federal government should embrace its role as a supporter—not a micromanager—of state and district responsibilities. In partnership with



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states and districts, the federal government should:

- Strengthen enforcement of civil rights laws to promote access and opportunity
- Help create the capacity at the local and state levels for school transformation

- Guarantee that the federal government delivers the funding required to comply with past congressional actions and current federal mandates
- Help to build public support for the goal of great public schools for every student by the year 2020.

Today's challenges bring a new sense of urgency to guarantee that every student has a great public school. The federal government should set a goal to achieve that by the year 2020.

The federal government should serve as a catalyst for positive change, collecting data and disseminating information and sharing resources. Disaggregating data should remain a cornerstone of federal law. (We note

that there are currently problems with the way in which data is disaggregated, for example, in grouping all Asian Pacific Islanders into one category. We recommend that it be carefully rethought.) Disaggregated data should be used to diagnose needs and prompt problem solving; we describe this in more detail below. An analysis of data also could trigger an exploration into the out-of-school supports that students might need, such as health care, housing, or counseling services.

Within this framework of the new federal role—one that is in balance with states and districts—we propose that federal leaders start to achieve the 2020 goal by implementing a five-year initiative for public school improvement.

## V. Transforming America’s Public Schools: A Five-Year Initiative

The Transforming America’s Public Schools Initiative will continue to focus on the needs of every student, with special attention to low-income, minority, and other exceptional student populations. It will focus on serving the whole child. It will address past omissions of funding. It will strengthen federal-state-local partnerships and emphasize shared responsibility. And it will inspire the American “can do” spirit, putting know-how to work for every student, in order to have great public schools for every student by 2020.

This initiative significantly enhances the capacities and success of the current K–12 system, building on its strengths and fueling state-based work to transform state and local programs. The Transforming America’s Public

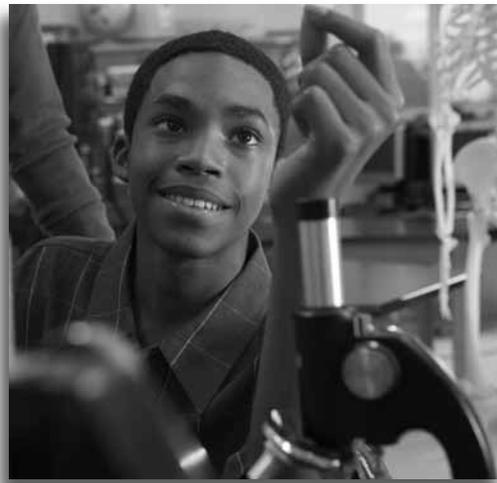


Photo: JupiterImages

Schools initiative asks Congress and the administration to address six priorities:

1. **Support the profession of teaching** as a desired and complex field of study and practice

2. Take responsibility once and for all for the protection of students by putting a **federal guarantee on the sustained funding of Title I and IDEA in order to help** disadvantaged, English Language Learner (ELL), and other student populations who need support,
5. **Establish high-quality educational research and development as essential to educational improvement and put into place** a system to distribute, and make understandable, the best research so that state instructional leaders and classroom educators can access the latest data and studies in order to adjust and improve programs and instructional practice
6. **Support innovation and best practices** to accelerate state-based improvement efforts and improve student learning based on teaching strategies and programs grounded in sound teaching and learning research.

The Transforming America's Public School initiative will continue to focus on the needs of every student, with special attention to low-income, minority, and other exceptional student populations.

- and by substantially increasing funding for other programs targeted to certain populations of students who need services
3. **Protect and achieve students' equal access to the services and supports** they need to be successful
  4. **Support state-based public school transformation through authentic accountability that is publicly transparent** in order to advance public school improvement, improve student learning, meet the diverse needs of students, and provide every student a great public school

## 1. Support the Profession of Teaching as a Desired and Complex Field of Study and Practice

NEA believes that teaching is a true profession. It should have high entry and practice standards developed by the members of the profession, consistent and clear processes for granting licensure, and strict adherence to restricting practice to those who have licensure.

