

# **National Education Knowledge Industry Association**

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## **Testimony submitted**

**by**

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**to**

**The Aspen Institute's Commission on No Child Left Behind**

The National Education Knowledge Industry Association (NEKIA) appreciates the opportunity to present to the Commission our observations and suggestions for the No Child Left behind Act (NCLB) and the impending reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). As you may know, NEKIA is a non-profit, non-partisan trade association dedicated to expanding the use of research-based knowledge in policy and practice in K-12 education. We are a strong and dynamic community of highly successful education organizations and agencies, all of which are constantly looking for new and better ways to support high-quality education research, development, dissemination, technical assistance and evaluation at the federal, regional, state, tribal, and local levels.

We believe that promoting the effective use of research-based knowledge in school improvement can and should be on the leading edge of innovation and improvement in k-12 education and a central organizing concept for the next reauthorization of ESEA. We posit that the effective production, application, transfer and management of research-based knowledge can significantly enhance and accelerate the nationwide efforts to improve academic performance for all students, close achievement gaps in k-12 education and transform education into an evidence-based field.

### **Critical "Knowledge Use" Issues Relating to NCLB**

We recognize that there are many technical issues surrounding NCLB that deserve attention during the next reauthorization process including: testing and assessment requirements, accountability metrics for determining adequate yearly progress, the provisions for highly qualified teachers, the needs of English Language Learners and special education students, requirements for supplemental educational services and public school choice. We believe that a number of broader issues relating to knowledge use should also be given priority attention. These issues include:

**Increasing demand for knowledge-based solutions---** Last year more than 24,000 U.S. public schools were not making adequate yearly progress and over 10,000 schools were designated in need of improvement under the NCLB. Many more schools are on the "cusp" and in need of additional support. To fulfill the promise of NCLB, much greater attention needs to be directed to delivering solutions to these schools in need.

**Woefully inadequate federal investment in R&D** --- While the NCLB clearly requires educators to use instructional practices and innovations supported by research, the Department of Education spends less than one percent of its budget on research, development, and statistics. Education is a \$745 billion industry representing an estimated 7.2 percent of the gross domestic product. However, only 0.03 percent is spent on research and development. That is only three cents for every hundred dollars spent on education. In comparison, other agency R&D budgets as a percentage of their discretionary spending are: Defense, 17 percent; NASA, 68 percent; Energy, 37 percent; HHS, 42 percent; NSF, 74 percent; and Agriculture, 4.6 percent. In other words, the Department of Education's research budget has been and remains among the smallest of any federal agency. Without an increased investment in developing and testing research-based practices, schools and districts will continue to find it difficult to fulfill NCLB's mandate for using such practices.

**Escalating capacity crisis** --- As stated a report by the non-partisan Center on Education Policy (CEP) released earlier this year, there is a growing capacity crisis at the state and local levels to support schools in need of improvement. We agree with CEP's assessment that "...the Department and the Congress should (provide) more funding and ... other types of support to help strengthen states' and districts' capacity to assist schools identified for improvement. Many states and districts lack sufficient funds, staff, or expertise to help improve all identified schools..."

**Weak policy link between the federal research enterprise and federal school improvement efforts** --- In simplified market terms, NCLB stimulates and shapes demand for research-based solutions through its accountability and sanctioning provisions while the Education Sciences Reform Act (ESRA) represents the supply side through its investments in research and development. While there are numerous provisions in NCLB for scientific based research and in ESRA for school improvement, the links between supply and demand have not been able to fully mature and they remain functionally weak. We attribute part of the problem to bureaucratic and implementation inertia. But the problem is also fed by federal policy that fails to create a strong policy link between ESRA and NCLB focusing on knowledge transfer, application and utilization.

**Delay in taking the next essential step in standards-based reform** --- Federal education policy has evolved in phases over the past 15 years in concert with the implementation of the elements of standards-based reform. The focus on standards and assessments in the late 1980's and early 1990's spawned a major focus on the alignment of assessments, curriculum, and assessments in the 1990's which in turn begat the current emphasis on accountability. It is particularly significant that the last three reauthorizations have paralleled this progression with the Hawkins/Stafford Elementary and Secondary School Improvement Amendments of 1988, the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994, and the NCLB of 2002. The next logical step in this standards-based continuum would be a more comprehensive and vigorous focus on school improvement --- when significant new resources and expertise would be targeted both to

turning around low performing schools and to building a knowledge capacity and infrastructure for sustained improvement. Regrettably, the compliance-driven focus of the implementation of NCLB has delayed the full realization of this next step.

