



LAURA BORNFREUND & CONOR P. WILLIAMS

# Moving Young Learners Forward

How to Fix No Child  
Left Behind

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# STRENGTHENING EARLY LEARNING IN A NEW ESEA

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By Laura Bornfreund



**C**hange is on the horizon for reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, a process which acquired some new urgency when the Republicans took control of the Senate in January. And “change” is really the only way to move things forward. Senator Alexander’s (R-TN) ~~bipartisan~~ partisan approach—where he introduced a [discussion draft](#) without conferring with Democrats on the Senate’s education committee — first was going nowhere fast. Last Friday, Alexander and the committee’s ranking Democrat, Senator Patty Murray, [announced](#) that their staffs will work together for the next several weeks in an effort to write a bipartisan bill.

As Lauren Camera over at [Education Week](#) notes, many issues remain, including what to include for early education up through third grade. Politically speaking, there is also the big question of whether a more bipartisan bill could actually pass the GOP-controlled Senate and what it could mean for negotiations with the House and its very partisan ESEA reauthorization process. House Education and the Workforce Committee Chair John Kline (R-MN) simply decided to trot back out [HR](#)

[5](#), which passed the House along party lines in 2013. He has also declined to hold hearings to discuss the bill. Ranking Democrat, Bobby Scott (D-VA), however, decided that wouldn’t do and held a [forum](#) of his own on ESEA reauthorization. Today, the Committee held a markup on HR 5. Several changes to the bill were proposed by House

*There is also the big question of whether a more bipartisan bill could actually pass the GOP-controlled Senate*

Republicans including changes to the Title I formula. (Read more about this on [Education Week’s Politics K-12](#).) It’s worth pointing out that if something like HR 5 ever made it to President Obama’s desk, he would almost certainly quash it with a veto (and without a second thought).

In other words, as much as Congress and the states loathe the current version of ESEA (known as [No Child Left Behind](#)), and grumble about the [Obama Administration’s waiver regime](#), it’s still likely that

they are going to be stuck with them for a while longer. Thanks for playing. Here’s hoping for a new ESEA in 2017.

Still, for those who have been thinking about and hoping for a reauthorization since 2007, these new bills are an opportunity to think what a new, better ESEA could and should look like. And, because early education is a big priority for [Senator Murray](#) — who could very well have the chance to lead reauthorization next time around — now is a good time to think intentionally about how it could and should be included in a more robust way.

Here in the shadow of another (likely) failed ESEA reauthorization attempt, New America’s Early Education Initiative will spend the next few days on a blog series exploring that question. We are taking a broad look across the birth-through-third-grade spectrum, including not only pre-K but also a focus on the K-3 grades. Some ideas have been described before, either by New America or in collaboration with other groups. Some are the ideas of others that I agree are worth further consideration. And some are nascent thoughts that need some further exploration.

# STRENGTHENING EARLY LEARNING IN A NEW ESEA PART TWO

By Laura Bornfreund

**G**enerally, early education—and [pre-Kindergarten](#) in particular—is relegated to nothing more than mentions in ESEA. There are minimal requirements or incentives, especially since the defunding of Reading First more than five years ago. That left almost no focus in the law on kindergarten through second grade, much less what comes before school entry, other than the allowance of Title I funds to be used for children from low-income families beginning at birth. (But fewer than 3 percent of children receiving Title I funds are under the age of 5.)

First, we suggest writing a new title—jargon for a big part of a law—that focuses primarily on pre-K education, but that could also bring focus to kindergarten and the early grades. A new title could be a home for [Preschool Development Grants](#), the current program first funded by a bipartisan [appropriations process](#) more than a year ago. This new funding is helping to build states' capacities to provide more 4-year-olds from low-income families

with high-quality pre-K. Specifically, it supports states that agree to meet certain indicators of quality—things like requiring all pre-K teachers to have bachelor's degrees and paying those teachers comparably to K-12 teachers. PDG also requires states to offer full-day pre-K, which helps ensure that children have ample time to develop literacy and math skills, play, explore, and interact with other children and adults. The PDG program also requires participating states to develop a plan to connect their newly developed or expanded programs to the K-3 grades.

