Elementary and Secondary Education Act

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was created in 1965 to create educational opportunity for all children. ESEA is composed of several titles (such as Title I) designed to meet specific educational goals. 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.

The critical brain development that occurs in young children from birth through age 8 builds the foundation for a lifetime of learning. Since the brain is still developing, young children develop and learn much differently than older children. Children entering kindergarten need to be ready for school and schools must be ready to effectively support every child’s unique development and learning. Teachers, administrators, and others who help educate young children through the early grades must have specialized knowledge, skills, and credentials.

ESEA has not been reauthorized since 2002, and conversations are ongoing with a focus on transparency, accountability and flexibility at the state and local levels. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) believes that 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 supports increased development and learning at each stage, and more effective transitions and shared expectations among early learning settings, which results in better alignment at the state, local, and classroom levels.

In the past, NAEYC recommendations to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) resulted in the bipartisan introduction of the Continuum of Learning Act, and we are an active participant in current discussions. Since 1926, NAEYC has been the voice of young children, its members, affiliates and early childhood stakeholders around the world. NAEYC combines the association’s evidence-based practices (supported by data and shown to have positive, significant difference in outcomes) and on-the-ground expertise with strategic advocacy efforts that promote high-quality, well-funded early childhood programs and practice.
Recommendations

NAEYC's has the following recommendations related to the reauthorization of ESEA. We believe that these recommendations reflect an appropriate federal role in advancing state and local early learning programs:

1. **Build state systems**: NAEYC recommends that ESEA reauthorization support state efforts to build educational systems that align high-quality, developmentally appropriate services for children, families and teachers from birth through age 8. Many states have made significant progress in recent years developing systems that support high-quality learning experiences for all children, such as Quality Rating and Improvement Systems that are relevant to all program settings and connected to professional standards, certification and licensure.

2. **Invest in early education**: NAEYC recommends that ESEA reauthorization include sufficient federal investments, including provisions in ESEA to provide quality services for young children and families. It is critically important to address the significant underfunding of the systems serving young children, such as CCDBG and providing greater access to Head Start and Early Head Start services. Additional funding is also needed to close the achievement gap and produce equitable outcomes for young children.

3. **Ensure quality in all programs**: NAEYC recommends that ESEA reauthorization be designed to accelerate state and school local efforts to incorporate early learning proven practices and excellence in teaching in all programs from birth through third grade. Funding for full day kindergarten and pre-Kindergarten programs and community-based early learning programs—such as Head Start and high-quality infant and toddler care— are vital to securing this seamless continuum. ESEA should make funds be available for creating developmentally appropriate standards, curricula, instructional materials and professional development.

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