

## **“Fixing NCLB” in the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)**

The Obama administration’s [blueprint](#) to Congress calls for a broad overhaul of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law (the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, or ESEA), and urges bipartisan support for reshaping the federal role in education and redressing controversial NCLB provisions around teaching, assessments, standards, and curriculum. Currently, NCLB affects each of the nation’s nearly 100,000 public schools, and President Obama’s plan aims to strike a careful balance by retaining some of its key features, including its requirement for annual reading and math assessments, while proposing other far-reaching changes.

The blueprint is organized around three major goals for reauthorization:

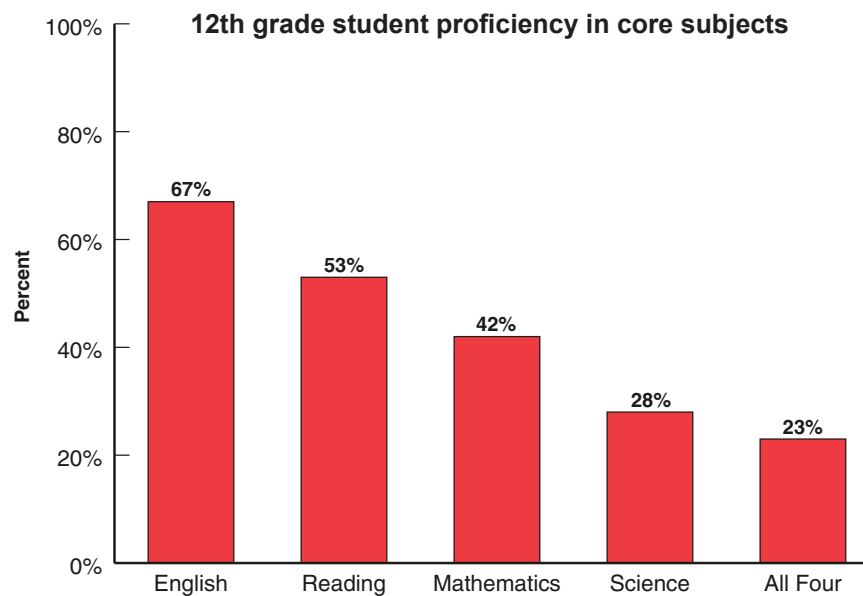
- Support college- and career-ready standards and prepare college- and career-ready students.
- Reward academic excellence and growth at the school, district, and state levels.
- Increase local control and flexibility while maintaining the focus on equity and closing achievement gaps.

These goals have derived in part from a year of unprecedented federal investment in education through the Race to the Top and Investing in Innovation programs that are inspiring districts and states to tackle ambitious and unprecedented reform agendas. Race to the Top, in particular, is the largest single federal investment in school reform ever, and represents a radically different approach to education improvement.

### **Blueprint Background and Details**

The Obama administration’s proposed overhaul of ESEA responds to national concerns around the country’s competitiveness. Proposed changes would set a goal that, by 2020, all students will graduate high school ready to succeed in college and the workplace, in turn supporting the president’s aim for America to once again lead the world in college completion rates. These policy changes align with BHEF’s College Readiness, Access, and Success Initiative (CRI).

Achieving this goal will require the nation to address the alarmingly low levels of college and workforce readiness exhibited by high school graduates in core academic subjects on a very ambitious timeline. Currently, only 23 percent of high school students are proficient in the four core subjects of English, reading, math, and science.



Source: ACT (2009). *College Readiness Benchmarks*

While Race to the Top remains a critical example of how to spur the nation to improve education, the competition has faced many detractors. Opposition to this reform has been focused on concerns that the recently announced common core standards are too low or that such involvement from the federal government represents too much involvement in local affairs. Critics also have argued that the encouraged reforms are unproven or have been unsuccessful in the past.

Despite these criticisms, the ESEA reauthorization blueprint aims to build on the proposed reforms advocated as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) and implemented through the Race to the Top competition. The blueprint's NCLB changes include:

Key Provision	NCLB	Proposed ESEA
Target Date	2014	2020
Goal	All students meet proficiency targets set by state	All students graduate high school college and work ready
Standards	States charged with setting own standards for math and reading	States must adopt common core standards in math and reading, or develop their own standards that meet college and career readiness benchmarks  Allows states the flexibility to assess students in other subjects
Accountability Measures	Measured through 8th grade  Accountability based on one-time snapshot of students' proficiency  Pass/fail school grading system	Measures through high school  Measures individual students' academic growth over time  Bases school performance on additional indicators, including pupil attendance, graduation rates, and learning climate  Rewards top performers and lessens federal intervention

Under the administration's blueprint, in order to be eligible to receive Title 1 funds, states would be required to align their standards for reading and mathematics with college and career-ready expectations, either by participating in the Common Core State Standards Initiative led by the National Governor's Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) or by upgrading their existing standards. BHEF has signed on as a supporter of [the Common Core State Standards Initiative](#).

The blueprint provides incentives to encourage states to adopt the common core standards. In addition to requiring annual assessments and accountability measures for student performance in reading and mathematics, the blueprint would allow states flexibility to test in other areas, including science, as BHEF and others have previously called for. It does not, however, explicitly require that states develop and adopt science standards.