The challenge with PDG is that it is currently a competitive grant program, which means that only some states' children are benefiting from these research-based federal incentives. A new Early Ed ESEA Title could make these rules more comprehensive through formula funds to any state that agrees to meet at least the base quality criteria as well as to coordinate and connect what comes before and after. Additionally, requiring states to develop a plan is a weak lever for





ensuring that they develop and implement strong, effective plans. A new Early Ed Title could encourage better design and alignment of these plans in accordance with strong early ed research.

Of course, the devil is in the details, and implementation is key. True alignment is complex and federal funding should be allocated for not only the continuation and expansion of pre-K, but also to help make full-day kindergarten a priority for states. In fact, a new ESEA should state explicitly that kindergarten should be provided at the same duration and funded at least at the same rate as 1st grade. Additional federal funds could help states meet this goal and to better connect and coordinate pre-K, kindergarten, and the early grades through:

- **standards and assessment at the state level;**
- **curricula at the local level;**
- **instructional strategies in the classroom;**
- **professional development opportunities for educators; and**
- **data collected across PreK-3rd.**

It's also essential that more attention is paid to K-2nd grades. NCLB brought increased accountability for student proficiency in math and reading beginning in 3rd grade, but the preceding elementary grades have not always gotten their share of attention. The new law also established the [Reading First program](#), which required the use of scientifically based reading programs and had the goal of ensuring children were able to read by the end of 3rd grade. The program was last funded in 2008. Regardless of your take on Reading First, marred by allegations of favored contracts and conflicts of interest,

its focus on the early grades was important.

At present, NCLB does very little to encourage states to focus significant resources beyond the tested grades and subject areas. And guess what? This means that states generally don't spend much money, energy, or reflection on those grades. Right now, most federal incentives are primarily targeted at 3rd grade and above. That's where NCLB's famous annual assessments kick in. Schools are held accountable for student achievement in these grades. Elementary schools are not held accountable for what happens in the early grades and pre-K if it is under their purview. Unless principals are playing the long game, they are more likely to put precious resources and effort into the upper elementary grades.

This is a salutary caution for those who believe a new ESEA should give states more flexibility around how they use federal funds. We believe that it is necessary to devote some funding to help states build well-coordinated, high-quality PreK-2nd grades that lay a strong literacy foundation. Doing so would also support children's background knowledge and vocabulary in English language arts, math, science, geography, and history. And last, but certainly not least, it would foster the development of student's [skills for success](#), which research has found can benefit students' academic achievement.

Another complementary way to encourage schools to pay more attention to the earlier years and grades is to [rethink the accountability incentives](#). Earlier this year, Elliot Regenstein and Rio Romero-Juando at the Ounce of Prevention put out a framework for a new smarter system of incentives and accountability spanning [early childhood](#) through 12th grade. It includes multiple



measures of professional practice (at the classroom and school level) and child outcomes across the spectrum, giving more weight to certain metrics depending on the grade level.

How might these metrics be weighted at different grade levels? In children’s earliest

years, “child outcomes” might account for 20 percent of the overall score and “professional practice,” including things like classroom observations and school climate, might account for 80 percent. A child outcome for kindergarten could include student attendance or perhaps the use of formative assessment to inform a

## Proposed Birth to High School Education Accountability

Ages 0-3   Ages 3-5   Grades K-2   Grades 3-8   High School

 <p><b>Metrics</b></p>	<p>A mix of metrics balancing child outcomes with professional practice</p> <p>Child outcomes will vary across age spans</p> <p>Balance between child outcomes &amp; professional practice will vary across age spans</p>
 <p><b>Measurements</b></p>	<p>Measures of child outcomes that are research based and age appropriate</p> <p>School observations used to measure professional practice</p>
 <p><b>Tiers</b></p>	<p>Tiers that communicate to the public the quality of outcomes and practice at school</p> <p>The highest tier will be reserved for schools that score highly on both, and the lowest tier for schools that score poorly on both</p> <p>Over time it will become possible to draw more meaningful distinctions in the middle tiers</p>
 <p><b>Supports</b></p>	<p>Supports to schools designed to address issues identified by the observation of professional practice</p>

Source: A Framework for Rethinking State Education Accountability and Support from Birth Through High School, The Ounce of Prevention

*Another complementary way to encourage schools to pay more attention to the earlier years and grades is to rethink the accountability incentives*

teacher's instruction. At 3rd grade through 8th grade, these metrics might be more equal and then at the high school level, graduation rates might get more weight over professional practice metrics.

