

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE FEDERAL ROLE IN K-12 EDUCATION

First significant federal effort was in the 1960's

- Stage set by Brown v Bd of Education decision and passage of Civil Rights Act
- Part of Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty/Great Society programs
- Focus on equal opportunity in education, in 1965 Congress passed Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)

ESEA

- Based on recognition of relationship between poverty and low achievement, provided federal funds to school districts/schools to supplement state and local funding
- Main program authorized in ESEA is Title I (compensatory education). Amount of funding based on poverty, funds to be used to provide extra services for low achieving students. Act specifically forbids federal curriculum, requires money be spent for extra services, but not what kind. Most districts use for elementary programs in reading and math. (For ex., federal Title I funds pay for reading teacher).
- Title I continues to be the largest source of Federal aid to K-12, approx. \$14 billion annually. (Total Federal K-12 spending is about 10% of the funds from all sources spent on public K-12 education.)
- Over time, other programs (funding streams) added to ESEA that provide funds for services to other groups of needy students – migrants, homeless, English Language Learners, etc
- As with most federal programs, legislation must be reauthorized periodically. ESEA has been reauthorized, usually every 6 years or so, since 1965. Last reauthorization was in 2001.

Special Education was the next major federal effort

- Impetus from state court cases that declared that schools could not turn away disabled children who have a right to public education
- Early 1970's, Congress passed the Education for Handicapped Children Act (later renamed Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or IDEA)
- Federal funds provided to districts based on numbers of children with disabilities to use for supplementary services, help with extra costs
- IDEA is administered separately from ESEA, is the second largest source of federal funds to school districts currently – approx. \$12 billion annually

Both ESEA and IDEA focused on supplementary services to groups of needy students in order to ensure equal opportunity for achievement.

- Because services provided by teachers, programs were added to help fund teacher education, in-school training, etc

Gradual Shift in Focus of Federal Efforts (1980's and 1990's)

- Attention turned to educational outcomes rather than equal opportunity, and to achievement gaps between socioeconomic, racial and ethnic groups. No longer a general “war on poverty”, up to schools to overcome socioeconomic inequities

- Questions were raised about the difference federal funds were making in achievement outcomes and why the gaps in achievement between different groups of students hadn't closed. New requirements were added to ESEA to test Title I students, require evidence of improvement
- At same time, 1983 report, "A Nation at Risk", questioned quality of American K-12 education generally. A national commission/Governors started a movement to establish education standards in various subjects.
- Efforts to target federal funds on the poorest districts succumbed to congressional politics of spreading money widely (For ex., 90% of districts get Title I funds). Local school districts complained about the proliferation of separate programs for different groups of children and argued for more flexibility to group federal funds and use money to help all students in high poverty schools

These trends culminated in passage of the 2001 reauthorization of ESEA – the No Child Left Behind Act, which made major amendments to ESEA reflecting the above trends

- Title I still the main program, most districts get funds under the poverty formula, continue to use for supplemental programs, but must agree to test all students and show improvement in achievement outcomes both for students as a whole and subgroups of students: low income, disabled, Hispanic, etc
- States establish standards and set goals for the percentage of students who will be proficient in reading and math in grades four and eight with percentage increasing over time to 100% by 2014. Schools meeting standards are making "adequate yearly progress" (AYP), those not meeting goals must take actions to improve
- No Child Left Behind also requires that all teachers (not just those paid with federal funds) be "highly qualified".
- Fundamental change in both the scope of federal requirements and the increased focus on testing and achievement. At same time, still allows enormous variability because states decide standards, goals and approaches to improvement

Where we are now

- Congress has postponed expected 2008 reauthorization of ESEA/ making changes in No Child Left Behind requirements. Increasing numbers of schools are failing to make AYP across the country. New standards movement initiated by Governors and Chief State School Officers: Common Core
- Federal stimulus legislation passed in response to recession provided large amount of additional money to states (based on ESEA funding formulas) to prevent teacher layoffs. In order to receive money, states agreed to take steps towards further education reforms promoted by Obama administration: adopt Common Core, track individual student progress, develop more effective teacher evaluation system using student performance, etc
- Stimulus was one time infusion of funds which has been spent by states.