

Council of Chief State School Officers

Recommendations for the President-Elect's Education Transition Team and Congress

The Background and Process for Development of the Recommendations

During the Council of Chief State School Officers' (CCSSO) Annual Policy Forum in November 2008, CCSSO President Ken James (AR) announced the formation of a Presidential Transition Task Force charged with developing immediate recommendations for the consideration of President-elect Obama's Education Transition Team, Congress, and the incoming U.S. Secretary of Education. These recommendations were to include immediate (first 100 day) recommendations as well as longer term recommendations.

The Task Force formally met on December 1, in Washington, DC. Following a half day internal session, the Task Force members met with the President-elect's Education Transition Team and senior congressional staff for a larger group discussion. The Task Force was encouraged by the Education Transition Team's openness to dialogue and their desire to listen to ideas from CCSSO for improving public education. Using CCSSO's national membership (representing public officials who head departments of elementary and secondary education in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, the Department of Defense Education Activity, and five U.S. extra-state jurisdictions), the Task Force's recommendations have been finalized and shared with the President-elect's Education Transition Team and Congress.

The Task Force is calling for a new, collaborative state-federal partnership with the Obama Administration and Congress, specifically through recommendations that will: (1) promote innovation and continuous improvement; (2) strategically invest in state and local capacity building; (3) accelerate change through an improved focus on teachers; and (4) promote better integration and coordination of federal child-focused programs.

CCSSO Presidential Task Force members

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 Ken James (AR), Chair
 Gavin Payne (CA)
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Judy Jeffrey (IA)
 Alexa Posny (KS)
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The formal list of the recommendations and an example of each is provided below.

Recommendations

CCSSO believes every student should have access to a high quality public education. Accordingly, the nation's chief state school officers are continuing to lead efforts to dramatically improve student achievement and close achievement gaps. The foundations for comprehensive standards-based reform are now in place, nationwide, and state education agencies (SEAs) are now implementing next generation systems of accountability and assessment, new models of teacher effectiveness and school improvement, and innovative support strategies for children, from birth through adolescence, to ensure all students are equipped for success in college or the workplace after graduation.

Implementing the next generation of standards based reform requires bold thinking and a revitalized state-federal partnership—based on mutual trust and a commitment to work collaboratively—to improve opportunities for all students. In the Obama Administration's—and Congress'—development of a new education agenda, chief state school officers respectfully submit recommendations in four core areas. In the document submitted to Obama's Education Transition Team, each of the four recommendations includes short term opportunities (e.g. regulatory/administrative and early legislation such as an economic stimulus package) and longer term legislative and leadership opportunities to accomplish these objectives.

I. PROMOTE STATE INNOVATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Federal education laws and leadership should encourage, not stifle, innovation and provide a policy environment that supports multiple educationally sound models rather than enforcing narrow compliance with a single federal approach. The federal government must stimulate and support states to build on the foundations and lessons of standards-based reform efforts to develop and implement more innovative and powerful strategies to enhance teaching and learning, along with more valid and effective accountability and school improvement initiatives. An example of a short term opportunity for the incoming Administration is to invite states to propose innovative and educationally sound models of assessment and accountability for approval through the U.S. Secretary of Education's existing waiver authority.

II. STRATEGICALLY INVEST IN STATE AND LOCAL CAPACITY BUILDING

The federal government must provide greater support for states and districts to ensure that each and every student has access to effective teachers, resources, and interventions necessary to achieve to his/her full potential. This means that states must have the ability to provide better technical assistance to districts and schools, to turn around consistently underperforming districts, and to empower districts to become agents of change in underperforming schools. An example of a short-term opportunity under this recommendation is to include resources in the economic stimulus package for school infrastructure and green technology, including ubiquitous broadband deployment reaching into rural areas.

III. ACCELERATE CHANGE THROUGH AN IMPROVED FOCUS ON TEACHERS

The improved preparation, induction, mentoring, and continued support of educators are critical to improving student achievement and closing achievement gaps. Federal, state, and local policies must support teachers and leaders along the career continuum from aspiring through retiring. By redesigning the entire system of educator development and supports including recruitment, selection, induction, mentoring, certification, licensing, and professional development, high quality educators will be effective at all levels, dramatically improving the achievement of each and every child. This comprehensive system of educator development cannot be formed in a vacuum, but instead must align, coordinate, and support sound policies and practices at the federal, state, and local levels. An example of a short-term opportunity under this recommendation is to support passage of an enhanced Teacher Excellence for All Children Act (TEACH) that will ensure large scale and systemic implementation at the state level to recruit successful teachers for high need subjects and schools, increase performance-based teacher and leader assessments, establish model induction systems, increase mentoring, expand loan forgiveness, promote career ladders, and improve and expand professional development.

IV. PROMOTE BETTER INTEGRATION AND COORDINATION OF FEDERAL CHILD-FOCUSED PROGRAMS

The federal government must improve integration and coordination of all federal programs focused on serving children, including ESEA, IDEA, the Perkins Act, the Higher Education Act, Workforce Investment Act, and related early childhood, health and social services programs. Federal children's programs should work together as a seamless whole to address each student's individualized needs. Disjunction between programs starts with poorly conceived relationships between related laws and is exacerbated by uncoordinated and imperfect implementation strategies. These defects lead to poor execution, wasted resources significant administrative and reporting challenges and suboptimal results for children and youth. An example of a short-term opportunity under this recommendation is to reorganize the U.S. Department of Education to make certain that the leadership in key offices work together to ensure better coordination.

Next Steps

The recommendations above will carry CCSSO through to the Legislative Conference in Washington, DC, March 8–10, 2009, where chiefs will deliberate the longer-term advocacy agenda—an agenda consistent with the direction outlined above and with CCSSO's four strategic policy areas. For more information, please contact Scott Frein, Director of Advocacy, at 202-336-7010 or visit <http://www.ccsso.org/content/pdfs/PresidentialTransitionPolicyRecommendations.pdf> for a complete list of policy recommendations.