Compensation should be competitive with other professions requiring similar education and skill, and

working conditions should be conducive to teaching and learning.

The profession demands that all prospective teachers receive adequate training and preparation in subject matter knowledge, pedagogy, and sociocultural knowledge of how students learn. Teachers should demonstrate these skills as well as classroom management and teaching ability through practice teaching and other assessments before being granted a teaching license.

To succeed in a diverse, complex and innovative democratic society, students deserve qualified, caring teachers because teachers are the single most important in-school determinant of student learning. Both teachers and education support professionals should have access to high-quality training and professional development aligned to meet the needs of both students and educators. Teachers and education support professionals should have mentoring, induction programs and other supports. Teachers should receive recognition for skills and activities that contribute to improving teaching practice, such as earning National Board Certification.

Federal policy should recognize the sophistication of the profession of teaching and, therefore, support teachers at every stage of their

professional development in the teacher quality continuum, beginning first and foremost with promoting high standards for entry into the profession. Federal policy should support the recruitment of talented and committed professionals to public school classrooms and support the

Federal policy should recognize the sophistication of the profession of teaching and, therefore, support teachers at every stage of their professional development...

development of a teacher workforce that reflects the diversity of the student population and nation as a whole.

In addition, federal policy should support all teachers in obtaining and demonstrating the essential skills, knowledge, and dispositions they need to be successful practitioners. Federal policy should support comprehensive teacher induction systems that provide more support and training, less demanding classroom assignments for new teachers, and significantly more focused performance assessments for all beginning teachers, regardless of their preparation and routes to licensure.

Veteran and novice teachers and paraeducators also should have access to ongoing, relevant professional development and opportunities for collaboration during the school day. Federal policies and programs should help inform states to move from simplistic and haphazard professional development systems to well-constructed, standards-based approaches that aim to improve teaching and learning.

Political leaders at every level—federal, state, and local—should address the conditions inside and outside the school building to support and retain our best educators. A teacher’s working conditions are his or her students’ learning conditions. Federal support should be directed to public schools in disrepair or in need of basic resources. Federal policies should support giving more time for teachers to prepare instruction, consult with their fellow professionals, and communicate regularly with parents. Paraeducators are essential partners to teachers in this work, and federal support also should be directed to their professional development. Teachers also need the support of skilled administrators, especially when it comes to student behavior and discipline. And teachers need a seat at the table for decision making that will affect their classrooms and their profession.

The federal government should collaborate with states to articulate what meaningful policies could help attract and retain qualified teachers and paraeducators to high-poverty and hard-to-staff schools. Strategies could include supportive school leadership, higher pay, loan forgiveness, tax credits, and tax deductions. Initiatives are needed to provide positive learning conditions, including smaller class sizes, up-to-date materials and technologies, and access to professional assistance when needed. Policymakers also should increase support for pupil services, such as for counselors, social workers, and nurses, which support quality teaching and learning.

Other federal activity should include giving grants to:

- Partner with states on the development of effective ways to prepare teachers, such as with residency programs or professional development schools
- Encourage partnerships among public schools, colleges, and other organizations to advance teacher quality and the profession of teaching
- Support models that can attract and retain diverse and talented teachers who can meet the requirements of licensure

- Support career ladder, mentor, master teacher and other programs that enhance leadership opportunities for teachers and other educators.

The federal government should not micromanage local and state decisions on teacher compensation and evaluation, which are best left to local, collaborative decision making such as collective bargaining.

## 2. Implement a Federal Guarantee for the Sustained Funding of Title I and IDEA

Despite years of advocacy, federal support for Title I and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) has been a series of broken promises. Title I and IDEA have never received the federal funding that the original laws promised. As a result, students, parents and families, and local taxpayers have been shortchanged.

In order for states and local school districts to build and sustain a successful public education system, they need a federal financial commitment commensurate with the requirements and mandates included in major federal legislation. Funding for students served by both of these critical programs must be made predictable, sustainable, and guaranteed by shifting these programs

from being subject to the vagaries of the annual appropriations process to “mandatory” spending.

