

Today... and ...



in the **Future**

Office of the Superintendent

3205 Jenny Lind • P.O. Box 1948
Fort Smith, Arkansas 72902-1948
479-785-2501
Fax: 479-785-1722

July 7, 2011

The Honorable John Kline, Chairman
Education and Workforce Committee
211181 Rayburn Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Kline:

I was pleased to learn of your proposal to provide local school districts with greater control and flexibility relative to the many categorical programs associated with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). School leaders have expressed continuing concerns regarding the difficulty in crafting local programs using federal funds to maximize their effectiveness. Flexibility in the use of the limited federal dollars will greatly enhance the ability of local educators to get the greatest benefit for the teachers and students we serve.

For many school districts—urban and rural, large and small—the complexity of the many federal programs makes creating a seamless delivery system of services responsive to the needs of local schools quite challenging. Some programs are small with a narrow focus which makes crafting viable strategies extremely difficult. Even large programs such as Title I are replete with set-asides and restrictions which make achieving broad goals more difficult than they should be. The ability to transfer funds, to combine programs, and to respond effectively to local needs should be a priority as we attempt to place trust in local educational professionals and to empower them to get the results we all seek.

There are those who will oppose flexibility for fear that certain groups of students will not receive the instructional services they need. However, maintaining the requirements for data disaggregation from all groups and holding schools accountable for responding to individual student needs in a climate of positive expectations is consistent with what we know about professional performance for maximum results. Those who lead and teach in our public schools are highly qualified professionals who must be empowered to assess the needs of students and to design instructional best practice to help each student succeed.

School leaders have experienced almost a decade of “blame and shame” with top-down prescriptive directions from the federal and state levels. The current pattern is designed to not only identify the “what” of educational objectives, but to also detail the “how” of processes. No other professional group is subjected to such intense scrutiny and regulation with so little flexibility. Your proposed “State and Local Funding Flexibility Act” is a giant step in the direction school improvement should be moving in the future.

Thank you for realizing that the way to maximize results in an austere economy lies in granting flexibility to the professionals who are closest to the students while holding high expectations for results. School leaders applaud your efforts and stand ready to support this proposal.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Benny L. Gooden". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Benny L. Gooden, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

pc: Dan Domenech
Bruce Hunter