

Every Student Succeeds Act: How Did We Get Here?

(a very quick recap)

No Child Left Behind

- Introduced a robust role for the federal government
- **GOOD:** For the first time shined a spotlight on achievement gaps between students by requiring states to disaggregate test data by race, disability, economic status, and English learner status.
- **BAD:** Created an accountability system, known as Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), that required a growing percent of students to be proficient in math and reading each year with the ultimate goal of reaching 100% proficiency in 2014
- **BAD:** Punished states with a series of progressively severe sanctions if schools didn't meet proficiency targets
- **RESULT:** Cemented the culture of teaching to the test and over-testing students, and resulted in states dummying down their standards so that more students could score proficient

No Child Left Behind

- Congress passed NCLB in 2001
- State implemented NCLB 2002/2003
- NCLB was due for reauthorization in 2007

One very short-lived reauthorization attempt by then-House Education Chairman George Miller, D-Calif., but it was quickly shut down.

Enter: The Obama Administration (and The Great Recession)

- Race to the Top
- School Improvement Grant
- Investing in Innovation

Policies:

- More rigorous and common standards (read: Common Core)
- Aligned assessments
- Teacher evaluations based in part on students test scores
- Turn around failing schools
- Expand charter schools

Enter: NCLB Waivers

2011: States are clamoring for relief from NCLB's mandates – especially the 2014 proficiency deadline – but an increasingly dysfunctional Congress hasn't been able to rewrite the law.

- The Obama administration offers states relief from NCLB's accountability system in exchange for their adoption of new education policies, many of which they saw as requirements of Race to the Top.
- Duncan underscores that in the absence of federal legislation, waivers are the next best option, and that once Congress rewrites the law, the waivers will no longer be needed.
- While not super excited about the conditional aspect of the waivers, states jump at the flexibility and relief.
- More than 40 states and the District of Columbia are granted waivers.

Groundhog Day: 2011-2014



Groundhog Day: 2011-2014

- Series of failed attempts by Congress to rewrite NCLB
- Congress becomes increasingly partisan
- Rep. John Kline, R-Minn.: Chairman of the House education committee
- Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa: Chairman of the Senate education committee

2015: Year of the Every Student Succeeds Act

Politics:

- Republicans control both chambers
- Rep. Kline: Chairman of the House education committee
- *Sen. Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn.: Chairman of the Senate education committee
- *Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash.: Ranking member of the Senate education committee

Outside forces:

- States dropping Common Core-aligned tests (PARCC, Smarter Balanced)
- Opt-out movement
- States pause inclusion of student test scores as part of teacher evaluations
- Waiver renewals

Moving Pieces

- House passes a conservative NCLB rewrite that squeaks through the chamber backed only by Republicans
 - Highlights the political frailty of the entire effort
- Senate gets to work on a bipartisan bill that passes the Senate with overwhelming bipartisan support

Conference: Threading the Needle



Sets the stage for both chambers to thread the smallest of needles in order to find a compromise between the two very different NCLB rewrite proposals – one that satiates Republicans’ insistence on shrinking the role of the federal government while meeting Democrats’ demands for ensuring safeguards for the most underserved students.

Reaction to ESSA

The Department of Education



The Department of Education gave ESSA the awkward middle school dance embrace.

Department of Education

- ESSA was, among other things, a reaction to the Obama administration's education agenda and the policies that it pushed through Race to the Top, waivers, and other programs.
- As opposition mounted in the last year against testing and teacher evaluations – policies that Education Department prodded states to adopt – Duncan and Obama didn't have the political capital to demand more out of the bill.
- And ahead of Duncan's departure from Washington, ESSA will be seen as his legacy, but it will also be seen as an undoing of his legacy.

Teachers Unions



Teachers Unions: Happy

Lily Eskalsen Garciá, President of the National Education Association:

“Finally, we are seeing an end to this national nightmare.”

Randi Weingarten, President of the American Federation of Teachers:

“For nearly 15 years, we've been treading water as top-down, test-and-sanction-based reforms failed to help all kids succeed. ... This law will usher in the most sweeping, positive changes to public education we've seen in two decades. ... Our members are ready to roll up their sleeves at the state level, partner with community, and send the message that the policies of No Child Left Behind, waivers and Race to the Top should be abandoned, not replicated. This is the reset we've been fighting for in federal education policy.”

Council of Chief State School Officers

Chris Minnich, CCSSO executive director:

“After eight years of debate and temporary fixes, states now can go beyond the rigid constructs dictated in No Child Left Behind, and explore the best models that work for their state and local schools. ... With this flexibility comes responsibility, and the federal law rightly has measures in place to hold states accountable for student outcomes. States have shown leadership in the past, driving the move to higher academic standards and better assessments, and I know they will continue to lead in the future to do what is in the best interest of all kids.”

