



Statement on ESEA Reauthorization

December 10, 2015

With President Obama signing the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) this morning, the long journey to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act is finally over. This reauthorization, eight years overdue, completely overhauls the 2002 law (commonly called No Child Left Behind) and has three major implications for Washington's school districts.

First, schools will no longer be required to send August "failure" letters to parents that were required if the school did not have 100% of its students meet test score-based benchmarks in 35 separate demographic and special needs categories. That was an impossible standard to meet and served to underscore the silliness of NCLB.

Second, districts will no longer be required to set aside 20% of their Title I monies for school choice transportation and supplemental educational services. These funds are mainly used - and often misused - by private tutoring companies disconnected from school programs. Large urban districts and other districts with challenging demographics were forced to move millions of dollars that now can be used to help kids who struggle learn to read and do math in their own school.

Third, regulations requiring "highly qualified teachers" in every classroom have been relaxed. HQT rules, although well intended, have made it difficult if not impossible to staff small, rural schools or to find teachers anywhere with endorsements in multiple subjects. HQT, thankfully, is now a thing of the past.

In addition to these changes, ESSA does lots more. In fact, reading all 1059 pages of the bill will uncover many things to like - and dislike - in the document. Immediately, the US Departmental of Education will begin writing administrative code to accompany the bill. NSBA will be following this closely, as will WSSDA. That watchdog effort will continue into and through the 2016-17 year as Washington state revises its school accountability system with new autonomy to measure what our state--and not the federal government--wants our schools to accomplish.

So, December 10, 2015, will go down as an important day in the history of K-12 education in the United States. ESSA redefines—and significantly lessens--the federal role in education, returning school governance to its state and local roots. Notably, in Washington, all twelve of our representatives and senators voted in favor of ESSA. Particularly, thanks needs to be extended to Senator Patty Murray, who, as ranking member of the Senate committee that deals with education, was a main author of this

bipartisan bill. In addition, Representative Cathy McMorris-Rodgers, fourth in leadership among House Republicans, helped to get the bill through the House in a highly contentious political atmosphere.

Finally, thanks to the many of you who, through the years as FRN members, have called, emailed or written Congress in support of reauthorization. The long journey that began in 2008 ended today. And for that we are pleased.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alan Burke". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Alan Burke

WSSDA Executive Director