Today, IDEA serves 6.8 million students. Prior to its 1975 enactment (as the

Funding for students served by both of these critical programs must be made predictable, sustainable, and guaranteed.

Education for All Handicapped Children Act), millions of disabled students received no education services at all or were segregated and denied access to a free, appropriate education. IDEA was a turning point for these students. When it passed, the federal government promised states and school districts that it would cover *40 percent of the costs* of serving students with disabilities to offset implementing the costs of this new law that, while necessary and worthy, carried a hefty price tag.

That promise has never been met. Federal funding never reached even half of the promised level of the costs. As of 2008, funding was at a shockingly low 17 percent. The shortfall forces states and localities to dig deeper into their budgets to cover

both their share and the promised share of the federal government.

Similarly, the federal government shortchanged Title I, promising to cover 40 percent of the costs of educating disadvantaged students and then not doing so. Title I was designed to direct federal funds to low-income and disadvantaged students and to schools with high percentages of low-income students. This program is significant because the U.S.

Department of Education estimates that approximately 20 million students receive services through Title I—about 40 percent of the overall enrollment of 49.6 million public school students. However, as with IDEA, Title I funds in fiscal year 2008 only provide 16 percent of the federal share, again less than half of the statutory commitment.

NCLB changed the distribution formula to address growing disparities in the amount of Title I funds received by states and school districts with higher percentages of low-income students. These changes increased the targeting of funding to those districts with the highest concentrations of low-income students. In spite of this, funding for Title I has not increased sufficiently for these formula changes to have much effect, and so the disparity between commitment and funding continues and grows.

In fact, based on the authorized levels in the law and the actual funding provided, there now is estimated to be a \$54.7 billion cumulative shortfall in Title I resources, which translates into about 8.9 million low-income and disadvantaged students unserved or underserved because of funding shortages.

In addition to the guaranteed funding proposed above, the federal government should commit substantial resources to meet the needs of special populations of students. For example, Title III of ESEA outlines English language acquisition services and programs designed to support English Language Learners, and Title VII outlines programs for American Indian, Native Hawaiian, and Alaska Native education. The funding to fully implement these provisions is inadequate. For example, funds are needed to develop native language assessments that are aligned to the appropriate, challenging standards and curricula and are valid and reliable measures of student learning. Funds are needed to train a larger number of qualified English as a Second Language (ESL) educators; to provide training for all educators in ESL methodologies and cultural competency; to provide bilingual and dual language education as a means for students to become bilingual and

biliterate; and to incorporate educational activities that are linguistically and culturally based for American Indian, Native Hawaiian, and Alaska Native students.

In addition, intensified monitoring should make sure that the funds are used for their intended purpose and not for the education of the general student population.

It is important to underscore that other federal programs that are especially important to low-income students also have suffered shortfalls. For example, according to the U.S. Department of Education, about 5.4 million students received Pell Grants in 2007, a number expected to grow. These grants, however, are covering less and less of students' costs. In 1979, the maximum Pell Grant award represented 77 percent of the average total costs of attending a four-year institution. By 2007, the maximum Pell Grant award represented just 32 percent.

### **3. Protect and Achieve Students' Equal Access to Educational Services and Supports**

For many years, leaders and activists have wrestled with how best to guarantee students' equal opportunity

to the services and supports they need. Years of unsuccessful efforts to guarantee equity, as well as legal wrangling and lawsuits in 45 states, are proof of the difficulty. Because of the vital importance of this issue, however, the federal government should carefully pursue specific action, and

We propose that the federal government require states...to develop "Adequacy and Equity Plans."

do so with a renewed sense of urgency. It has been 61 years since *Mendez v. Westminster* and 54 years since *Brown v. Board*.

