

Elementary and Secondary Education Act Reauthorization

Background:

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)—with Title I as its core program to equalize and leverage educational opportunity—was created in 1965. Title I funds can be used (at local discretion) for instructional and comprehensive services for children as young as infants. Title I and other programs under ESEA also can be used to support children younger than kindergarten age and their teachers in school and community early childhood education settings.

Young children from birth through age 8 develop and learn differently than older children. As much as children entering kindergarten need to be ready for school, schools must be ready to effectively support each child’s development and learning. Teachers, administrators, and others who help educate young children through the early grades must have specialized knowledge, skills, and credentials.

A primary goal of this reauthorization should be to create a continuum of learning from birth through third grade that includes developmentally appropriate and challenging standards, curricula, and instructional assessments, as well as comprehensive services and meaningful parent/family engagement. This continuum approach would support better development and learning at each stage, and more effective transitions and shared expectations among early learning settings, which would lead to better alignment at the state, local, and classroom levels.

Recommendations:

A continuum of developmentally appropriate standards, curricula, and instructional assessments to support teaching and learning of all children from birth through third grade

States should be required to review and revise kindergarten through third grade standards to ensure that they address all domains, including social and emotional development and approaches to learning. Districts should ensure that curricula and instructional assessments are developmentally appropriate and aligned to the standards.

- As defined by the National Academy of Sciences’ 2008 report on early childhood assessment, child outcomes assessments should be used to improve instruction and services and not be used for high-stakes decisions, which the report defines.
- Schools should ensure that screenings, curricula, assessments, and other activities that support children’s learning are appropriate to children’s home languages or special needs.

Specialized knowledge for effective teaching and learning for teachers, principals, and other staff

- For programs to be maximally effective, there must be ongoing professional development for school principals and other administrators (e.g., special education directors) in child development

and developmentally appropriate practices, family engagement, collaboration with community early childhood providers, and a school climate supportive of all children and their families.

- Teachers should be assigned to grades for which they have specialized credentials and knowledge, preferably a teacher license in early childhood education when teaching children in third grade and younger.
- Title I funds should be used for joint professional development between community-based early childhood providers and kindergarten and first grade teachers, on the continuity of standards, teaching practices, and supports for children to maximize development and learning.

Ready Schools needs reviews to support a continuum of high-quality teaching and learning

- Require elementary schools to assess themselves against indicators of their readiness for all children in each of the early grades, including processes for successful transitions.
- Create collaboration agreements and other mechanisms for ongoing communication between community-based early childhood programs and schools on issues of alignment, best practice, family involvement, and access to learning-related services.

Encouraging the use of Title I and other ESEA programs for children from birth through third grade

- The reauthorization should promote greater use of Title I funding for young children across all high-quality settings in order to increase the availability of high-quality programs and to strengthen collaboration with other funding streams and community-based providers to create full-day, full-year preschool opportunities.
- Through Title I and its relationship to IDEA and Head Start, children should receive a developmental screening when they enter kindergarten if they have not had such a screening, with referral to services as appropriate and needed.

Legislation that is based on NAEYC's recommendations for ESEA reauthorization:

H.R. 791 Continuum of Learning Act – Introduced by Rep. Polis (D-CO) and Young (R-AK).

Current cosponsors include Rep. Grijalva (D-AZ), Rep. McDermott (D-WA) and Rep. Schwartz (D-PA).

The Continuum of Learning Act is supported by NAEYC, National Association of Elementary School Principals, National Women's Law Center, Center for Law & Social Policy, HighScope Educational Research Foundation, The National Disability Rights Network, First Five Years Fund, ZERO TO THREE, Early Care & Education Consortium, Learning Disabilities Association of America, and Easter Seals.