

**How Stronger Accountability and Parental Involvement Provisions Can Support
Education Reform**

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Submitted by

**Eduardo Angulo
Chairman and Executive Director
Salem/Keizer Coalition for Equality
3850 Portland Rd NE
Salem, OR 97301**

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Good morning. My name is Eduardo Angulo. I am the Chairman of the Salem/Keizer Coalition for Equality. The Coalition is an affiliate organization of the National Council of La Raza (NCLR) and it engages in several activities on behalf of the residents of the Willamette Valley in Oregon. We have identified education as one of our major priorities, and have been in the business of helping parents gain the confidence and power they need to take control of their children's education by becoming active partners with their local schools.

I work with mostly farmworking parents in Oregon. Very few of these parents are fully proficient in English. Even fewer – I would say none – believe that their children are not capable of learning English and excelling academically. They have high expectations for their children. Unfortunately, this has not yet resulted in high achievement.

I am here to represent – as best as I can – the point of view of these parents. In my testimony today, I will discuss how strengthening accountability and parental involvement in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) will help these parents and their children.

Background

I would like to first provide some background on Hispanic and English Language Learners (ELL) students in Oregon and why getting policies right for these children is important for the Oregon public school system and its economic future overall. In the 1997-98 school year, about one in twelve (8.1%) students in Oregon was Hispanic. Today, more than one in five students (20.5%) is Hispanic. In the 1997-98 school year, the estimated number of students for whom English was not the primary language and who needed English Language Development (ELD) services was 13,425. In 2009-10, that number was 65,398. The number of students identified as needing ELD services has increased 32% per year. The data make it clear that the present and future of Oregon schools will include a large proportion of Latino and ELL students.

Unfortunately, the state's public schools have room to improve in educating its Hispanic and ELL populations. Currently, just over half (52.6% and 51.4%, respectively) of Latino and ELL students graduate in four years. The policy choices we make today will affect thousands of students, and shape the opportunities available to them as adults.

Recommendations for Reauthorizing ESEA

The right mix of policies can make a difference for these students. From the perspective of the Salem/Keizer Coalition for Equality, the reauthorization of ESEA must contain a focus on standards-based reform, which includes:

- **High academic standards for all students.** We believe that every child can learn and achieve at a high level. However, we must challenge all students to meet high standards and provide them and the schools they attend with the resources to do so. We would oppose having separate, lower standards for Hispanic or ELL students. Instead, we

would support targeting resources to schools that need them most to help students meet standards.

- **Appropriate assessments to measure student achievement and progress.** Policymakers, educators, parents, and students should know if students are meeting standards or making progress toward high standards. This means that tests must be aligned to the standards and should provide information to stakeholders about student performance. For ELLs, it also means tests must be accessible, and in some cases, should be in the language of instruction provided to students.
- **Accountability for results.** ESEA reauthorization must include a fair way to hold schools accountable for helping students meet standards and make progress. At the Salem/Keizer Coalition for Equality, we fear that without such a system, ESEA will return to the days in which states and districts will only have to report how they used funds, not whether or not taxpayer dollars actually produced results for students. We support a fair system of accountability for all districts and schools.
- **Accountability for all subgroups.** We also believe it is important to keep the current ESEA law's focus on *all* students. This means keeping the law's requirement holding schools accountable for students based on income, race/ethnicity, disability, and English proficiency status.
- **Strong parental involvement.** Everyone understands that parents are the consumers and main stake holders of our PreK-12 public education system in America. They are the ones who monitor the academic progress of their children and make important decisions about their children's education. The parents I work with share this responsibility with parents from more affluent communities throughout this country.

Unfortunately, when we look at parents from low-income and minority communities, they have not had the power to shape public education reform the way more affluent parents can. Title V of ESEA includes the Local Family Information Centers (LFICs) program, which would provide resources to community groups to prepare parents for their responsibilities under ESEA to hold schools accountable at the local level. However, the LFICs program was never funded. LFICs must be maintained in reauthorization and adequately funded.

Conclusion

Few can argue that the current version of ESEA has worked perfectly. However, the Salem/Keizer Coalition for Equality is prepared to make the case that it has made a positive difference for the parents we serve in the Willamette Valley. No Child Left Behind has provided parents with tools to help transform their local schools. These tools are sunshine, transparency, and accountability for results. Sunshine lighting on low achievement scores, finally showing everyone that our kids are not being well-served by the public schools; transparency letting us know who is teaching our children and whether or not they are doing a good job; and accountability so that schools that are not doing well have to improve.

From the parents' perspective, things are finally changing for our children. NCLB has allowed parents to hold our public schools accountable and it has allowed us to be in the room to be part of the solution to closing the achievement gap. Now, our parents can confidently walk to their local public schools, knock on the door, and be invited to be part of the decision-making process. This has always happened in more affluent communities. Now it is starting to happen in a small farmworking community in the middle of the Willamette Valley in Oregon. ESEA reauthorization must build on this momentum for public education reform.