We propose that the federal government require states, as part of their application for federal education funds under ESEA, to develop "Adequacy and Equity Plans." The process of developing the plans should bring together stakeholders within the state to devise a plan to meet adequacy and equity goals. Through these plans, states will demonstrate where among districts and schools there are disparities in educational tools and services, opportunities, and resources. The

states will outline steps under way or planned to remedy the disparities. We believe this will help elevate the commitment to all students and build a shared understanding of what it will take to support them.

Because states already must submit applications to the U.S. Department of Education to receive funds (notably, the applications submitted currently describe the states' accountability systems for measuring educational outcomes of students and schools and are subject to a peer review process), the plans will be an additional component required in each state's application, not a whole new program. These applications should undergo a rigorous, independent peer review by a representative panel of experts including educators to assess the plans for feasibility, legitimacy, and sufficiency. States and their local school districts will be responsible for complying with their own approved plan. The Education Department will include as part of its current monitoring process a review of whether states and local districts are meeting the provisions of the Adequacy and Equity Plan (in addition to the other components of the state plan).

The design of federal approval and monitoring should clearly recognize that the goals of adequacy and equity

will be challenging to implement in practice. For example, states and localities most likely will have to restructure their tax and finance systems in a way that remedies inequities in services and tools afforded to students and that strengthens the adequacy of all of their public schools. They will have to seek additional, targeted support for such efforts. As every state is different, appropriate changes in one would not necessarily transfer to another. The federal process, therefore, should be one that sensibly supports adjustments and flexibility as states pursue their goals and work to eliminate disparities, without ever losing sight of the fact that the richest country in the world can afford to provide every student with a quality education. Indeed, it cannot afford to do otherwise.

#### **4. Support State-led Public School Transformation Through Authentic Accountability That is Publicly Transparent**

In order to support public school improvement, states should have well-designed, transparent accountability systems that authentically assess both student learning and the conditions for its success, focus on closing

achievement gaps, help to monitor progress, and identify successes and problems.

The federal government should use the ESEA implementation process, described above, along with other federal programs, as mechanisms to induce states to devise comprehensive accountability systems that use multiple sources of evidence (including rich, meaningful, and authentic assessments, such as developing and/or using native language assessments for the appropriate students until they gain proficiency in English as determined by a valid and reliable measure). Instead of the current NCLB system that has resulted in a significant narrowing of the curriculum, state accountability systems should be designed to support efforts to guarantee every child has access to a rich, comprehensive curriculum. Such systems also should:

- Align with developmentally appropriate student learning standards
- Provide multiple measures of student learning and assess higher-order thinking skills and performance skills
- Be consistent with nationally recognized professional standards for test construction and test use

- Use principles of universal design in order to meet different needs of students, as well as appropriately designed assessments and accommodations for special populations and English Language Learners. These should be used only for their intended purpose.

In order to support public school improvement, states should have well-designed, transparent accountability systems that authentically assess both student learning and conditions for success...

These state systems should evaluate school quality, as well as demonstrate improvements in student learning and closing of achievement, skills, and opportunity gaps among various groups of students. As states design these evaluation systems, the design team must include practicing educators to ensure that the system can yield clear and useful results. The results of these evaluations should not be used to punish and sanction schools. Results instead should be used to inform state, local, and classroom efforts to identify struggling students and problematic school programs so that states, districts, and educators can provide appropriate

interventions and supports for improvement.

States should continue to report data on a disaggregated basis (including at the district and school levels and including both outputs and inputs) to the Education Department and to the public. Each state's application for federal funds shall describe in detail its transformative process and authentic accountability systems, and each application should undergo a rigorous peer review process in order to obtain federal resources.

The input components of state accountability plans should encompass the conditions that ideally should be present for every student to succeed in public schools and to be well-prepared for postsecondary education, lifelong learning and the workplace. Such conditions could entail, for example, the reporting of students' access to preK or other early childhood programs; student access to dental, vision, physical and mental health care; access to supportive services for which the family is eligible; reasonable class sizes; alignment of preK, K–12, and postsecondary educational systems with each other and the needs of the 21st century community and workforce; and safe facilities in good repair. NEA has highlighted these and other examples of conditions of success in its *Positive Agenda*.

