

Oral Testimony

Presented by
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Good morning. My name is Jim Kohlmoos, president of Knowledge Alliance. It is my pleasure and honor to present this testimony on behalf of the Knowledge Alliance. We appreciate this opportunity to present to the Committee our comments and recommendations on the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), also referred to as No Child Left Behind (NCLB).

By way of introduction, Knowledge Alliance (formerly known as NEKIA) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan trade association composed of 30 leading education organizations dedicated to expanding the use of research-based knowledge in policy and practice in K-12 education. In the aggregate, Alliance members are involved in virtually all aspects of school improvement including high-quality education research and development, dissemination, technical assistance, professional development and evaluation at the federal, regional, state, tribal, and local levels. We firmly believe that the effective use of research-based knowledge can significantly enhance and accelerate the nationwide efforts to improve academic performance and close achievement gaps in K-12 education.

While the business of research and knowledge creation and use can sometimes seem confusing, detached, and complex, our goal is very straightforward and clear: to help educators use and apply the best available research-based knowledge to help all students succeed.

We applaud the bipartisan effort throughout the process in sustaining key goals of NCLB. We believe that this reauthorization is an opportunity not only to improve some of NCLB's accountability provisions, but also to give greater focus to school improvement and to more effectively deliver research-based solutions to schools that have the greatest needs

We offer this testimony at a critical juncture in the evolution of education reform in this country. As you know, federal education policy has evolved in phases over the past 15 years. The focus

on standards and assessments in the late 1980s and early 1990s spawned major attention on the alignment of standards, curriculum and assessments in the 1990s, which in turn played a role in the current emphasis on accountability. The next logical step in this standards-based continuum is to deliver of solutions to the problems identified by the accountability system. This means focusing comprehensive and vigorous attention on school improvement and providing significant new resources and expertise targeted both to turning around low performing schools and to building a knowledge-based capacity and infrastructure for sustained improvement. As a nation, we have already made a firm commitment through the NCLB to provide a world class education to *every* student that attends our schools. With this upcoming reauthorization we believe that the time has come to take this next big step towards this ambitious goal.

We have already provided extensive comments to the Committee regarding the Title I reauthorization draft, but I wanted to take a few minutes to make some general comments and suggestions:

Focus priority attention and resources on school improvement and capacity building --- We applaud the greater emphasis in the discussion draft on building capacity at the state and local levels to provide urgently needed school improvement support in terms of expertise, research-based knowledge and funding. In order to reflect the importance of school improvement and capacity building, we recommend that the title of the statute reflect this emphasis: for example, “Building America’s Capacity for Excellence for All Children Act.” This will help highlight school improvement and capacity building as one of the guiding principles of this reauthorization.

Increase investments in School Improvement Grants --- We are pleased by the proposed increase to 5% for the state set aside for school improvement. We also suggest to ensuring the continuation of the formula grant program for states which the Department of Education recently activated. To ensure the successful expansion of school improvement grants, we encourage the Committee to increase the authorization to \$500 million over the life of the authorization.

Define and consistently include the term “Scientifically Valid Research” --- We agree with the inclusion of this term in many places in the draft. We suggest that the definition should be the same as that used in the Education Sciences Reform Act with only slight modification to address external validity issues. This definition reflects the need for both relevance and rigor in developing and implementing key programs and provisions in the statute. We also suggest that term be consistently used throughout the statute. In order alleviate confusion, other related terms such as “evidence-based” should be avoided.

Launch the “second generation” of Comprehensive School Reform --- We applaud the inclusion of this “second generation” program and recommend that the program be of sufficient size and scope (authorized at least \$300 million). A State formula grant system through which competitions would be conducted for LEA subgrants allows all states to participate and increases the diversity of grantees. Awards to the LEAs should be at least \$100,000 the first year (to allow for start-up costs) and \$50,000 in subsequent years. Up to a 3% set aside for national activities should be included for further model development, quality center evaluations and clearinghouse activities.

Involve expert, third party providers in the state system of assistance --- We applaud including third party service providers as part of the state system of delivering needed school improvement. Specifically, this support should include the Comprehensive Centers, the Regional Educational Laboratories, the National Research and Development Centers, and other school improvement specialists and entities which will help to mobilize intensive and extensive assistance.

We have seen the benefits of many effective school improvement initiatives at the local level which emphasize capacity building and the use of scientific valid research in delivering solutions to specific problems and circumstances. Allow me to briefly share with you three examples. The Calexico Unified School District, where nearly 80% of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches, contracted with WestEd in 2001 to work intensively with six underperforming schools. WestEd helped the schools create and implement an improvement plan and then worked with all nine Calexico schools to define a common language of teaching for administrators and coaches. Both now provide specific feedback to teachers on instructional practices and regularly analyze and discuss classroom instruction. By 2005, all schools had made great achievement gains, reflected in an increase of 124 points, on average, on California's Academic Performance Index.

The Siletz Valley Charter School in Oregon, the local school for the Siletz tribe, became successful over a four-year period with intensive support from Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL). Beginning as a failing school with a 78 percent poverty rate, it now has more than 80 percent of their students meeting or exceeding state benchmarks in both reading and math. As a school improvement consultant to the school, NWREL helped the staff find appropriate curriculum materials, conduct qualitative reading inventories, use children's literature to build decoding skill, comprehension, and positive attitude, implement the 6+1 Trait approach to assessing and teaching writing, and collect data to support Title I eligibility. This school not only avoided closure, but is now a thriving, successful community school.

The National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards and Student Testing (CRESST) at UCLA is using rigorous multiple methods to validate the promising afterschool practices of sites located in Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Ohio, New York, and Pennsylvania (among others). Findings are being used to create training and web-based tools to help afterschool programs across the country to implement more effective interventions in reading, math, arts, homework help, and technology. The project is being conducted in collaboration with Southwest Educational Development Laboratory and the National Partnership for Afterschool Learning, which also brings together and benefits from the collective reach of numerous other R&D organizations around the country.

By focusing greater attention on school improvement and capacity building as a key element of the next reauthorization, the Committee's discussion draft is headed in the right direction. ESEA can and should re-shape and accelerate nationwide efforts to fulfill the promise of NCLB. Through a robust system of support that emphasizes rigor and relevance and the use of scientifically valid research in its solutions, we believe that the increasingly urgent needs for turning around low performing schools can be effectively met. With our recommendations we

are committed to helping the Committee find common ground in fulfilling the legislation's ambitious goals.

We thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and thank you again for your ongoing dedication to our nation's children.