



*Great Public Schools for Every Child*

**STATEMENT OF**

**REG WEAVER**

**PRESIDENT**

**NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION**

**BEFORE THE ASPEN INSTITUTE'S  
COMMISSION ON NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND**

**SEPTEMBER 25, 2006**

Good morning Secretary Thompson, Governor Barnes, and Members of the Commission. Thank you for the opportunity to join you this morning and share the views of the 3.2 million members of the National Education Association (NEA). We also appreciate the Commission previously inviting other educators, including several NEA members and leaders, to speak to you on issues including teacher quality, accountability, special education, rural education, and the impact of NCLB on high schools.

NEA is the largest professional association in the country, representing an array of public school educators—teachers and education support professionals, higher education faculty, educators teaching in Department of Defense schools, students in colleges of teacher education, and retired educators across the country. While our membership is diverse, we have a common mission and values based on our belief that a great public school is a basic right for every child.

Our members go into education for two reasons—because they love children and they appreciate the importance of education in our society. We want all students to succeed. Our members show up at school every day to nurture children, to help them reach their full potential, to be anchors in children’s lives, and to help prepare them for the 21<sup>st</sup> century world that awaits them. It is our members’ passion and dedication that informs and guides NEA’s work as we advocate for sound public policy that will help them achieve their goals.

You have asked me to share with you NEA’s views about the No Child Left Behind Act in terms of what we support and what changes need to be made as we approach the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. You have also asked me to comment on the implementation of the law to determine whether the reauthorization should amend any of the current regulations, guidance, or practices at the United States Department of Education (USED). I will attempt to address both questions in each of the following areas: Assessments, Accountability, and Teacher Quality.

NEA and its members have long supported the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). During the last reauthorization of ESEA, we supported the laudable goals of No Child Left Behind—closing achievement gaps, raising overall student achievement, and ensuring all students have a qualified teacher. We also supported a number of specific elements in the new law, including the targeting of Title I funds to the neediest schools and students; disaggregation of test data by subgroup; and programs for dropout prevention, after-school learning opportunities, and math and science education. We continue to support all of these elements.

NEA did not at any time oppose annual testing nor did we oppose passage of the No Child Left Behind Act. We did, however, make clear to Congress our objection to accountability systems based solely upon test scores. We also made clear that any tests used in an accountability system had to be valid and reliable, aligned with the curriculum, and designed to inform instruction. We also insisted that the system had to allow for accurate and fair measurement of test results.

During the debate on No Child Left Behind, we suggested two ways to craft a more workable, accurate, and fair accountability system. First, we suggested the use of multiple measures and methods to gauge student achievement and school quality to determine school effectiveness. Second, we suggested creating accountability systems that not only required certain proficiency levels but also measured growth in student achievement over time. We supported, and continue to support, these policies because while we know that all children can learn, we understand that not all children learn at the same rate or in the same way.

Our criticisms during initial debate and our continuing expressions of concern over implementation of the law are not rejections of the goals of No Child Left Behind. Nor do they reflect a desire to do away with the law. However, we do believe it's time for a change in ESEA.

In fact, I have made closing the achievement gaps one of NEA's highest priorities. It is not only something about which I care personally, it is also the right thing to do. As someone who taught for 30 years, I know that change doesn't happen overnight. But, I also know that if we are to achieve the change we seek, we cannot ignore the experiences of those working in our classrooms every day. Rather, we must translate the lessons we learn from our nation's educators into sound, workable policies that will help us meet our goals.

In July, NEA held its annual meeting where almost 9,000 delegates voted on NEA's priorities for ESEA reauthorization. They didn't vote to repeal or do away with NCLB. Instead, they voted on a comprehensive set of proposals designed to fix what's wrong with the law and add to it the kinds of initiatives that will make our common goals a reality. Our proposals address two main questions: What does it take to create a great public school in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? And what areas of No Child Left Behind should be amended to help create great public schools for every child? These two questions reflect our members' fundamental belief that education reform must include more than a measurement system and that it must include the essential programs, curriculum, and supports that students need so that they can in fact achieve and learn at higher levels. A copy of that report, NEA's Positive Agenda for the ESEA Reauthorization, is attached as Appendix I.