The federal government should be a supportive and catalytic partner, rather than prescribing the details of a state's accountability system. The federal role should be to provide necessary resources, collect and report data, and monitor state efforts to ensure that states carry out plans to close achievement gaps and eliminate disparities. The federal government also can provide technical assistance to states regarding best practices. In exchange for federal support, each state should be required to collaboratively develop and outline a long-term process for achieving transformation of its education system – preK through higher education – clearly aimed at serving every student well. This should be done through the shared responsibility and action among all stakeholders, including preschool professionals, K–12 and higher education educators and staff, unions, administrators, parents, families, and community leaders.

## **5. Establish High-quality Educational Research and Development as Essential to Educational Improvement**

Education is an investment with enormous payoff, and it deserves federal support for research and development to improve the quality of practice. Currently, the funds allotted

for education research, statistics, and assessment total just \$546 million out of approximately \$60 billion in K–12 education funds, equaling 0.9 percent of the federal education investment. Quite simply, the federal government should *quadruple the amount of research and development money spent in the area of education*. Such a level of funding represents a minimum necessary investment.

Some areas of critical focus should be further researched into the links between brain development and learning so that effective instructional strategies can be developed, particularly those strategies designed to reach students at risk of falling behind and dropping out, as well as those who have unique needs. These efforts should focus on educating the whole child, not just on improving basic reading and mathematics skills. Further, such research should not be exclusively experimental. Instead, there should be an emphasis on qualitative research with design standards that insist results are usable in the school and classroom.

The federal government should decouple the current Institute for Educational Sciences from the Education Department and create an independent new National Institute of Educational Research (NIER), similar

to the relationship of the National Institutes of Health to the Department of Health and Human Services, or as a separate agency altogether, such as National Science Foundation. This would dramatically expand the existing Institute for Education Sciences by adding resources for

Education is an investment with enormous payoff, and it deserves federal support for research and development to improve the quality of practice.

efforts to convert research findings into practice models for the classroom. Further, such a move would, with the proper legislative safeguards, help to remove the new institute from political interference, and thereby foster high-quality research carried out by well-regarded professionals.

Working in partnership with the Regional Laboratories, national organizations, and state and local governments, the new NIER would disseminate suggested practice models to the classroom to improve instruction. The new institute would help collect and disseminate reliable

international comparison data. It also would help support locally based research and development institutes connected to or serving the research needs of state and local education authorities. Classroom practitioners could collaborate in the research, providing them with an excellent opportunity for professional development and a sabbatical, while providing researchers with access to everyday classroom practice.

As part of this endeavor, the current Regional Laboratories should be restored to their public status, depoliticized, and retooled to reclaim their independent research and support roles. Additionally, the labs should use their geographic distribution across the country as a point of contact for educators and other stakeholders who are eager to use the latest education research.

It is essential that experienced educators – especially classroom teachers – be a key part of the team that distills research to an understandable form and uses it to develop tools to help inform instruction. Furthermore, educators should be intimately involved in the redesign and ongoing operation of the Regional Laboratories.

## **6. Support Innovation and Best Practices to Accelerate State-based Improvement Efforts and Improve Student Learning Based on Teaching Strategies and Programs Grounded in Sound Teaching and Learning Research**

The Education Department should expand its ability to serve as a clearinghouse for best practices that help educators better teach their students and help school leaders provide stronger leadership for our public schools. The department also should include experienced educators in its processes of identifying such practices and planning for the dissemination of such information.

There should be a continuing commitment to participate in international assessments such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). The findings and data collected from these benchmarks should be put to good use in helping to improve instruction and curricula. We recommend,

however, we also form an international partnership to develop authentic global assessments of 21st century skills.

Priority attention should be placed on how best to advance the professionalism of teaching. The federal government should devote financial support to improving teacher preparation programs and should work with teacher unions and subject area associations to expand mentoring programs, provide professional development for educators, and expand school leadership initiatives. We know these factors and this kind of collaboration—with teachers at the table in the decision-making process—are key to the success of teachers.