Regenstein and Romero-Juardo call for schools' progress on the professional practice metrics to be assessed through external review. While external review is fairly common in birth-to-five early learning programs, that is not the case for K-12 in the U.S.. In many states, external observations or monitoring are required for state-funded pre-K and [Head Start](#) programs. Also, as The Ounce makes clear, support for school improvement is a necessary piece of any accountability system.

This type of system would be a clear—and welcome—departure from our current accountability structures. The approach would offer a more holistic view of student learning and success, and would elevate the pre-K through 2nd grades to the same level as currently tested grades. Providing this example of an alternative accountability system as an option for states and allowing them to reserve more funds to build capacity for this kind of system would be a way to allow some experimentation.

I'm sure the smart folks at The Ounce would be more than happy to help state leaders think through the implementation of this kind of new accountability system.









# **STRENGTHENING EARLY LEARNING IN A NEW ESEA PART THREE**

By Laura Bornfreund





**W**e, and others, have talked about many of these ideas before. In 2010, New America sent [consensus recommendations](#) with 14 other organizations for the ESEA reauthorization underway at that time. And, you can also find some of them on the [special ESEA page](#) on our website that tracks developments in ESEA reauthorization.

Some of the ideas below may be more politically feasible, at the moment, than those I put forth last week. Both approaches together — taking significant steps to expand and strengthen early learning and making clarifications

and smaller changes here and there — would really *transform* teaching and learning in the PreK-3rd grades.

At the very least, Congress should absolutely clarify when teachers of pre-K and pre-K programs can and should be included in ESEA programs. Here are some more specific ideas for Congress. A new ESEA should:

- **Recognize states' early learning guidelines as part of their PreK-12 academic standards.** This would encourage states to pursue true alignment and incorporate the breadth of learning domains common

in early learning guidelines at least up through the 3rd grade. Just about every state has multi-domain early learning guidelines (or standards) and many states say they are aligned, but this change could help bring their assurances closer to reality.

- **Change the funding formulae in ESEA (Title I, II, III, V) to include children ages three and up** — rather than beginning at five. Increasingly 3- and 4-year-old children are included in public education through pre-K and special education programs and these formulae should be updated accordingly.
- **Make it explicit that teachers of 3- and 4-year-olds are included in all ESEA programs that seek to improve teacher quality.** Amendments to programs such as Improve Teacher Quality State grants, the [Teacher Incentive Fund](#) (if it becomes a part of ESEA), and any new programs should be written carefully to include these teachers. And inclusion should not stop with teachers who work in public schools or who are employed by school districts; teachers in community-based programs (such as non-profit pre-K programs or [child care centers](#)) should be included too when those programs are heavily funded by public dollars. For example, many community-based programs are funded by [Head Start](#) and the new [Preschool Development Grants](#). All of these teachers should be included in professional development opportunities regardless of the setting in which they teach.
- **Mandate — and support — the integration of pre-kindergarten and other birth-through-age-5 data into state longitudinal data systems.**

*Under new guidance from the Department of Education, early learning is now listed as an acceptable model for school improvement*

This not only would provide an integrated view of children's growth starting with their enrollment in [early childhood](#) programs and continuing through their postsecondary years, but would also help teachers track students' progress and intervene with more intensive instruction when appropriate.

Further, this would allow policymakers and researchers to better evaluate the long-term results of [early childhood](#) investments.