## **I. NEA Principles for Great Public Schools**

NEA believes that the federal government should continue to be a partner to states and localities in the effort to build and enhance our nation's public schools, where 90 percent of school-aged children are educated. Our report spells out what we believe to be the seven key components of a great public school:

- Quality programs and services that meet the full range of all children's needs so that students come to school every day ready and able to learn;

- High expectations and standards with a rigorous and comprehensive curriculum for all students;
- Quality conditions for teaching and lifelong learning;
- A qualified, caring, diverse, and stable workforce;
- Shared responsibility for appropriate school accountability by stakeholders at all levels;
- Parental, family, and community involvement and engagement; and
- Adequate, equitable, and sustainable funding.

The priorities detailed in the report are very consistent with the views of our general membership. In fact, our recent member poll found:

- 57 percent of our members want major changes to No Child Left Behind, 21 percent want minor changes, 17 percent favor repeal, and just 4 percent want to keep the law as it is;
- 95 percent of our members want the Association to be active in working to change the law, while only 4 percent disagree;
- 85 percent of our members believe there is too much reliance on standardized testing.

Our members rated highest the following proposals to improve NCLB:

- Use multiple measures instead of just tests (71 percent strongly favor);
- Measure student achievement over time instead of just the day of the test (70 percent strongly favor);
- Ensure that employee rights under contracts and laws are respected (65 percent strongly favor);
- Fully fund mandates (64 percent strongly favor);
- Restore the class size reduction program (63 percent strongly favor).

Let me add here that our members are very concerned about the unintended consequences of testing. A member from San Bernadino, California, says:

“Since the inception of NCLB, more children are being referred for tutoring because they do not read fast enough and are subsequently receiving lower grades

in reading.... It seems that NCLB has created an environment of quantification of reading with little regard to the quality of understanding of a piece of text.”

The views of the public about NCLB are quite consistent with the views of NEA members. The 38th Annual Poll of the Public’s Attitudes Toward Public Schools conducted by Phi Delta Kappa (PDK) and Gallup found that nearly six in 10 Americans who are familiar with the so-called No Child Left Behind Act believe it has had no effect on schools or has actually harmed them. More important, the public also agrees with NEA’s substantive concerns about the assessment and accountability provisions of NCLB:

- Two out of three respondents (69 percent) this year and a similar proportion in 2005 say that the use of a single state test as NCLB requires cannot provide a fair picture of whether or not a school needs improvement.
- NCLB bases performance on testing in English/language arts and math only. Four out of five respondents (81 percent) say that this will not give a fair picture of a school and that other subjects should be included.
- Nearly four out of five respondents (78 percent) say they are concerned that the focus on English/language arts and math will mean less emphasis on art, music, history, and other subjects.
- Four-fifths of respondents (81 percent) say the proper measure of performance is the improvement [or growth] made by students during the school year.

One of the main conclusions of the PDK/Gallup poll was that “[b]ecause the effort to comply with NCLB is driving instruction in most schools and dominating efforts to improve achievement, the concerns of such a large proportion of the public need to be addressed.”<sup>1</sup>

Let me also add our concerns, as shared by the public, about the narrowing of the curriculum as an unintended consequence of NCLB. Indeed, we recently signed onto a statement, “ARTS EDUCATION: Creating Student Success In School, Work, and Life,” along with some 50 other education and arts organizations that noted that “access to arts education in our schools is eroding” and stated that the “federal commitment to arts education must be strengthened so that the arts are implemented as a part of the core curriculum of our nation’s schools and are an integral part of every child’s development.”

## **II. Assessments**

We believe there are several areas of change needed to No Child Left Behind’s assessment provisions. While there is positive statutory language which requires assessments to be aligned with content standards, to be valid and reliable and consistent

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<sup>1</sup> “38th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public’s Attitudes Toward the Public Schools,” August 22, 2006, <http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/k0609pol.htm#nclb>.

with nationally recognized testing standards, the quality of statewide assessments generally does not meet the aspirations of the statutory language.

