



The Education Trust

Closing the gaps in opportunity and achievement, pre-k through college.

Dear Colleague:

The Education Trust promotes high academic achievement for all students at all levels, pre-kindergarten through college. Our goal, as an organization, is to close the gaps in opportunity and achievement that consign far too many young people — especially those from low-income families or who are black, Latino or American Indian — to lives on the margins of the American mainstream.

From our earliest days, we have recognized that, done right, federal education policy can help to advance opportunity. Done wrong, it can impede progress, damaging prospects for children and endangering our nation's future. Certainly, what states and districts do matters most for student achievement. But the federal government has long had a special role: to protect the interests of the children who are most likely to be overlooked in state and local improvement efforts. Periodically, that special federal role must be reexamined, or “reauthorized.” It is at these critical junctures that we gear up as an organization to consider which provisions of the law need to be improved, rewritten, or eliminated based on our experiences in schools and districts, and on what our data analyses suggest. Those conclusions then become the basis for our work to improve federal education policy.

For our first experience with reauthorization in 1994, we hosted the advocacy phase of the work of a 24-member Independent Commission on Chapter 1 (now Title I). In that role, Ed Trust staff and commission members identified provisions of the law that were harmful to low-income children and worked to reshape them. We spotlighted the funding system that was in effect at that time, which took money away from high-poverty schools if their achievement improved. We also flagged accounting provisions that pressured schools to use funds for low-level pull-out programs, instead of for school-wide improvements and teacher professional development, which were more likely to generate higher student achievement.

In preparing for our second reauthorization in 2001, Ed Trust looked hard at lessons learned from leading states and our work in schools and districts. We also probed the limited data on student achievement patterns that were available at that time. This research and preparation suggested that the law's provisions in two particular areas needed improvement: accountability, on the one hand, and teacher quality and assignment patterns, on the other. In the former category, which is the subject of this paper, we sought to end the widespread practice of sweeping the underperformance of certain groups of children under the rug of school-wide averages, ensuring to the extent possible that the law held schools accountable for improving the performance of all their students.

As the current reauthorization approached, we again evaluated the lessons of our work with schools and districts, and looked at the data. We asked what was working, what wasn't, and what needed to change. This time, though, we had the benefit of three things that we didn't have during earlier reauthorizations: a rich body of data, access to extraordinarily thoughtful local

superintendents and state chiefs, and much greater organizational capacity to mine what these leaders as well as the numbers told us.

This new paper, "[Getting it Right: Crafting Federal Accountability for Higher Student Performance and a Stronger America](#)," describes the conclusions we developed from these efforts and our resulting recommendations. To some, it will seem startling that our recommendations depart so significantly from current law. But to those who know our commitment to probing deeply, acting on what we learn, and working for ever better policy levers, this paper will contain no surprises.

In other words, we think this proposal preserves the best parts of current law, even as it discards those that have failed to improve education for the children whose very futures depend on quality schools.

Cordially,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "K. Haycock", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Kati Haycock
President, The Education Trust

