

# *Forum on Educational Accountability*

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September 20, 2007

The Honorable Edward Kennedy, Chair  
Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions  
317 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Michael Enzi  
Ranking Member, Senate HELP Committee  
379A Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Sirs:

As you lead the HELP Committee in preparing a bill to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the Forum on Educational Accountability (FEA) would like to urge you to reframe the law's approach to professional development in several vital respects. FEA is a working group seeking to implement the Joint Organizational Statement on NCLB, now signed by 140 national education, civil rights, religious, disability, parent, civic and labor organizations representing more than 50 million Americans.

FEA believes that the most productive federal role for professional development flows from addressing the following key assumptions. In Title I funded schools, many teachers need intensive enhancement of their knowledge and skills to be able to effectively teach a rich and challenging curriculum to diverse students, and many administrators need such enhancement to be able to lead successful school improvements and transformations. For professional development to be effective in meeting these needs, states, districts or vendors cannot simply provide it "to" the staff – staff members at the ground level must be heavily involved in designing and implementing the process, so that it both addresses their specific problems and gets them personally invested in making it work. The heart of professional development lies in various forms of collaborative activity among staff, not in the provision or purchase of consumables and services, however useful some of them may be at times.

All Title I funded schools, not just those failing the current Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) targets, need to implement effective professional development practices. Moreover, educators already know a great deal about what professional development practices are the most effective; not all are of equal value. Finally, providing successful, in-depth professional development that dramatically improves instruction and leadership requires allocating substantial time and effort at the school and district levels, as well as greatly beefing up state capacity to offer technical assistance. Providing such professional development requires a large financial investment.

Given these assumptions, we ask you to reframe Titles I and II in the following eight respects:

1. Specificity of Professional Development Requirements

Instead of authorizing a laundry list of permissible professional development activities, require districts and schools to implement the six key practices identified by FEA as most important, including peer collaboration, mentoring, regular allocated time, and establishing positions for mentors and other experienced and specialized staff to support teachers. (See the FEA legislative recommendations and our report, *Redefining Accountability*, for more details.)

2. Scope of Schools

Instead of limiting requirements to improve professional development practices to schools under “school improvement plans” and those seeking to meet other, often very limited “highly qualified teacher” criteria, require all Title I funded “high needs” schools to implement all six practices and the remaining Title I funded schools to implement the first two.

3. Timing

Instead of restricting the responsibility to improve professional development to schools that fail AYP, require Title I funded schools to plan and implement the key practices when they receive such funds.

4. Amount of Funding

Instead of expressly allocating only about 10% of Title I funds to professional development, require at least 20% of Title I funds to be allocated for this purpose plus an equal (20%) state match to implement the six key practices.

5. School Staff Involvement

Instead of providing professional development “to” the staff, involve teachers, principals and pupil services personnel in the design, implementation and evaluation of all professional development activities, so that professional development meets individual needs and the stakeholders buy into the approaches taken. Collaborative work among educators must be understood as central to building school capacity to serve all students well.

6. Increasing State Technical Assistance Capacity

In addition to mandating that an unspecified portion of “state reservations” of Title I funds be used for statewide technical assistance, set aside 2% of Title I specifically to build state capacity to provide technical assistance, including experienced educators to turn around very low-performing schools.

## 7. Reporting

Beyond focusing reporting requirements on compliance with AYP and teacher qualifications, require localities and states to report the steps they have taken to implement the six key professional development practices, obstacles they have encountered, the steps they've taken to overcome the obstacles and the results. Such narrative reporting can be an invaluable tool for inducing schools to make many of the systemic changes needed to improve teaching and learning.

## 8. Statutory Structure

Instead of dealing with professional development piecemeal in multiple sections of Title I, because of its critical importance to accomplishing NCLB's goals, add a separate chapter to Title I explicitly on professional development for Title I funded schools.

We hope that this comparison is helpful as you consider how to structure professional development. The Joint Statement and FEA's detailed recommendations on professional development, found in our legislative recommendations and in *Redefining Accountability*, are on the web at [www.edaccountability.org](http://www.edaccountability.org), or we would be pleased to send them to you electronically.

Sincerely yours,

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