NEA strongly believes that there should be a much greater emphasis on examining the breadth and appropriateness of content standards, as well as reviewing whether statewide assessments are completely aligned—not just adequately aligned—with those content standards. In NCLB regulations, the USED decided that states could continue to use norm-referenced tests, so long as they were “augmented” with test items designed to ensure alignment with content standards. This early decision by the Department, we believe, put the cart before the horse. The Department should have focused first on reviewing and approving the states’ standards and assessment systems in order to ensure that the assessments were of the quality described by the actual statutory language. We are dismayed that five school years into the implementation of the law, only 10 states have received final approval from USED for their standards and assessment systems (Arizona, Delaware, Indiana, Maryland, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Utah, West Virginia). Proper construction of content standards and assessment systems is an essential prerequisite to any accountability system. This seems to have been lost because of the initial decisions made by USED not to review the states’ Title I plans in depth.

NEA members are frustrated by the fact that states—due to the lack of resources and the pressure to quickly comply with NCLB’s testing mandates—utilize tests which mainly emphasize students’ regurgitation of facts. We believe that in order to provide the greatest education possible for all students, public schools must offer a broad and rich curriculum, including arts, music, vocational education, and other subjects designed to engage students and promote enthusiasm for lifelong learning.

Our members recognize that the world has changed, and they want to be a part of delivering an educational experience that is relevant and meaningful. For America to remain competitive in a global economy, our students must be taught the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills that will allow them to compete in the workforce. NEA has been actively engaged in the Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills—a partnership of education organizations and leading businesses—to produce a series of recommendations about the types of skills students should learn in a 21<sup>st</sup> century school. The Partnership has also issued a set of recommendations regarding NCLB’s reauthorization, which we support and have attached for you as Appendix II.

The assessment systems also should better accommodate the diverse needs of students taking the statewide assessments. For example, large-scale test makers have been slow to enhance their testing protocols to include the various types of assessments and accommodations which are permissible under NCLB and necessary to ensure appropriate assessment of students with disabilities and English Language Learners. When a teacher reads a math test to a blind student—a permissible accommodation—the score of that student should not be invalidated or counted as a zero for purposes of “adequate yearly progress” (AYP) simply because the test maker has failed to include that accommodation in the testing protocols.

NEA also strongly believes that assessment systems should measure growth in individual student achievement. Assessments should not simply report how a student performs on a test one day out of the year. Assessments should be tools used to track whether there has been growth in an individual's mastery of skills and content. We applaud Secretary Spellings' decision to pilot a growth model project. Her decision signaled that she heard what our members have had to say, and we thank her for that. We also applaud her decision to allow states to propose their own growth models for peer review rather than prescribing a certain type of model. This flexibility was particularly welcome given that all states were testing prior to enactment of NCLB, and 15 states were already testing annually in grades three through eight. We have recently completed a policy brief on the growth model pilot program and the process used by the Department of Education to approve proposals by two states (North Carolina and Tennessee). This policy brief is attached as Appendix III.

Our members believe that measuring student growth over time will be more helpful than the current snapshot approach, which measures student achievement on one day out of the year. A growth model approach will more accurately reflect student learning and will help inform instruction.

In order for educators to make use of the assessment results, they must get them in a timely fashion. Current NCLB regulations do not require that test results be given to teachers in time for them to analyze the results and use the data to inform their choice of instructional methods or strategies in the classroom. This needs to be corrected in the reauthorization of ESEA.

Assessment data should be easy to understand and use. While NCLB requires that assessments be designed to yield "individual student interpretive, descriptive, and diagnostic reports," few states and districts have the capacity and resources necessary to produce meaningful reports that help parents and educators address students' needs. The federal government should pay much more attention to building the capacity of states and local education agencies (LEAs) to deliver these types of reports, as they are at the heart of using data to inform instruction and improve learning. This effort requires both increased financial assistance, as well as technical assistance, from the federal government.

