

**THE COUNCIL OF CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICERS**

**Statement of Valerie Woodruff, CCSSO President to**

**The Aspen Institute**

**Commission on No Child Left Behind**

**September 25, 2006**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today regarding implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act and pending reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. My name is Valerie Woodruff. I am the Secretary of Education in the State of Delaware and President of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). I am pleased to be with you today on behalf of CCSSO to talk about our perspective and priorities.

CCSSO is at a key transition point in its leadership and in its work on ESEA reauthorization. Earlier this month, I was thrilled to announce that Gene Wilhoit, Commissioner of Education for the State of Kentucky, will be joining CCSSO as Executive Director, following five years of great service from our current Executive Director, Tom Houlihan. As President of CCSSO I can tell you that it is clear from the perspectives of Commissioner Wilhoit, CCSSO's Board of Directors, and its entire membership that ESEA reauthorization is and will be one of our central issues of national action in the coming months and (likely) years.

To that end our incoming President, Elizabeth Burmaster, Superintendent of Public Instruction in the State of Wisconsin, has been leading a CCSSO Task Force on ESEA Reauthorization. (Libby and several other state chiefs have had the opportunity to testify to this Commission previously during the course of your work.) CCSSO's Task Force consists of chiefs and other state education agency officials – from eastern and western states, northern and southern states, small and large states, urban and rural states, red and blue states. This Task Force has worked with input from the broader CCSSO membership and core partners during the last year to develop CCSSO's Policy Statement on ESEA Reauthorization – the core principles that we believe should guide reauthorization. We will be rolling out CCSSO's ESEA Reauthorization

Policy Statement next month (on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC). But I am happy to have this opportunity to preview some of our core principles with you today.

As an initial matter, you may have noticed that I have framed my comments as being about "NCLB" implementation and "ESEA" reauthorization. That is purposeful. We do not currently think of the No Child Left Behind Act as being about IASA reauthorization (from the prior Improving America's Schools Act). Similarly, this reauthorization should build on NCLB to focus on the kind of state-federal partnership that is appropriate *now*, at this point in education reform.

What does that mean? At the time of NCLB's enactment, state movement toward standards-based reform was uneven. NCLB mandated, as a requirement of receipt of federal funds, nationwide state action on several foundations of standards-based reform, based on specific minimum requirements. Today, based in part on NCLB, those foundations are widely in place, including state standards, assessments, data systems, accountability systems, teacher quality requirements, and more. There is room for continuous improvement in all of these areas, but we should all clearly understand and appreciate the substantial work that has occurred in states across the country to put these systems in place. Now, the question is how do we build on and invest in these systems to promote innovation and advancement in a manner that can best improve student achievement and close achievement gaps.

To date, NCLB implementation has not fully supported or promoted that kind of innovation. States are ready to move beyond NCLB. We are working to: build more valid, reliable accountability systems that include growth as well as status; develop individual student identifier data systems that can follow student progress through school and into college; more accurately define graduation rates; align high school standards with college and work expectations and establish default college ready curricula; appropriately connect teacher compensation and advancement to student achievement; establish early warning systems regarding student and school performance; promote individualized instruction and individual learning plans for underperforming students; and more. I am pursuing all of these efforts simultaneously in my state. Yet too often, we find ourselves swimming against the current of federal law, rather than

being able to leverage it to focus on what matters most. For example, approximately half of all states have worked to develop improved assessment systems for limited English proficient students. This is a growing and important population, and the state of knowledge with regard to LEP assessment has much room for improvement. Yet states that made an effort here but have work remaining were threatened by the U.S. Department of Education with either immediate or future withholding of federal funds. I on the other hand made the decision not to move in this area in part because it has been unclear what the Department wanted and would accept, and the Department fully approved my assessment system. There has got to be a better way to focus on incentivizing leadership rather than command and control. Hopefully, the newly announced LEP Partnership is a step in the right direction.

At this stage in standards-based reform, ESEA reauthorization must make innovation the hallmark of federal law and of the state-federal partnership, and focus attention on what matters most. This requires action in several areas:

1. ESEA reauthorization should retain its focus on accountability for outcomes in student achievement, but it should provide greater freedom for state innovation in accountability, assessment, and other matters to ensure the most valid, reliable systems and to value state judgment regarding what models are most educationally sound. For example, it is CCSSO's belief and that of many states that the use of growth models for accountability (when properly constructed) can more validly measure school performance and target interventions by following the progress of the same students over time and at all levels of achievement. For NCLB and other federal programs to support state efforts to establish annual, vertically aligned assessment systems and individual student identifier, longitudinal data systems that together can follow the progress of each individual student, and then to not use these systems to make more accurate, educationally sound accountability determinations is a waste. Many states, including my state, made great efforts to build and propose such growth based accountability systems. Yet under current NCLB implementation, only two states were approved to use these models. And now there is a cap of eight more, regardless of what work states have done and how many have done it. That is not innovation; that is tokenism.

2. ESEA reauthorization must provide greater support for state capacity. Even though federal law generally requires *state* standards, *state* assessments, *state* accountability determinations, *state* data reporting, *state* systems of rewards and consequences, and more, federal funding generally treats states as administrative overhead to be minimized instead of a core player in standards-based reform. This must change. In particular, states have a vital role to play in using the foundations of standards-based reform that are now in place to provide support, technical assistance, and interventions in persistently underperforming districts and schools, and to help use data and target interventions to improve student achievement and close achievement gaps. This requires systemic solutions, and states can and must lead the way.
  
3. ESEA reauthorization must provide a greater focus on research and development, with an eye on what matters for state policy and what we know about what works. This is an obvious role for national action and federal leadership. Yet to date the investment has been modest and has not resulted in significant returns.

There is more to say, but I will save it for the rollout of our CCSSO ESEA Reauthorization Policy Statement. Meanwhile, I appreciate this opportunity to speak with this NCLB Commission, and I look forward to your questions. Thank you.