### **Guiding “Knowledge Use” Principles for Reauthorization**

In attempting to address the critical issues outlined above, we believe that NEKIA’s five guiding principles for effective knowledge use in school reform should be embedded in the next reauthorization. Our principles include:

**#1 Sustained Improvement** --- Effective use of education knowledge can significantly enhance, accelerate, sustain the nationwide efforts to improve academic performance and close achievement gaps in k-12 education.

**#2 Useable Knowledge** --- Knowledge that is used to shape policy and practice should be derived from the best available empirical evidence as well as informed by sound professional judgment.

**#3 Key Stakeholders** --- The effective use of knowledge in education requires the active participation of and the on-going collaboration among five key stakeholder groups:

- **Practitioners** should be involved in all phases of the knowledge development and utilization process, not just as recipients of research.
- **Policymakers** need to develop the capacity for integrating knowledge into the policy making apparatus.
- **Researchers** should focus on rigor, relevance, and replication in addressing practical questions of effectiveness based on the needs of practitioners and policy makers.
- **Developers and Providers** need to use the best available knowledge in developing and delivering their products and services.
- **Intermediaries** are needed to facilitate productive collaborations and relationships among stakeholders, help interpret and disseminate findings, conduct applied research, and provide capacity-building assistance.

**#4 Cumulative Process** --- Effective knowledge use depends upon dynamic on-going exchanges of data and information among the stakeholders and involves a continuous process of research, application and adaptation. As knowledge is used and adapted, new knowledge is created and applied in a cumulative, iterative fashion.

**#5 High Priority Policies** --- School improvement policies at the federal, state, and local levels should focus priority attention on the effective use of knowledge and create incentives to stimulate greater demand for and increased supply of knowledge-based solutions.

### **Specific Recommendations for Reauthorization**

**Make knowledge-based solutions a central theme of the reauthorization** --- We suggest taking the next logical step in the standards based reform continuum described above and clearly and explicitly focusing the next reauthorization on knowledge-based solutions for school

improvement. Special consideration should be given to focusing primarily on support rather than on sanctions and strengthening and expanding technical assistance and capacity building provisions for turning around low performing schools. We suggest that the title of the new law should reflect this theme e.g. “Knowledge-based Solutions for All Children Act”

**Integrate a knowledge utilization clause into scientifically base research provisions ---** We support the continuation of the scientifically based research (SBR) provisions in the current statute. But these provisions need to be made more practical in their application to specific programs. We suggest adding another clause to the SBR definition that clarifies how the best available evidence can be used in solving the specific problem.

**Launch a national knowledge utilization initiative in support of school improvement ---** Similar to other efforts that have deserved focused high priority attention, we suggest that the Department of Education be authorized to launch a national initiative for knowledge utilization for school improvement. The basic components of this initiative would include:

- ***Interagency Task Force*** to promote coordination and cooperation among Federal departments and agencies administering knowledge use programs and activities,
- ***Knowledge Use Partnership in Education Network*** to promote and advance knowledge utilization in education in conjunction with private and public organizations and entities throughout the Nation.
- ***Biennial Report to Congress*** analyzing of the state of knowledge use in education in shaping policy and practice
- ***Using Knowledge for a Change Venture Fund*** to support local and state activities for: creating a corps of local chief knowledge officers and research-to-practice coordinators; developing professional development programs and institute on knowledge use; conducting action research on effective knowledge use; supporting efforts to identify and disseminate promising practices in the implementation of knowledge-based innovations; promoting entrepreneurship in developing new knowledge-based solutions, innovations, and choices in school; establishing fellowship programs for building expert capacity in knowledge utilization;

**Increase authorization levels for investments in “knowledge use” programs in line with demand ---** We believe that the reauthorization of ESEA should create strong policy links to ESRA by aligning the quality and quantity of supply funded in ESRA with the increased demand for school improvement support created in ESEA. Specifically we recommend at least a doubling of the authorization levels of “knowledge use” programs in both statutes. This would apply to such programs as Comprehensive Assistance Centers; Comprehensive School Reform; Teacher Quality State Grants; Regional Education Laboratories; Fund for Research, Development, and Dissemination; Smaller Learning Communities; Title 1 School Improvement Fund; Twenty-first Century Learning Centers; Even Start; Math Science Partnerships; Parent Information Centers; Reading First; Special Education Research and Evaluation programs; Statewide Data Systems; Striving Readers; Technology State Grants; Title V state innovation grants.

We believe that these suggestions for the reauthorization will help advance a new knowledge era in federal education policy and standards based reform. And with a knowledge enterprise at the

leading edge of innovation and improvement in k-12 education, we are confident that the promise of NCLB may indeed be fulfilled.