States and localities also need enhanced data systems to accommodate growth model data. Data systems should make running a school easier, not more complicated. States and localities should have data systems which are not only compatible and able to comply with the basic requirements of NCLB but are also designed to assign students individual identifiers to track individual student growth, to house individual education programs (IEPs) for students with disabilities, to house information about the types of accommodations or other linguistic supports necessary for English Language Learners, and to produce the kinds of data reports required by law and needed to improve the delivery of education services to our students.

### **III. Accountability that Emphasizes Supporting Students and Educators**

We believe that accountability systems should be based upon multiple measures and methods, including local assessments, teacher-designed classroom assessments collected over time, portfolios and other measures of student learning, graduation/dropout rates, in-grade retention, percentage of students taking honors/advanced classes and Advanced Placement exams, and college enrollment rates. We strongly believe that the current one-size-fits-all system is unacceptable and that states need the flexibility to design systems that produce results, including deciding in which grades to administer annual statewide tests.

Accountability systems should reward success and support educators to help students learn. Toward this end, any improved accountability system should allow for use of growth models and other measures that assess student learning over time and recognize improvement on all points of the achievement scale. These measures should then be used as a guide to revise instructional practices and curricula, provide individual assistance to students, and tailor appropriate professional development for teachers and other school professionals. They should not be used to penalize teachers or schools.

I taught middle school science. As a veteran classroom teacher, I would welcome the opportunity to use my students' test results to guide my instructional practices. But I seriously question the logic of any system that mandates tests, but does not also mandate that the results of those tests be given in time to make any instructional adjustments. And if someone had then told me that my class the next year would be tested in the spring and that their scores would be compared to my students from last year, I would have said there was something inherently wrong with the system.

An accountability system designed to measure performance cannot compare apples and oranges. As a science teacher, I know that such a system will not yield any meaningful data. The implementation phase of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has highlighted a critical void in assessing student progress, measuring student progress over time, and providing the resources and tools that educators need to get the job done. In our opinion, it does not recognize that children are human beings, not cardboard cut-outs, and that teaching them is both an art AND a science.

One of our members from Rockford, Illinois has noted the illogical consequences of the current system:

“Jackson Elementary School teachers worked tirelessly in the first year of corrective action to bring up scores to the level set by NCLB. The students made incredible gains, unfortunately they missed AYP by less than one percent. This translates to one or two students that made gains, but not enough to bring them to the prescribed level. Therefore, they are in their second year of corrective action and labeled as a failing school.”

The current system simply fails to provide useful, timely data for diagnosing learning problems and facilitating instructional changes. Rather, students who are tested in one grade move on to the next grade, and their new teacher receives their test results—results that have virtually no relevance to the choices that new teacher will make in instructional strategies.

Not only is the current underlying system flawed, but implementation is also troubling. NCLB requires assessments to be built upon states' content standards, which in turn are to be aligned with statewide assessments. Yet, four and a half years into the law, only ten states have received full approval from the Department of Education for their content standards and assessment systems. To educators, this translates as a lack of interest in what is tested and whether the test content has actually been taught in the classroom. It appears that the goal is simply to administer tests and assign accountability labels. This is demoralizing to educators and contradictory to sound educational practice.

NEA is not alone in supporting an improved accountability system that allows for use of more accurate measures. We have led an effort to develop consensus on a broad set of principles for ESEA reauthorization. To date, 89 organizations have endorsed these principles, one of which calls for use of growth models as part of an accountability framework (See Appendix IV for the complete Joint Organizational Statement on NCLB with the list of signatories). In addition, nine bills that would allow use of growth models are currently pending in Congress.

Governors and state legislators have also called on a bipartisan basis for more flexibility to use growth models. The National Governors Association's (NGA) proposals for the ESEA reauthorization, issued in March 2006, state that, "Maximum flexibility in designing state accountability systems, including testing, is critical to preserve the amalgamation of federal funding, local control of education, and state responsibility for system-wide reform."

