

“Enhancing School and Family Capacity to Support Student Success”*

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Thank you, Reggie.

I. Introduction

When the organizations that became the Forum on Educational Accountability (FEA) first got together in late 2003-early 2004, what brought us together was an agreement on the importance of NCLB’s “objectives ... strong academic achievement for all children and closing the achievement gap” - combined with a recognition that NCLB’s approach to accomplishing that was generally ineffective, often harmful, and had to be dramatically changed!

Over many months, we ultimately agreed on the key principles that should be included in the ESEA reauthorization, and we embodied them in the “Joint Organizational Statement on No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act.” The “Joint Statement”, FEA’s “Bible,” originally issued with about 30 national organizational signers, has now grown to 153 national endorsers, and the list continues to expand.

The Statement’s central theme is that: *“Overall, [NCLB’s] emphasis needs to shift from applying sanctions for failing test scores to holding states and localities accountable for making the systemic changes that improve student achievement.”* (Emphasis in original)

This symposium is going to focus on the heart of that sentence: how to help schools improve. While FEA’s work addresses four major areas: assessments, accountability, opportunity to learn/equity and capacity building/school improvement, I believe that ultimately the first three subjects are probably most important not as independent concerns, but as means for advancing the fourth: building capacity to help all students learn at a high level.

So, this afternoon, I’d like to start by setting the “background” for this symposium - describing the advocacy work that FEA has done in its own right to “Enhance School and Family Capacity to Support Student Success,” along with related work that I have done with Monty Neill on behalf of our own organizations, Citizens for Effective Schools (CES) and FairTest, and then other such work that CES has done on its own. Altogether, I will briefly describe eight initiatives. As soon as I finish that background,

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we will have the privilege of hearing from three outstanding researchers who will share with us their important work in this field.

II. Eight Important Initiatives

“Redefining Accountability: Improving Student Learning by Building Capacity”

The first, and most central, FEA document on “enhancing school and family capacity to support student success” is its 2007 report, “Redefining Accountability: Improving Student Learning by Building Capacity.” Preliminarily, what does “capacity-building” mean as used here? Essentially, while schools, families, communities, school districts and states have several different kinds of “capacities” - including money, real and personal property, organizational structures and human resources - the “capacity” we are chiefly focusing on improving is “human capacity”: the knowledge and skills of key stakeholders to help students learn, either directly by personal interactions with students, or indirectly, by enhancing the effectiveness of other stakeholders so that they can better help students learn.

In “Redefining Accountability,” FEA concentrates on two major categories of capacity-building: “professional development” and “family involvement.” For both, we divide the universe of Title I-funded schools into two groups: first, all such schools, and second, the subset of “high needs schools”, i.e., those with the “highest poverty and lowest achievement.”

Professional development

FEA recommends that all Title I-funded schools should be required to address the professional development needs identified by school staff, “so that all teachers will have the subject matter knowledge and pedagogical skills to effectively teach a challenging curriculum to diverse learners and foster a supportive learning climate.” Second, all such schools should be required to “[p]rovide time for staff discussion and collaboration during the school day.”

In addition, all “high needs schools” should be required to provide: a) intensive mentoring for beginning teachers, as well as mentoring for experienced teachers, “to meet their individual professional development needs;” b) to create career ladders for mentors and coaches, professional development specialists, curriculum developers, etc., so that classroom teachers will have the specialized support and assistance they need; and c) intensive training for school staff in how to reach out to parents and communities to engage their support for children’s behavioral development and academic achievement. In addition, all “high needs schools” should be required to provide training in “instructional leadership” for administrators, teachers, and specialized instructional support personnel to enhance their knowledge and skills to help other staff improve instruction and engage families in supporting their own children’s education. An amount equal to 20% of Title I funds allocated to each district should be used for such professional development activities, with states required to match that amount.

Family and community involvement and support

FEA distinguishes between “family involvement,” i.e. increasing families’ participation with the “school,” and “family support,” i.e., helping families support their children’s learning at home. In these areas, FEA’s recommendations include that: a) all Title I-funded schools should be required to involve “parents and families in meaningful ways in school policymaking and reform, and promote attendance at other school-related activities;” b) all “high needs schools” must provide adult literacy, parenting skills and other similar programs to strengthen families’ capacities to support their children’s academic achievement; and c) all such schools need to provide adult mentors from the community to offer positive role models and assistance for academic learning for low-performing students without family members available to perform these functions. In addition, FEA recommends that the amount required to be allocated for such programs in ESEA be increased from 1% to 5% of Title I funds.

“Proposed ESEA/NCLB Amendments”

Immediately after publishing “Redefining Accountability,” FEA turned to converting its recommendations into legislative form. Thus, the second document I’d like to mention is FEA’s “Proposed ESEA/NCLB Amendments” March 30, 2007. While this legislative draft is broader than the subject of this symposium, addressing ESEA’s “Statement of Purpose and Findings,” “State and Local Plans,” and “Accountability and Improvement,” it includes two extensive sections directly relevant here: proposed amendments to “Section 1118. Parental Involvement” and a new “Section 1119A. Professional Development.” Although this legislative language was drafted in 2007 in anticipation of ESEA’s being reauthorized at that time, since the reauthorization process has been delayed, these recommendations are still timely.

“Why the No Child Left Behind Act Needs to be Restructured to Accomplish Its Goals and How to do It”

Third, FEA’s “Redefining Accountability” report and “Proposed ESEA/NCLB Amendments” gain research support from my 2007 law review article: “Why the No Child Left Behind Act Needs to be Restructured to Accomplish Its Goals and How to do It.” This article includes discussion of, and citations to, expert support for the importance of “peer collaboration as the centerpiece of staff development,” mentoring for teachers and administrators, and family literacy and parenting skills programs.