- **Codify early learning as a strategy to be allowed in School Improvement Grants.** Congress should require struggling schools to provide full-day kindergarten — equivalent in duration to 1st grade — and pre-K to all students (in addition to other turnaround strategies). Using SIG funds for pre-K and kindergarten has always been allowed, but not explicitly encouraged. And when decisions are left up to elementary schools and school districts facing consequences for subpar test scores in 3rd -5th grades, they will most likely deploy extra resources in those grades. As I discussed last week, echoing the Ounce of Prevention Fund's recommendations, accountability incentives need to change. In the meantime, it makes sense to be clearer that focusing SIG dollars PreK-3rd is allowed *and* encouraged. Under new guidance from the Department of Education, early learning is now listed as an acceptable model for school improvement. Congress should follow suit in its ESEA reauthorization.
- **Allow federal charter school funds be used for pre-K programs.** This could be made available to standalone charter pre-K programs or for elementary charter schools interested in adding pre-K to the span of grade levels they offer — or to encourage them to expand to full-day kindergarten.




- **Provide examples in the law of allowable or suggested activities more relevant to the years before kindergarten and the early grades of elementary school.** Examples: professional development for PreK-3rd grade educators on teaching strategies that develop children's literacy skills, or dedicated planning time to support vertical alignment of curricula, assessment, and instruction in the PreK-3rd grades.
- **Establish a competitive pilot program to help principals become leaders who understand how to support children in pre-K, kindergarten, first, second, and third grade.** As leaders of schools, principals establish the climate, set the vision and priorities, and make known the acceptable classroom practices. If a principal does not understand how young children learn best, she may walk into a kindergarten or first grade classroom, for instance, expecting to see teachers leading students in whole group instruction rather than students participating in center-based activities and learning in small groups guided by the teacher. The principal may not see it as her responsibility to reach out to and collaborate with [child care](#) centers and pre-K programs that typically feed into her school.
- **Devote funds to help improve and create new PreK-3rd grade assessments in (but also beyond) reading and math.** Congress should also invest in new teacher observation tools for early grade classrooms. While the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), for example, is a valuable and widely used tool, it only measures a narrow range of teaching practices. The tool zeroes in on the quality of teacher-student interactions. And other

*For families, family engagement means something more than attending a parent-teacher conference or chaperoning a field trip*

commonly-used observational tools — such as the Charlotte Danielson Framework and the Marzano Teacher Evaluation Model have not necessarily been validated for use with early grade teachers.

- **Adjust the law to favor family engagement as opposed to simply requiring parental involvement.** This simple shift in language signals something broader and deeper. Broader: it sends the message that parents are not the only caregivers in children's lives. Grandparents or other relatives often live in children's homes and have a shared responsibility for their learning and development. Some older siblings also serve as caregivers. The shift in terms also encourages both educators and families to think of school as a place where the entire family is welcome. It's also a deeper term. For families, family engagement means something more than attending a parent-teacher conference or chaperoning a field trip. For schools, it means more than making those kinds of requests and sending out newsletters or requests for supplies. It encourages schools and families to work together more closely to help ensure the success of their children. This new terminology would better support schools' and districts' efforts to reach out to families before [pre-kindergarten](#) or kindergarten and throughout children's years in school.
- **Increase funding to (at least) keep pace with the national growth in the English Learner (EL) population.** When [No Child Left Behind](#) became law in 2002, it authorized up to \$750 million to serve the country's 4.1 million ELs. This year, Congress appropriated just \$737 million to serve the (at least) [4.4 million ELs in U.S. schools](#). These students are





*There should be special focus on avoiding the use of suspension and expulsion and instead relying on more appropriate, and positive, discipline strategies.*



a growing demographic in our schools, and funding should be considerably increased to reflect that fact.