Similarly, the National Conference of State Legislatures issued a report in February 2005 calling on Congress to make substantial changes to the law. The report states:

"Administrators at the state, local and school levels are overwhelmed by AYP because it holds schools to overly prescriptive expectations, does not acknowledge differences in individual performance, does not recognize significant academic progress because it relies on absolute achievement targets, and inappropriately increases the likelihood of failure for diverse schools."

Allowing inclusion of growth models in NCLB's accountability system does not require abandoning the requirement that all students read and complete math problems on grade level. Quite the opposite is true. We believe that growth models hold greater promise to demonstrate whether a student is learning. They would provide a more accurate measure by giving schools credit both for moving a child from below basic to basic as well as moving a child from proficient to advanced. They would also offer a way to recognize highly effective schools that have an influx of students who are not performing at grade level.

Growth models will also help overcome the all-or-nothing approach of measuring Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Currently, a typical school has to meet 37 criteria to make AYP. A school that falls short on just one of the 37 is treated in the same manner as a school that fails all 37 criteria. (See tables below) Growth models that offer more common sense ways to measure student achievement, in particular for students with disabilities and English Language Learners (ELL), will ameliorate this problem.

**Current AYP Failure School: Miss 1 of 37**

|                               | <b>Reading</b> | <b>95%</b> | <b>Math</b> | <b>95%</b> | <b>Other indicator</b> |
|-------------------------------|----------------|------------|-------------|------------|------------------------|
| <b>All Students</b>           | Yes            | Yes        | Yes         | Yes        | Yes                    |
| <b>Black/African American</b> | Yes            | Yes        | Yes         | Yes        |                        |
| <b>Hispanic</b>               | Yes            | Yes        | Yes         | Yes        |                        |
| <b>Native American</b>        | Yes            | Yes        | Yes         | Yes        |                        |
| <b>Asian</b>                  | Yes            | Yes        | Yes         | Yes        |                        |
| <b>White</b>                  | Yes            | Yes        | Yes         | Yes        |                        |
| <b>ELL</b>                    | Yes            | Yes        | Yes         | Yes        |                        |
| <b>Poverty</b>                | Yes            | Yes        | Yes         | Yes        |                        |
| <b>Disability</b>             | Yes            | Yes        | Yes         | No         |                        |

**AYP Failure School: Miss All**

|                               | <b>Reading</b> | <b>95%</b> | <b>Math</b> | <b>95%</b> | <b>Other Indicator</b> |
|-------------------------------|----------------|------------|-------------|------------|------------------------|
| <b>All Students</b>           | No             | No         | No          | No         | No                     |
| <b>Black/African American</b> | No             | No         | No          | No         |                        |
| <b>Hispanic</b>               | No             | No         | No          | No         |                        |
| <b>Native American</b>        | No             | No         | No          | No         |                        |
| <b>Asian</b>                  | No             | No         | No          | No         |                        |
| <b>White</b>                  | No             | No         | No          | No         |                        |
| <b>LEP</b>                    | No             | No         | No          | No         |                        |
| <b>Poverty</b>                | No             | No         | No          | No         |                        |
| <b>Disability</b>             | No             | No         | No          | No         |                        |

However, the use of growth models will not completely eliminate this problem. If one subgroup makes AYP using a growth model, while another subgroup in the school does not make AYP (even using the growth model), the school will still be designated as failing AYP. In this instance, the use of the growth model doesn't eliminate the "all or nothing" approach.

There are differences among growth models, however, each with varying levels of complexity. Some states, like North Carolina, have had to implement a different growth formula for students not already proficient than for students who are proficient. This was necessary because of the federal requirement that proficiency be the end result of any growth trajectory. Obviously, such a model does not work for students who already are proficient.

We are also concerned that students entering the public school system in school year 2012-2013, for example, may not have enough time in the system to receive the kind of support or intervention necessary to allow all of them to be proficient by 2013-2014. Proficiency at any given moment in time is as much a reflection of what students actually know as it is the extent and degree to which they've been exposed to supports and programs designed to enable them to improve.