Civil Rights Community

In a letter of *support* for ESSA, The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights wrote to members of Congress:

"There are several important areas in which the bill falls short ... The Every Student Succeeds Act cedes considerable responsibility to states. The hard-learned lesson of the civil rights community over decades has shown that a strong federal role is crucial to protecting the interests of underserved students."

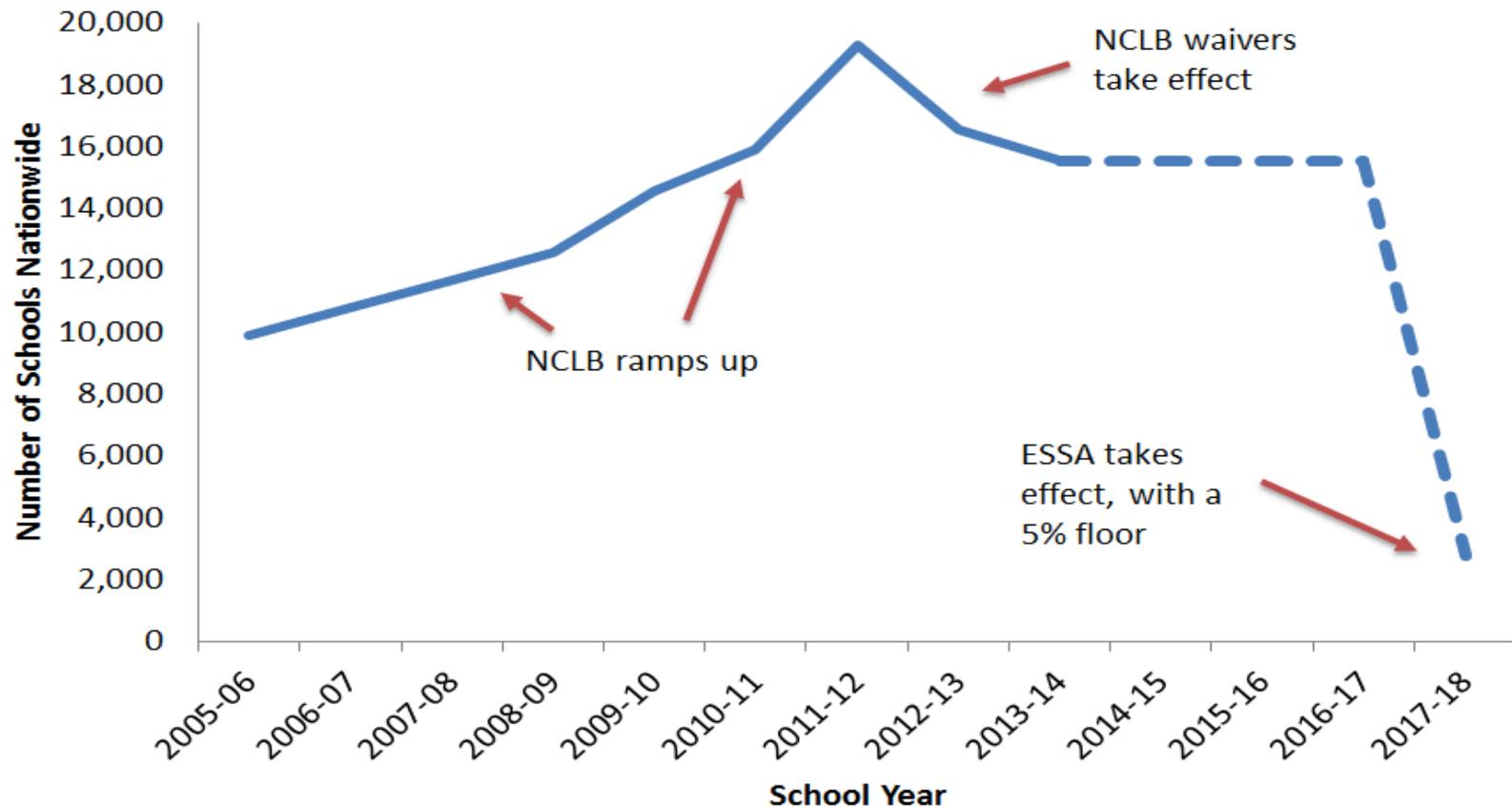
<http://www.civilrights.org/press/2015/leadership-conference-on-ESSA.html>

Accountability Concerns

In an op-ed in the *Washington Post*, Chad Aldeman, a senior policy analyst at Bellwether Education Partners, argued that the new education law will **“radically diminish expectations for our nation’s public schools.”**

Aldeman looked at the number of schools identified for improvement each year and found that from NCLB’s peak until ESSA becomes fully implemented in 2017-2018, about **17,000 schools will be let off the hook for student performance.**

Schools Identified for Improvement, 2005-06 to 2017-18



His basic point boils down to this: States could decide to identify more than the 5 percent of schools they're required to under the law. But based on what occurred under waivers, where states generally met the minimum requirement, the ESSA floor will likely serve as "a powerful anchoring mechanism."

<http://aheadoftheheard.org/the-coming-essa-cliff/>