

Talking Points
The Obama Administration's NCLB waiver plan
September 23, 2011

Background: The White House has outlined how states can get relief from provisions from ESEA (NCLB) in exchange for serious state-led efforts to close achievement gaps, promote rigorous accountability and ensure that all students “are on track to graduate college and career-ready.”

As of today, states can request flexibility from specific NCLB mandates that are **stifling reform**, but must meet certain requirements to do so. They must address:

- The transition of students, teachers, and schools to a system aligned with college and career ready standards for all students;
- The development of differentiated accountability systems; and
- The development of comprehensive principal and teacher evaluation and support systems.

States can apply by November 14 if their applications are prepared, or they can wait until February for the second wave if they need more time to align/develop plans. President Obama said that the purpose is not to give states and districts a reprieve from accountability, but rather to unleash energy to improve our schools at the local level.

Talking Points:

Overall:

- NEA supports the overall package because students, educators, school districts, and states all **need relief as quickly as possible** from the undue burdens cause by the law and its regulations.
- It is important to recognize that this package is an important interim step for relief because waivers alone cannot address all the problems with NCLB.
- Let there be no mistake, working with Congress to make comprehensive changes during the reauthorization process remains the ultimate goal.

The waiver proposal recognizes the reality in states and local districts

- Teachers and educators closest to classrooms understand best what students need.
- NEA members and leaders asked that school improvement not be limited to four narrow models, and this proposal allows for additional locally developed strategies that focus on innovation, and professional judgment tailored to the student population.
- The proposal preserves more flexibility for the rural districts.

The proposal helps set more realistic goals

- NEA members and leaders along with many thoughtful educators asked for the punitive AYP system to go away, and this proposal does exactly that. It requires states to set “ambitious, but achievable” annual measurable objectives instead of requiring 100% of students to meet an arbitrary benchmark on a particular day of the school year.
- The proposal gives more flexibility to local needs and promotes more school district efficiency, collaboration and strategic planning.

Maintains a commitment to civil rights and to student success, with a focus on children of color and those in poverty

- The proposal removes harmful labeling of schools and instead recognizes the lowest 5% of Title I schools as the nation's "Priority Schools."
- It maintains a strong commitment to students of color and students from poor communities, focusing on schools with persistent achievement gaps.
- NEA members and leaders and our allies in the education and civil rights community called for a continuing commitment to accountability to and for students, and this package preserves a commitment to closing the achievement gaps by continuing to disaggregate data.

There is stronger recognition of the profession of teaching and its complexities

- The proposal recognizes collective bargaining as a process for innovation and positive change.
- It respects educators by creating time for planning and piloting **prior** to requiring implementation of teacher and principal evaluation systems, by requiring multiple components for the systems not just student growth, and by requiring that only valid measures be used in such systems.
- It focuses on better, stronger professional development that is tied to supporting great teaching and in sync with teacher evaluation systems.
- It respects the views and judgments of teachers by guaranteeing them a seat at the decision-making table.

There is an improved process.

- The applications for waivers will not be processed behind closed doors.
- The package calls not only for civil rights organizations and parents to be involved, but students themselves.



Great Public Schools for Every Student

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 23, 2011

CONTACT: Sara Robertson
(202) 822-7823, srobertson@nea.org

Obama, Duncan to provide relief from many NCLB restrictions *Van Roekel: Flexibility from rigid rules welcomed by educators*

WASHINGTON— President Obama announced a plan today to provide relief to states from many of NCLB’s more onerous provisions, such as meeting Adequate Yearly Progress requirements and other deadlines.

“President Obama has taken a welcome step forward with this plan. It sets much more realistic goals for schools, while maintaining ESEA’s original commitment to civil rights, high academic standards and success for every student,” said NEA President Dennis Van Roekel.

“Teachers have been sounding the alarm on NCLB’s test-label-punish approach for more than 10 years. Now, there is an opportunity to move forward with real reform, especially for the most disadvantaged students,” said Van Roekel.

“Educators want commonsense measures of student progress, freedom to implement local ideas, respect for their judgment and the right to be a part of critical decisions,” said Van Roekel. “This plan delivers.”

Van Roekel notes that the waiver plan provisions get away from labeling schools as failures. “Instead, the Department of Education has adopted a term NEA also uses for low performing schools: [Priority Schools](#). The waivers recognize the Title I schools that need the most help—and the students they serve—as a federal priority.”

Last week, Van Roekel completed a back-to-school tour for a first-hand view of how teachers are collaborating with key education stakeholders to significantly improve student learning and success. “I’ve been visiting schools across the country and I know that teachers and education support professionals care deeply about their students and they want policies that work to benefit students,” said NEA President Dennis Van Roekel. “President Obama and Secretary Duncan have crafted a path that breaks through the logjam of bad NCLB policy and opened the way to better ideas that will work for students and schools.”

“NEA will continue to work with Congress and push for comprehensive [NCLB reauthorization](#),” said Van Roekel.

See NEA’s letter to Sec. Duncan requesting regulatory relief for K-12 schools [here](#).

Follow us on twitter at www.twitter.com/NEAMedia

###

The National Education Association is the nation’s largest professional employee organization, representing 3.2 million elementary and secondary teachers, higher education faculty, education support professionals, school administrators, retired educators and students preparing to become teachers.

QUOTABLE QUOTES

NEW YORK TIMES

Obama to Waive Parts of No Child Left Behind

September 23, 2011

“Students and schools need relief from No Child Left Behind and from the high stakes tests, so this looks like a good move,” said Dennis Van Roekel, president of the [National Education Association](#), the country’s largest teachers union. “But this is just a short-term solution. We still need Congress to rewrite the law.”

WALL STREET JOURNAL

Obama Rewrites 'No Child' Law

September 23, 2011

Dennis Van Roekel, president of the **National Education Association**, the biggest teachers union, said in an interview that teachers would welcome the relief from the existing law's emphasis on testing, and that his union was comfortable using test results as part of evaluations.

"Every teacher ought to be able to demonstrate evidence of student learning," Mr. Van Roekel said. The union nonetheless believes no current standardized test is reliable and valid.