There is one important caution we would like to offer. Including a growth model as part of the AYP process is an improvement, but it will not be a panacea. Getting certain students on track to proficiency within a four-year timeline, as is required under North Carolina's approved model, will still be a challenge for many schools. In addition, complexities will continue to arise for some ELL students or certain students with disabilities who take alternate assessments. We will also continue to need much more research about growth models as well as technical assistance to states, local districts, and educators to evaluate and use data, evaluate the models themselves, and replicate successful efforts. The ultimate goal should be to help classroom educators use data to inform instruction.

We have additional concerns about supplemental services and school choice, which are referenced in Appendix I, our Positive Agenda for ESEA Reauthorization. Similarly, we have strong concerns about the lack of resources for and state capacity to deliver significant school improvement assistance. For example, NCLB created a \$500 million program specifically dedicated to school improvement efforts. To date, the Congress has not allocated any funding to this essential initiative. In fact, the President's fiscal year 2007 budget requests—for the first time since NCLB's passage in late 2001—any funds at all for the program.

#### **IV. Teacher Quality: Quality Educators in Every Classroom**

We could not agree more with the requirement that every child be taught by a qualified, certified, caring teacher. While we support the requirement that all students be taught by a highly qualified teacher, the implementation of this definition has created a maze of rules and guidance that are almost impossible to understand or navigate. To that end, NEA has produced and distributed approximately 50,000 "highly qualified" charts to help

our members understand how to comply with the law's requirements. (Attached as Appendix V.) The chart demonstrates the complexity of what happens when Congress tries to craft a federal definition to overlay 50 different state systems for licensing educators and determining whether they are highly qualified. We have and will continue to believe that a teacher who is fully licensed or certified by his or her state in a particular subject or area IS highly qualified. We, therefore, continue to be troubled by the loophole created by both the statute and the guidance from USED that holds some charter school teachers and some individuals going through an alternative certification program to a lesser standard than the "highly qualified" definition in the law.

One of the aspects of implementation that has been most troubling again involves an early decision made by USED not to review states' "highly qualified" definitions, but rather to conduct those reviews now as a function of their oversight and compliance responsibility. The result has been that states have received Title II Teacher Quality funding for four years, but many have been told recently that their definitions do not comply with NCLB. This is another example of putting the cart before the horse that has caused major disruption and high levels of anxiety among our members. For four years, our members were told by their states to comply with a set of requirements, only to be told—as the time for full compliance had almost elapsed—that they may have to meet a different set of requirements. This has been an unfortunate by-product of USED's poor implementation decisions made in the first year of implementing the statute.

We are supportive of efforts to strengthen teacher preparation, professional development, and licensing standards so that our nation's public school students are taught by professionals who have a firm rooting in both pedagogy and the content they are expected to teach. But those efforts ought to take place in states working in coordination with higher education institutions, licensing boards, and educators' associations. NEA helped establish the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education because we wanted to ensure that teachers entering the profession were well qualified and had the professional skills necessary to be outstanding teachers.

## **V. Funding**

For the first five years after NCLB took effect, the law was underfunded by more than \$40 billion, 25 percent below the authorized funding levels Congress set after considerable discussion and negotiation. Title I, perhaps the most important resource in helping to level the playing field of funding inequities across the country, has been underfunded by \$74 billion compared to the amounts needed to fully fund the statutory formula. Given the fact that states and localities already spend on average \$1,437 less on lower-income students than their more affluent peers, the underfunding by the federal government significantly exacerbates existing inequities. Children and educators need resources and tools to produce the kind of results all of us want. For a more detailed examination of the funding shortfalls, see Appendix VI.

