

Guiding Principles to Reform K–12 Education Policy

The Business Coalition for Student Achievement (BCSA)—representing business leaders from every sector of the economy—believes that improving the K–12 education system in the United States is critical for a strong foundation that supports the nation’s economy and competitiveness, and individuals’ success in this rapidly changing world. The K–12 education system must prepare the nation’s children for high-paying jobs requiring the application of knowledge and skills in new and unprecedented ways. High standards, rigorous accountability, effective instruction, quality interventions, parental choice, and accurate information should be hallmarks of America’s education system. The federal government has a critical role to play in ensuring that every child receives a world-class education. The BCSA is committed to working with stakeholders on this essential task.

To do so, the BCSA believes that education policy at all levels should reflect the key principles of accountability and reform outlined below. These principles, based on both research and practice, are essential elements that will lead to a stronger, more results-oriented education policy. The business community strongly believes that these principles must be part of any reauthorization, appropriations, or regulatory changes to federal education programs as well as to education policy at the state level. Federal and state policy must include the following:

Internationally benchmarked standards and aligned assessments that reflect readiness for college, the workplace, and international competition.

- Support adoption and implementation of standards for college and career readiness in math, English language arts, and science, which may include the state-led and developed common core state standards.
- Require rigorous assessments aligned to state standards for college and career readiness that seek to measure higher-order skills required for the modern workplace including collaboration, communication, creative thinking, and the application of knowledge and skills for innovation and problem solving.

Provisions that hold all schools accountable for student achievement for *all* students, including all subgroups.

- Report disaggregated data for all student groups (race, income, gender, etc.).
- Establish annual targets for improvement and for closing achievement and graduation rate gaps. Annual targets must reflect continuous and substantial improvement toward achieving the goal of college and career readiness. Allow the use of year-to-year growth in annual achievement determinations.
- Assign differentiated school ratings based on progress in reaching targets for all student groups.
- Provide differentiated rewards, assistance, and sanctions based on school ratings.
- Use the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) as an independent benchmark.

Increased focus on chronically low-performing schools and schools that fail to improve graduation rates for all students.

- Include reform provisions for the nation’s high schools and hold them accountable for increasing the graduation rate using a common, accurate graduation rate calculation.
- Develop policies that will meet the goal of graduating 90 percent of the nation’s students from high school by 2020.
- Require data-driven reform in that nation’s lowest-performing schools, including high schools with graduation rates of 60 percent or less.
- Strengthen state and district capacity to reform chronically low-performing schools.

Support for effective teachers and school leaders.

- Support state models for evaluating teacher effectiveness using measures that include student academic performance along with other measures to helping all teachers improve.
- Implement policies and practices to fairly and efficiently remove ineffective educators and reward high-performing teachers and principals.
- Ensure equal distribution of highly effective teachers.
- Invest in high-quality alternative certification initiatives and programs that bring talented individuals—including majors in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) fields and second career teachers—into the teaching profession.
- Redesign and strengthen ineffective and inflexible teacher preparation and professional development programs to align with expectations for teacher effectiveness and state college- and career-ready standards.

Provisions for clear information and choices for parents and students.

- Provide transparent, accessible, useful, and comparable school performance and budgetary data budgets.
- Offer choices for students in low-performing schools.
- Expand choices with proven records, including successful programs that have been scaled; charter school networks; virtual schools; strategies that link rigorous academics with rigorous and relevant experience in the workplace; and programs that earn high school diploma, college credits, and workforce certifications.

Data systems that inform instruction, improvement, and interventions.

- Include timely, accurate collection, analysis, and use of high-quality longitudinal data that aligns with district systems to inform decisionmaking, improve teacher effectiveness, and inform strategies to improve student achievement.
- Integrate existing data systems so that teachers and parents get a comprehensive and secure profile that includes information necessary to customize instruction.
- Enable teachers to access user-friendly data to help support instruction.

Elimination of redundant, costly, and ineffective programs and regulations that impede innovation and do not enhance student achievement.

- Provide program renewal based on effectiveness and need.