The department should dramatically expand and improve its current Blue Ribbon Schools program to disseminate information about and provide financial support and recognition to model schools, districts, and states, especially those that use successful transformative processes to achieve their goals and those that close achievement gaps. Blue Ribbons could be used to recognize school systems with these attributes:

- Innovative curricular approaches
- Strong and effective parental involvement and partnership strategies

- Focused efforts to improve training and evaluation of school administrators
- Increased graduation rates
- Cutting-edge practices in the classroom.

The Education Department should expand its ability to serve as a clearinghouse for best practices...

The work of these schools should be documented and made available for others.

There are many examples of educators and schools engaged in transformative work in public education. They ought to be recognized and held up as an example worthy of replication. They should be valued for their dedication, success, and innovation.

Finally, the Education Department should use its resources to bring together stakeholders on a regular basis to highlight best practices in education so that transformative ideas start to germinate in other sites across the country with an eye toward bolstering peer-to-peer collaboration and scaling up replicable, sound models of educational practice.



## VI. The NEA Commitment

The next administration will face a formidable set of challenges, from the war to the economy, from health care to national security. NEA understands that the time available for lengthy and deep engagement by administration and congressional leadership in education improvement might be limited.

We also recognize that making improvements cannot wait; they are vital to the future of our students and the country. Therefore, working in close partnership with the U.S. secretary of education, the administration, and Congress, NEA will marshal its resources to support the Transforming Public Schools Initiative.

We welcome additional thoughts, but we start with these commitments. These advance NEA's own mission: to fulfill the promise of public education to prepare every student to succeed in a diverse and interdependent world.



Photo: JupiterImages

### **1. Call upon the administration to convene stakeholders at a White House Summit on Education to craft a policy framework that will fully serve every student.**

NEA has long recommended that advocates for students look at the whole child in addition to students' performance in the school building. Supports for children include: child nutrition, employment prospects and

living wages for parents and caretakers, and access to affordable health, counseling, vision, and dental services.

We, therefore, recommend that soon after the new president is elected, the White House call for a summit to bring together governors, relevant federal agencies (U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Health and Human Services, U.S. Department of Labor, etc.), unions, educators, education organizations, parents, civil rights leaders, researchers, corporate executives, and other stakeholders to address the essential services needed by students and develop a cross-agency compact with the governors for the delivery of these services. NEA commits to being an active partner in this effort.

## **2. Create models for parents, educators, and other stakeholders to develop, implement, and support state-based educational improvement strategies.**

NEA already is collaborating with the KnowledgeWorks Foundation in Ohio to explore how best to design public engagement programs addressing

school improvement in the state. NEA and its affiliates can help create models to inform states, school districts, and organizations about ways to bring input into and advance public understanding of critical public school improvement strategies.

## **3. Engage with the states to develop a new framework on school improvement and accountability systems that support authentic student learning.**

NEA is working with our state affiliates on a new framework for better state-based assessment systems that include native language assessments that are content-aligned to English as a Second Language and other academic curricula. These aim to ensure transparency to the public, with special attention paid to low-income and minority students. Further, they aim to provide educators with meaningful diagnostic information so they are able to make needed changes faster.

#### **4. Advocate for our 3.2 million members and urge a new vision.**

Job number one for NEA is to represent our members in their daily work to help every student succeed and make public schools great. We will bring our members' insights, expertise, and aspirations to the table as, collaboratively, we pursue the best ways to transform public schools. To begin, we urge federal leadership to forcefully use the national bully-pulpit to inspire the best and brightest college students of diverse ethnicities, cultures, and races to join the movement to transform our public schools. We call upon federal leaders to consistently offer an uplifting vision of the profession of teaching as a fulfilling, skilled, and desirable profession for the 21st century.

#### **5. Routinely meet with the U.S. Department of Education secretary and staff to assess progress of the initiative and identify actions to take.**

NEA is deeply committed to improving America's public schools, and we need a dynamic partnership to realize shared goals. Unfortunately, in the past few years there has been little dialogue between NEA and the department, which is a detriment to both organizations, as well as to public schools and their students. This must change.

