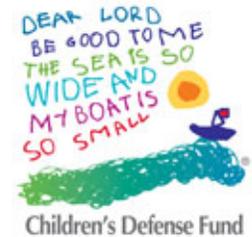


Children's Defense Fund

Priorities for ESEA Reauthorization



March 2011

Ensuring Quality Education for Our Nation's Most Vulnerable Children

More than 15 million children in rich America live in poverty. Almost 25 percent of children under five are poor, including 42 percent of Black children and 35 percent of Hispanic children. The best hope these poor children have of lifting themselves out of poverty is a quality education. Yet for too long, many poor children have been denied this opportunity. Inequities in education funding, resources and opportunities leave millions of poor and minority children in low-performing schools with inadequate facilities and ineffective teachers. The Children's Defense Fund (CDF) urges Congress to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 2011 and address the following priorities:

Funding Equity Among Schools, Districts and States

Title I of ESEA was created to ensure all children have a fair, equal and significant opportunity for a high-quality education by leveling the playing field for poor children. Currently, however, formulas that determine the distribution of Title I funds and the Title I "comparability requirement" are stacked against children struggling in areas of concentrated poverty. ESEA reauthorization must include a revised Title I formula to eliminate current inequities caused by the use of number weighting and state average per pupil expenditure factors. The "comparability loophole" must be eliminated within school districts to truly equalize state and local expenditures in Title I and non-Title I schools so poor children will not be subsidizing rich children. These changes together will help eliminate funding inequities which disproportionately affect poor and minority children.

Support for Full-Day Kindergarten

Congress should provide incentives to states to ensure all school districts offer full-day kindergarten to prevent children from missing an important foundational step on the K-12 road. Just 12 states currently require all districts to provide full-day day kindergarten, yet 43 states have approved K-12 Common Core Standards that will be hard to meet if the first step is broken.

Helping Vulnerable Children Stay in School and Succeed

Children who drop out of school often pay a heavy price later in life. Those most at risk of dropping out must be identified early and steps taken to help them graduate from high school. Incarcerated youths have exceptional educational needs that require special resources. Children in foster care need to be assured of educational stability to help them achieve.

- **Prevent children from dropping out and ensure they graduate from high school.** Poor and minority students are at greatest risk of dropping out. Schools must gather and report data on early indicators to identify students at increased risk of dropping out and intervene with potential dropouts. Data on achievement, graduation rates and school discipline must continue to be collected, disaggregated and publicly reported so disparities and gaps can be identified and addressed. A reauthorized ESEA must focus competitive grant programs on effective dropout prevention and target School Improvement Grants proportionately to high schools.

Increase educational support, continuity and stability for children in juvenile detention facilities and foster care. Part D of Title I should be strengthened to ensure children in detention get quality education while there and help with transition to their community schools. Congress should help ensure children who enter foster care or change placements remain in their same school or, if such placement is not in their best interest, promptly enroll in the school where they will be living.