- **Establish stricter rules to ensure that Title III funds go to language supports that actually help ELs develop linguistically and academically.** Current Title III funds are inadequate to meet the needs of these students, and worse still, oversight over how they are spent is often inadequate. Congress should tighten the restrictions on how these funds are spent to ensure that they are used for the best research-based programs available — and exclusively to support ELs.
- **Update the law’s rules around [counting English Learners](#).** Specifically, it should move toward the process of using state-specific data for allocating Title III dollars (and away from the national sampling data in the American Community Survey) to ELs. The ACS data could be used to check states’ data, but not as the primary source.
- **Make the Investing in Innovation (i3) program, put into place by the current Administration, part of ESEA and make connecting birth-to-3rd a dedicated priority.**
- **Provide funds to expand the use of promising classroom discipline practices al-**

**ready in place in many schools and [early childhood](#) programs.** There should be special focus on avoiding the use of suspension and expulsion and instead relying on more appropriate, and positive, discipline strategies.

This integrated approach would signal that [early childhood](#) (birth through third grade) is an important part of elementary and secondary education. It might also give some districts and schools the critical nudge towards early education investments that they were already weighing. But adopting these changes to ESEA won’t necessarily lead to increased access to high-quality pre-K programs in the way that a Title focused on Pre-K could.

Finally, let’s not forget that this is an opportunity to think about how to better connect ESEA and [Head Start](#). “Assurances” or “a plan” are not enough. In our Beyond Subprime Learning report, we offer some ideas on how to better connect [Head Start](#) for 3 and 4 year-olds to other federally funded pre-K programs — such as those funded under Title I and provided via the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act — and with state-funded pre-K. Also, because there are so many education laws up for reauthorization right now, we point out in the report that it would be a missed opportunity if Congress proves unable to coordinate new thinking about these laws to improve learning outcomes for all children.





# **HOW TO REVAMP NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND FOR DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS**

By Conor P. Williams



**R**epublicans in the House of Representatives spent a chunk of the end of last week trying to pass the Student Success Act, their party’s rewrite of [No Child Left Behind](#) (NCLB), the federal government’s core PreK–12 education law. But after hours of debate and a pile of amendments, well, things didn’t quite come together. At the last minute...



For what it’s worth, I more or less predicted this...[in November.](#))

Meanwhile, bipartisan NCLB negotiations continued in the Senate. Since we’re waiting on those—and have no idea how long the House will take—the education policy world is in a holding pattern. So why not use it to leave the tawdry, disappointing world of legislative politics behind—and talk substance?

In keeping with Laura Bornfreund’s recent posts on how to improve NCLB’s early education provisions,

I’m going to share a list of ideas that could improve how the federal government supports dual language learners in a future NCLB rewrite. It’s clear that Congress could use the help—of the [dozens of proposed amendments](#) the House explored last week, only one was specifically related to DLLs—and it’s still awaiting a vote (No. 39, from California Democrat Julia Brownley, would establish a grants program to support states’ creation of [seals of biliteracy](#)). If that’s not dispiriting enough, recall that the Student Success Act [considerably weakens existing federal programs](#) that serve DLLs.



So here are a few of our ideas for improving federal policy for DLLs. They're listed in approximate order from most- to least-audacious.

- **Congress should:** dramatically increase federal funding for programs that help DLLs learn English and develop academically. [As I've written before](#), we currently spend less (\$737 million this year) on language learners than the original NCLB authorized (\$750 million), even though there are at least 300,000 more language learners in American schools in 2011-2012 than there were when NCLB passed in 2002. If we assume that the original authorization of \$750 million for Title III was adequate (it wasn't, of course, but bear with me), an increase commensurate with this growth would come out to \$805 million. And again, that's probably undershooting the need by quite a bit. We simply [aren't spending enough money](#) to serve these students well, and the [projected growth](#) in the number of DLLs will only exacerbate the situation. But if we increase funding for DLLs, we should also make sure that those funds are being used in ways that actually support these students So...
- **Congress should:** tighten NCLB's rules for how Title III funds can be used. When I travel out of D.C. to see how different schools are serving DLLs, educators, researchers, and advocates alike tell me that it's far too easy for Title III funds to be used for expenses unrelated to DLLs' linguistic and academic growth (e.g. [see p. 8 here](#)). As I put it [in a previous post](#), [O]ne (federal) person's "fostering innovation" is another (local) person's "we don't have to meaningfully change our practice for supporting DLLs."