## VI. NEA's Work to Close Achievement Gaps

It has been a major priority of mine to marshal NEA resources to assist our state and local affiliates in seeking policy changes at the state and local level to help close achievement gaps. Our work has included:

Committing more than \$6 million through NEA Foundation grants to close achievement gaps in urban school districts. Those grants fund programs with clear goals of improving literacy and math and science achievement; helping stabilize quality staff; and involving families and communities involved in the learning process. In two of the grant sites, Hamilton County, Tennessee, and Milwaukee, Wisconsin, school faculties use growth data to assess progress in reading and mathematics and determine appropriate interventions for instructional improvement. Reaching ambitious growth targets provides confidence and positive reinforcement to teachers and students who have large gaps to overcome. It also helps teachers and administrators set continuous benchmarks for progress and observe what works in changing instructional practice. For example, last year in Hamilton County, Tennessee, the five schools targeted under the NEA grant set and achieved a goal of 115 percent of the expected growth according to state standards per annum in reading and mathematics achievement. While these schools have not yet all reached high levels of achievement compared to the state's affluent schools, they have made greater gains than many of the top-ranked schools. By significantly accelerating the rate of achievement, low-performing schools can close achievement gaps, while all schools continue to make progress.

Delivering trainings and products on a variety of instructional issues, including closing the achievement gaps, to our members and leaders across the country. Sponsoring statewide National Board Certified Teacher summits focused on recruiting and retaining accomplished teachers in high-need, high-poverty schools with low student achievement.

Developing and sharing with all NEA affiliates our *Closing Achievement Gaps: An Association Guide*—a blueprint for closing the gaps.

Awarding grants to ten states (Colorado, Minnesota, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Missouri, New Mexico, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Pennsylvania) focused on closing gaps through changes in state policies such as early childhood education, coaching for new principals, statewide teacher induction programs, and revised state professional development guidelines. We have also provided grants to eight states for their work to encourage highly skilled teachers to move to and stay in high-need schools.

Continuing the partnership established in 2005 with the Tom Joyner Foundation to increase the percentage of fully-certified minority teachers in targeted high-needs communities. The Teacher Licensure Scholarship Program works with

Historically Black Colleges and Universities to assist minority teachers in obtaining full licensure. To date, the Foundation has provided financial assistance and NEA has provided technical assistance and expertise to nearly 300 teachers in seven states.

Developing training modules on closing the achievement gaps for use in community conversations. This work has been piloted in Mississippi and Florida and will be used by the end of this program year in three of the seven states that have been awarded grants to convene community conversations.

Surveying, through the Center for Teacher Quality, teachers in three states (Kansas, Arizona, and Ohio) to identify the necessary working conditions to achieve optimum teaching and learning environments.

Developing online professional development focused on helping teachers become more effective with a diverse student body.

Awarding grants to recognize model teacher retention program through a Saturn-UAW-NEA partnership.

Launching and maintaining a user-friendly, interactive Web site to help our affiliates and the general public research and locate resources about the achievement gaps ([www.achievementgaps.org](http://www.achievementgaps.org)).

In the near future, NEA will develop a program guide outlining effective support strategies for minority candidates pursuing National Board Certification, with the goal of increasing the percentage of minority National Board Certified teachers in high-need schools. In the next school year, we will convene community conversations in seven states as part of our Public Engagement Project (PEP) initiative. We will also develop additional educational materials for state affiliates on teaching and working conditions, and we will be announcing additional grants for 2006–07. Finally, NEA is building a database to identify policies, practices, and programs that help close the achievement gaps. I would be happy to share additional information on any of our projects with the committee.

## **CONCLUSION**

On behalf of all 3.2 million members of the National Education Association, I want to thank you for this opportunity and for your leadership and commitment to hosting a national dialogue about ESEA/NCLB. I encourage every member of this Commission to talk to educators about their experiences. Ask them about their frustrations. But more importantly, ask them about their successes. They all have stories to relay about kids achieving and kids succeeding. When you ask for their stories, you'll get as clear a sense as I have that they all want every one of their students to realize their full potential. And that educators go above and beyond the call of duty time and time again to make that goal a reality for America's public school students.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide input. I hope the Commission will take time to read our policy report and agenda for ESEA reauthorization. We believe it embodies our firm belief that great public schools are a basic right for every child.