NEA is willing to do whatever it takes to foster a collaborative – even if spirited – exchange that leads to the speedier implementation of good policies, thoughtful programs, and worthwhile projects. It is time to end divisive politics. We invite a new dialogue and partnership. We are ready to work hard to get something done – right – for our students and America's public schools.



## VII. Conclusion

*“No republic can maintain itself in strength... [without] general education, to enable every man to judge for himself what will secure or endanger his freedom.”*

– Thomas Jefferson to John Tyler, 1810

Since the American Revolution, leaders have argued that the security of the republic depends upon the wisdom and character of its citizens. Leaders have pointed to education as essential to preserving our rights and liberties.

NEA believes that the federal government has a vital role to play in advancing the quality of the nation’s public schools. Federal leaders should act quickly to redefine the federal role in education to one that is constructive, appropriately defined in scope and focus, and that addresses the issues that state and local governments have not been able to resolve on their own, in particular, equal educational opportunity for all students.

Federal leaders have the opportunity now to change federal policies in order to strengthen and accelerate state and local efforts to achieve educational excellence for every student. Leadership has the ability to foster a climate of collaboration in order to unite diverse groups with

education responsibilities – state and local authorities, parent and civic organizations, social service agencies and businesses, and NEA and our affiliates – as respected partners focused on shared goals.

In this partnership, federal leaders can shape a type of American Renaissance in our public schools that will prepare our students to succeed as democratic citizens in a global society. In a world of promise and uncertainty, of prosperity alongside poverty, of free people confronted by oppressive societies, students should develop a deep appreciation of our liberties and acquire the wide range of skills it will take to realize the American Dream.

NEA and our affiliates are ready to move forward to meet these challenges, to contribute ideas, to give aggressive support, and help unleash the creative energies that will create great public schools for every student in America.



# Addendum

## Great Public Schools Criteria

(From *It's Time for a Change: NEA's Position Agenda for the ESEA Reauthorization*; published summer 2006, available at [www.nea.org/esea/posagendaexecsum.html](http://www.nea.org/esea/posagendaexecsum.html))

All children have a basic right to a great public school. Our vision of what great public schools need and should provide acknowledges that the world is changing and public education is changing too. Meeting these Great Public Schools (GPS) criteria requires not only the continued commitment of all educators, but the concerted efforts of policymakers at all levels of government. We believe these criteria will:

- Prepare all students for the future with 21st century skills
- Create enthusiasm for learning and engage all students in the classroom

- Close achievement gaps and raise achievement for all students
- Ensure that all educators have the resources and tools they need to get the job done.

These criteria form a basis for NEA's priorities in offering Congress a framework for the 2007 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The reauthorization process must involve all stakeholders, especially educators. Their knowledge and insights are key to developing sound policies.

### 1. Quality programs and services that meet the full range of all children's needs so that they come to school every day ready and able to learn

Students must have access to programs such as public school preK and kindergarten programs; afterschool enrichment and intervention

programs; nutrition, including school breakfast and lunch programs; school-based health care and related services; counseling and mentoring programs for students and families; safe and efficient transportation; and safe and drug-free schools programs.

## **2. High expectations and standards with a rigorous and comprehensive curriculum for all students**

All students should have access to a rigorous, comprehensive education that includes critical thinking, problem solving, high-level communication and literacy skills, and a deep understanding of content. Curriculum must be aligned with standards and assessments, and should include more than what can be assessed on a paper and pencil multiple choice test.

## **3. Quality conditions for teaching and lifelong learning**

Quality conditions for teaching and learning include smaller class sizes and optimal-sized learning communities; safe, healthy, modern, and orderly schools; up-to-date textbooks, technology, media centers, and materials; policies that encourage collaboration and shared decision making among staff; and the providing of data in a timely manner with staff training in the use of data for decision making.