What's more, given the last decade of research on how schools and families can best support DLLs' development, Congress should

specifically rule out some of the least-effective versions of English-only language supports for DLLs (like [Arizona's English immersion program](#)). But even a larger Title III budget might not be a big enough "carrot" to get districts to submit to tighter rules. So...

- **Congress could:** scrap Title III entirely in favor of a different approach to federal language learner policy. The House Republicans' NCLB rewrite actually does this: [eliminates Title III entirely](#). The federal government's role in supporting DLLs at school has [varied considerably](#) over the years—there's no reason that NCLB's specific standards and accountability approach should be the only one under consideration. So here at the Work Group, we've been considering other ways the federal government could support DLLs. Specifically, they might consider building Title III's existing accountability mechanisms (for more on how these currently work, [see this post](#)) into Title I accountability. Since Title I is a much larger pot of money, these two systems could theoretically be harmonized to amplify DLLs' importance in the eyes of the federal government—and [the states and districts they're holding accountable](#). But, let's be honest, more and better accountability for how DLLs are served in U.S. schools won't do much unless we also get working on improving educators' capacity for supporting them, so...
- **Congress should:** put some of the savings from harmonizing Title I and Title III accountability into a national effort to diversify the American teaching force. Just 11.2 percent of American teachers speak a non-English language at home—compared to [nearly one-quarter of American children](#). This could take a number of forms, some of which the Work Group will explore in future

writing. One favorite idea in our office is to fund a new alternative teacher certification program:

**Year 1:** Intensive language training from the State Department + practice as a tutor in a school setting; **Year 2:** Placement as a (federally-funded) assistant teacher in schools with high percentages of DLLs + coursework focused on language development and practical teaching strategies; and **Year 3:** Official certification and placement in classrooms with high percentages of DLLs.

Of course, this sort of dramatic overhaul of the federal role in education simply isn't coming anytime soon, so...

- **Congress should:** fix NCLB's data collection rules for DLLs, as New America discussed in [our recent brief](#). Title III funds are currently allocated to states according to data from the American Community Survey. But [those data don't appear to be particularly accurate](#) for this purpose. Congress could require that Title III funds be allocated according to states' own data from their language proficiency assessments (screening and summative alike). But those assessments [vary a great deal by state](#), so to make these data better...
- **Congress should:** take up the efforts that began with recent federal assessment grant competitions requiring participating states to develop a "[common definition of English Learner](#)" and build it into NCLB. That is, Congress should require states to set more

consistent rules for screening and reclassifying ELs. But even a small lift like that might be a lot to ask in our gridlocked political moment, so...

- **Congress should:** double the funding of the [National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition](#) (NCELA). It's a tiny part of the budget ([\\$1.6 million in 2013](#)), but it could be a really powerful lever for better sharing of better data and best practices. And who could be against collaboration and more and better data? Or maybe...
- **Congress should just:** change the name of the Department of Education's [Office for English Language Acquisition](#) to: the Office for Multilingual Students, or the Office for Multilingualism, or even just the Office for Language Acquisition. It would cost nothing, and would send a message about the importance of DLLs' home languages. (Note: Congress should also change NCELA's name while they're at it.)

Will anything happen? Short version: [no](#). Longer version: Given that the GOP majority is struggling to hold its right wing together and find enough votes [to pass its own bill](#), it's hard to imagine a scenario where they're able to pass an as-yet hypothetical bipartisan Senate measure. Any bipartisan Senate offering will cost the House leadership *more* defections from conservatives, and even if they're willing to break the famous "[Hastert Rule](#)" and reauthorize the bill by securing a large number of Democratic votes, it's hardly clear that they could get enough of those to finish the job. All of which means that even the most innocuous of these Title III reform ideas will likely have to wait for the next round of NCLB haggling.

Still want more on ESEA reauthorization? Here is a sampling of ideas from other organizations: [Council for Chief State School Officers](#), [Grow America Stronger Coalition](#), [International Literacy Association](#), [National Association for the Education of Young Children](#), [National Association of Elementary School Principals](#), the [National Governor's Association](#) and [New America's Dual Language Learners National Work Group](#).



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