

## Eastern Shore Superintendents

### Position Paper #1: **No Child Left Behind**

The Eastern Shore superintendents believe that public education is vital to the continued success of American democracy and that a high quality public education is a basic right for all children of every race and service need. In accord with this belief, former President George W. Bush took the opportunity of reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), to sign Public Law 101-110, otherwise known to all as “No Child Left Behind,” (NCLB) into effect on January 8, 2002. This legislation had a major impact on state and local educational systems. “No Child Left Behind” has:

- established new learning goals for all students that must be achieved by the year 2014;
- required States to develop and implement federally approved plans to monitor local schools’, local systems’, and their own state progress annual progress on preset goals (AYP);
- set standards for teacher and paraprofessional qualifications, safe schools, supplemental services, and the public reporting of school performance; and
- created a system of accountability based upon annual test results.

The keystone of NCLB is accountability of public education at a federal level that had never been experienced before its implementation. The state and locals have always held, and continue to hold, themselves accountable to their students and their communities.

The Eastern Shore superintendents support public accountability for every child, every classroom, every school, every system, and every state. Nothing is more important than having our children reach their highest levels of learning and their full potential to be contributing, successful citizens prepared for the challenges of a global society. Therefore, we support:

- 1) Adopting high standards for all children delivered by highly trained staffs who never stop learning;
- 2) Developing clear and accurate measures of: academic progress, actions of equity for all groups of students, safe learning environments, and staff credentials and highly qualified teachers and staff;
- 3) Providing on-going high quality research at both the federal and state levels to guide local school systems in best classroom practice, decision making, and professional development initiatives for teachers, principals, and superintendents; and
- 4) Establishing multiple school based efforts beyond the traditional school day and year to meet the needs of struggling students.

There is no doubt that NCLB has moved our educational systems forward on several fronts in these areas. However, there is also no doubt that there are multiple shortfalls in the legislation and in its implementation that have hurt children. NCLB, as it stands, neglects fundamental needs, unfairly penalizes groups and schools, and disregards the need for resources to support its mandates. These deficits must be corrected.

President Obama and Congress are currently in the process of reauthorizing ESEA and can rectify the previous misjudgments of the initial legislation's implementation. Congress can address the increasing resource and capacity crisis that state and local educational systems are experiencing and that threatens not only future progress, but that which has been achieved. We cannot afford to lose what we have gained.

Foremost, the US Department of Education must recognize that opportunities to learn are not equally distributed among many non-school factors that greatly affect children of low income and minority groups. NCLB's unrealistic expectations for the performance of students qualifying for special education services must also be addressed. Students in these subgroups and their teachers deserve guidelines that recognize these differences, promote flexible timelines, and use continuous improvement measures. A similar disservice is the use of a single high stakes measure to make gross judgments about individuals, groups of students, schools, and systems. Supporters of education and members of the legislature are asked to promote changes at the state and federal levels that do not compromise rigor but respect our students' achievements on multiple measures and reflect the reality of identified students' limitations and necessary accommodations. Given appropriate instruction and adequate time, all students will achieve greater success.

The Eastern Shore superintendents believe that the state and local agencies have the primary responsibility for educational programs and student progress. Maryland has a constitutional responsibility to establish, fund, and support public education. To do so, resources must be available. Critical needs have been described by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) in their recent study of all 50 states on each state's capacity to develop and deploy systems of support for schools identified for improvement under NCLB. This report cites the basic need of states for resources:

- For sufficient staff,
- To generate timely data,
- To deliver professional development,
- To offer grant funds,
- For technical assistance,
- To deal with individual systems and schools' unique needs, and

- In providing expertise to support Special Education students, English Language Learners, and children of poverty.

Legislators are urged in the AIR Report and by the Eastern Shore superintendents to consider ways to increase state capacity to develop the systems of support needed by the locals.

The federal government must be held responsible for ensuring equal opportunity for all students. This should, constitutionally, occur through building the resources of states and locals to meet their students' needs. The current 93 federal programs are woefully inadequate, disconnected, and offer significantly diminished support. It is the obligation of the federal government to build the capacity of the state education agencies to remove inequities from public education and provide all children with the equal opportunity to learn upon which a democratic society thrives.

The Maryland State Board of Education has directed a school reform initiative that commenced in the early 1990's. Student performance standards were increased and local school systems were held accountable for the annual performance of the students who were tested. The last phase of the school reform initiative has been the implementation of new high stakes high school assessments (HSA) in English, Algebra, U.S. Government, and Biology. Students in the graduating class of 2009, must pass all four exams, achieve a composite score as a graduation requirement, or meet the HSA requirements through the state's standardized Bridge Projects. A comprehensive pre-kindergarten through grade twelve academic intervention plan entitled, "Every Child Achieving" adopted by the State Board of Education in 1999, was developed to ensure that all students would meet success with the new high school assessments. The "Every Child Achieving Plan" is aligned with the provisions of the "No Child Left Behind" legislation. The state continues to work closely with the locals to meet the needs of students. However, neither the state educational agency nor the local public schools can, by themselves during the traditional or extended school day, meet the ever increasing deficiencies of poverty, language barriers, hunger, disabilities, crime, dysfunctional homes, no homes, abuse, or neglect without resources to broaden their capacity.

These NCLB federal and state requirements have significant associated costs not envisioned during the Thornton Commission deliberations. The state's Bridge to Excellence Act has resulted in a significant restructuring and improvement of the state school funding formula; and we, the local public school systems, have used that funding effectively to the benefit and progress of our students as clearly demonstrated in the MGT of America Interim Report to the State Board of Education: "Evaluation of the Effect of Increased State Aid to Local School Systems through the Bridge to Excellence Act." The Thornton Funds originally purposed at providing equity, have been used to meet the NCLB requirements. Federal funding has not been increased to meet the "No Child Left Behind" Act's mandates. Many school systems have experienced a

significant decrease. At the state level, Bridge to Excellence support has been put on hold. The expectations and requirements of NCLB have not. They continue to increase.

The Eastern Shore superintendents cannot emphasize strongly enough that while we accept higher expectations and the accountability that supports and informs our work, we must have the fiscal resources to implement the changes required to achieve the desired student performance results which American Recovery and Reinvestment Act Funds are attempting to address on a short term basis. While this is an appreciated resource, it is one which is filling empty pockets, is temporary, and fails to provide the resources to move us forward.

We support and endorse higher standards. To be successful in a global economy, Maryland's students must be well prepared. To meet the challenges of preparing all students as mandated by NCLB, the Eastern Shore school systems must have a sustained source of state funds to ensure that our students achieve the standards that have been established and do not lose that which has been accomplished.