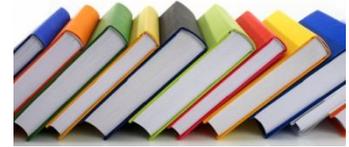


Friday Focus



From the desk of Laura Weakland

Reading Elementary

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Quote of the week: *“The greatest sign of success for a teacher ... is to be able to say, ‘The children are now working as if I did not exist.’” -- Maria Montessori*

I hope you've had a great week of learning!

This “Friday Focus” memo allows me to share my professional reflections on something I am reading or currently learning. This concludes a five-part series on **A Blueprint for Reform: The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)**. Part one of the series focused on the topic of college and career-ready students. Part two focused on great teachers and leaders in every school. Part three focused on equity and opportunity for all students. Part four focused on raising the bar and rewarding excellence. This last part of the focus series will discuss the topic of **promoting innovation and continuous improvement**.

Background of ESEA/The Blueprint for Reform

The ESEA was signed into law in 1965 and was considered the most far-reaching federal legislation affecting education. The latest reauthorization was passed in 2001 and was named No Child Left Behind (NCLB). NCLB actually expired in 2007, but reauthorization has failed to occur since then. In 2010, the Obama administration issued a blueprint for reform.

Promoting Innovation

In his cover letter for the Blueprint, President Obama talks about the need to support innovative approaches to teaching and learning, as well as, the need to provide a world-class education to all students in this country. There are two approaches regarding innovation that will be funded under this proposal: “fostering innovation and accelerating success” and “supporting, recognizing, and rewarding local innovations.”

Under the first strategy, the Investing in Innovation Fund (i3) will provide additional grants for “implementation and investment in, innovative and evidence-based practices, programs, and strategies that significantly improve outcomes.” To-date the administration has funded 92 projects, of which none have a direct impact on educational institutions in Michigan. The largest projects funded thus far are for Teach for America and the KIPP Foundation and revolve around teacher and principal effectiveness. Over 80% of the funding thus far has been for students considered “high-need.” A rigorous 3-tiered evidence framework will direct the highest level of funding. Grantees will also have to secure matching funds from the private sector.

The second strategy focuses on support of local innovation by creating “fewer, larger, more flexible funding streams” around areas integral to student success. Local school districts will also have fewer restrictions on the blending of federal education program funds.

Continuous Improvement

The last section of part five of the blueprint discusses supporting student success and continuous improvement for all. It discusses the need to prioritize the tackling of persistent achievement gaps

and shared responsibility on the part of schools, the community, and parents. It focuses on models that work to keep students safe, supported, and healthy. Lastly, it supports engaging families and the community in the education of their children.

Links for Additional Information:

- <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/blueprint/faq/reward-excellence.pdf>
- <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/innovation/index.html>
- http://www.ascd.org/publications/newsletters/policy_priorities/vol18/num01/The_Never-Ending_Story_of_ESEA_Reauthorization.aspx
- <http://www.nsba.org/Advocacy/Key-Issues/NCLB/Blueprint-Summary.pdf>