## **4. A qualified, caring, diverse, and stable workforce**

A qualified, caring, diverse, and stable workforce in our schools requires a pool of well prepared, highly skilled candidates for all vacancies; quality induction for new teachers with mentoring services from trained veteran teachers; opportunities for continual improvement and growth for all employees; working conditions in which they can be successful; and professional compensation and benefits.

### **5. Shared responsibility for appropriate school accountability by stakeholders at all levels**

Appropriate accountability means using results to identify policies and programs that successfully improve student learning and to provide positive supports, including resources for improvement and technical assistance to schools needing help. Schools, districts, states, and the federal government should be financially accountable to the public, with policymakers accountable to provide the resources needed to produce positive results. Accountability systems should be transparent so that policies are determined and communicated in an open, consistent, and timely manner.

### **6. Parental, family, and community involvement and engagement**

Policies should assist and encourage parents, families, and communities to be actively involved and engaged in their public schools; require professional development programs for all educators to include the skills and knowledge needed for effective parental and community communication and engagement strategies; provide incentives or require employers to grant a reasonable amount of leave for parents to participate in their children's school activities.

### **7. Adequate, equitable, and sustainable funding**

School funding systems must provide adequate, equitable and sustainable funding. Making taxes fair and eliminating inefficient and ineffective business subsidies are essential prerequisites to achieving adequacy, equity, and stability in school funding. ESEA programs should be fully funded at their authorized levels.

## **Principles for the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) February 2008**

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has produced many unintended and unfavorable consequences for students, parents and educators across the country. Six years of experience with NCLB demonstrate the law's complexity and the vital need to take the time to carefully consider and fully understand how each proposed change will affect our nation's schools and students. NEA offers these principles for ESEA reauthorization, and we encourage Congress to listen to the voices of educators in developing legislative proposals.

- The federal government should serve as a partner to support state efforts to transform public schools. The 21st century requires a partnership among all levels of government—federal, state, and local—to make up for the historic inequitable distribution of tools and resources to our nation's students, and to create a more innovative educational experience so that students are prepared for challenging postsecondary experiences and the world of work.
- A reauthorized ESEA must ensure that all children—especially the most disadvantaged—have access to an education that will prepare them to succeed in the 21st century. The federal government should focus on high-quality early childhood education and child care, parental/family involvement and mentoring programs, as well as access to quality health care for children to help overcome issues of poverty that may impede student progress. It must invest in proven programs such as universal prekindergarten, knowledge-rich curricula, and intensive interventions, and must provide resources to help improve teaching and learning conditions through smaller classes and school repair and modernization.
- A revamped accountability system must correctly identify schools in need of assistance and provide a system of effective interventions to help them succeed. The paradigm must change from labeling and punishing to investing in proven programs and interventions. States and school districts should be given significant flexibility through a transparent process to meet agreed upon outcomes, using a variety of growth models based on movement towards proficiency, as

- opposed to 100 percent proficiency in 2014. School quality and student learning must be based on multiple measures and indicators, not based primarily on test scores.
- Teachers and other staff must be provided supports and resources to help students succeed. Hard-to-staff schools, especially those with high concentrations of disadvantaged students or those that have consistently struggled to meet student achievement targets, need significant supports and resources, including additional targeted funding to attract and retain quality teachers, and induction programs with intensive mentoring components that will help teachers become successful. A reauthorized ESEA should exclude any provision linking student test scores to teacher compensation.
  - The federal government should require states to detail how they will remedy inequities in educational tools, opportunities and resources. Funding should be targeted to schools with the highest concentrations of poverty. The federal government should provide resources necessary to meet the law's requirements and mandates.
  - State and local collective bargaining for school employees must be respected and not undermined.
  - Targeted programs that support special needs students and schools—such as English Language Acquisition, Impact Aid, rural schools and Indian education—should be maintained and expanded
  - The federal government should serve as a clearinghouse, making available to educators a wealth of knowledge about how best to teach students and help schools improve practices.







*Great Public Schools  
for Every Child*

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