The “Lead Act,” S.3469 and H.R. 5495, 111th Congress, 2d Session

Fourth, while FEA has chiefly emphasized the need for effective professional development for teachers, as noted earlier, it has also recognized the importance of providing “instructional leadership skills for school administrators,” especially those in “high needs schools.” Powerful recent research that we will hear about shortly also found the great significance of having a skilled, strong and committed principal to serve as the catalyst for change in chronically low-performing schools. Consistent with recognition of the vital need for skilled turnaround leaders and that there is currently a huge deficit in the number of leaders with the requisite knowledge and skills, CES has proposed that Congress create a National Education Leadership Academy to prepare experienced principals to lead the transformations of such schools. The Academy would develop a state-of-the-art framework for such leadership training and be brought to scale by regional centers.

A new bill, evolved from the CES proposal, was just filed June 9th by Senators Michael Bennet (Colorado) and Sherrod Brown (Ohio), and by Congressmen Donald Payne (New Jersey) and Russ Carnahan (Missouri): the “Lead Act,” S. 3469 and H.R. 5495. I believe that it would go a long way toward filling a critical need in ESEA: expanding the capacity of existing principals, and other district officials, to work with teacher and other school leaders, parents and communities to help greatly improve student learning in our most disadvantaged schools.

2008 Amendments Higher Education Act Teacher Quality Grants: required one year clinical preparation

Fifth, turning from enhancing capacity by improving professional development of existing staff to enhancing capacity by improving preparation of new educators, FEA recommended what became the 2008 clinical education amendments of the Higher Education Act’s Teacher Quality Grant program. Specifically, FEA recommended the provisions that require program grantees to provide: at least a one year, closely supervised clinical program, integrating methods and theory into clinical work, and ensuring that candidates are taught how to teach students higher-order thinking skills. These amendments are cited and explained in FEA’s October 6, 2008 Press Release: “Forum on Educational Accountability Successful in its Efforts to Improve the Higher Education Act, P.L. 110-315.” We understand that those statutory provisions have been instrumental in significantly shifting the attitudes of schools of education toward having teacher preparation become much more clinically based.

Given the very important advance in teacher preparation policy embodied in the 2008 Amendment’s shift toward clinical education, I was stunned to learn that the Teacher Quality Grant program is one of those that the 2011 budget proposes to eliminate through consolidation. Whether or not Teacher Quality Grants are retained in exactly their current form, we believe it is essential that the Government continue to give financial support, preferably increased, to building the capacity of new teachers through intensive clinical preparation, with the components described above.

Moving toward conclusion, I would like to mention as background three last documents. They look at enhancing capacity not only from the perspective of strengthening support for particular stakeholders - teachers, principals, or parents - but more broadly, from the perspective of school-wide reform.

School Inspectorates/School Quality Reviews

One potentially promising way to do this would be for states to establish a corps of accomplished and specially trained educators to provide independent, on-site, periodic reviews, evaluations and recommendations for helping Title I-funded schools improve. By establishing and training such a corps, states could help to meet two critical needs at once: 1) enhancing their own human capacity to understand how to help low-performing schools, and 2) being able to actually provide valuable insights and recommendations to help such schools do better.

Drawing on the initial work of Richard Rothstein, CES and FairTest have prepared a working paper, dated December 15, 2009, exploring how such a system, similar to the English school inspectorate of 1993-2005, could be adapted to ESEA and American federalism. In addition to the original paper, we

prepared an Executive Summary, likewise dated December 15, 2009, and, later, extensive answers to two sets of questions raised by representatives of the U.S. Department of Education. All four of these papers are referred to collectively as the sixth document. This inspectorate idea has been picked up by the Administration through its inclusion of “school quality reviews” for “turnaround schools” in its “Blueprint.”

“Common Elements of Successful School Turnarounds: Research and Experience”

Another way to think about how to increase capacity for making school-wide improvement is to try to identify all the different components that low-performing schools put in place in order to turn themselves around. As background for the May 19, 2010 House Education & Labor Committee Hearing, “Research and Best Practices on Successful School Turnaround,” I, with assistance from Monty Neill, addressed this in the seventh document, “Common Elements of Successful School Turnarounds: Research and Experience” (May 14, 2010). Relying heavily on some of the research you are about to hear described by other speakers, as well as other research and experience, we concluded that there were common strategies typically shared by successful turnarounds and described what they were, with citations to supporting authorities. These common strategies include peer collaboration, teacher mentoring, parenting skills programs, etc. - many of the policies mentioned above that CES and FEA have long been advocating. .

“A Research -and Experience - Based Turnaround Process”

Finally, after we completed the “Common Elements” paper, FEA turned to developing an alternative to the Administration’s “four school turnaround models.” On June 17, 2010, FEA issued that proposal, entitled: “A Research- and Experience -Based Turnaround Process.” This proposed “Turnaround Process” rests in substantial part on having schools designated and funded for “turnaround” adopt and adapt to their own circumstances the key components identified in the “Common Elements” paper. Thus, it too, the eighth document, relates directly to “enhancing school and family capacity to support student success.”

II. Conclusion

All of these documents either are already available at the FEA website, www.edaccountability.org, or at the CES website, www.citizenseffectiveschools.org, or are expected to be available on the CES website within a week. Please contact me if you cannot find them and need them in the interim.

I hope this has set a useful context and very much look forward to our next speakers!

