

# ESEA Reauthorization: Summary of NEPC Memo on ESEA



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## BACKGROUND

- ▶ The National Education Policy Center (NEPC) is a network of nationally recognized education researchers, writers, and practitioners who aim to produce and disseminate high-quality research to inform education policy discussions.
- ▶ In their memo, *Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act: Time to Move Beyond Test-Focused Policies*, Kevin Welner and William Mathis of NEPC and the University of Colorado Boulder draw on current research to argue that test-focused approaches to education reform are ineffective and that policymakers should focus instead on ensuring that all students have access to educational opportunities and resources. A news release and a link to the complete version of the memo, including full citations, can be found at: <http://nepc.colorado.edu/newsletter/2015/02/policy-memo-esea>.

## PROBLEMS WITH THE CURRENT SYSTEM

- ▶ While student testing can be useful when used in specific ways, there is no evidence that the implementation of testing under NCLB has led to increased student learning. Disaggregating test data by student subgroups has been effective at demonstrating that achievement gaps exist, but has not led and will not lead to the narrowing of those gaps.
- ▶ The prioritization of increasing test scores (which measure only some aspects of learning) over increasing learning has led to the following unintended consequences:
  - Making schooling less engaging and creative;
  - Deprofessionalizing teachers and teaching;
  - Narrowing the curriculum, particularly in terms of squeezing out the arts, music, social studies, and science; and
  - Marginalizing values and skills that are important to functioning in a democratic society, such as cooperation, problem solving, and complex reasoning and judgment.
- ▶ Current policy does not address resource inadequacies, the inequitable distribution of resources, or the out-of-school challenges that affect student performance.

## AN OPPORTUNITY-BASED ALTERNATIVE

- ▶ Focusing on the closing of achievement gaps is vital in a context of increasing income disparity and child poverty. Half of public school students are from families with incomes below or just above the poverty line, and this proportion is increasing each year.
- ▶ Currently economically deprived students receive about 19% greater funding than the average student; studies show that this should be between 40% and 100% in order to counteract the effects of poverty and other challenges in students' out-of-school lives.
- ▶ Rather than making changes 'around the margin' to the current test-focused system, policymakers need to make a sustained, fair, adequate, and equitable investment in our nation's education system. In addition to educators and school leaders, accountability in this system must be universal - encompassing the leaders and policymakers in district offices, state and federal legislatures, and state and federal departments of education who are responsible for providing necessary resources and supports.