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REAUTHORIZATION of ESEA

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At long last and seven years overdue, it appears that Congress is now ready to take up the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), also known more popularly as No Child Left Behind (NCLB). So far, this effort - in the form of House resolution HR5 - has progressed in fits and starts. In addition, the Senate is actively working on a bipartisan bill to amend and revise ESEA.



As with so much that comes from within the beltway, it will bear close watching and dedicated advocacy to ensure that the new regulations align as closely as possible with California's new accountability and testing systems. Ideally, accountability measures will be inclusive as opposed to exclusive, Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) will be eliminated in favor of a more pragmatic growth model measurement system, and decisions regarding intervention will be best left to local districts. With regard to assessments, a State should not be required to administer tests in a manner inconsistent with its own accountability model and there should be an allowance for State developed alternative assessments for students with moderate to severe cognitive disabilities.

In the funding arena, we are hopeful that the legislation will include full funding authorization for Title 1, and that the concentration of these funds will win out over portability so that our schools and school districts have the ability to operate substantive programs without fragmentation. In addition, funding formulas should accurately reflect the disparate costs between states of providing a K-12 education and not disproportionately favor states with comparatively low rates of poverty.

The good news is that both the House and Senate proposals appear to satisfy many of these preferences, including the elimination of the AYP, increased flexibility relative to alternative assessments, and address the burdensome compliance regulations associated with the supplement/supplant rule. On the other hand, serious concerns still remain with regard to testing frequency, school improvement grant mandates, funding formula, allocation levels and the flexibility of distribution, i.e., concentration versus portability.

We are hopeful that most if not all of the preferred components will materialize – and problematic issues be resolved – in the reauthorization of ESEA, but it still remains to be seen if Congress will take this action in a timely manner, focusing on the issues as opposed to blaming the other Party or House for inaction.

Stanley C. Mantooth, Ventura County Superintendent of Schools