

# Sample Editorial: *ESEA Reauthorization*

*For the public to engage meaningfully in discussions over major education policy shifts, they need help from policy communicators. Lacking a concrete sense of education as a system – and focusing primarily on the visible agents in education (teachers, students, and parents) – it can be difficult for the public to grapple with nuanced policies such as Title I funding or competing proposals for redesigning federal rules for state assessment systems.*

*How can the tools of Strategic Frame Analysis™ help to invite the public into the expert conversation? First, reorient consumerist thinking by using a collectivizing Value that establishes public education as a public good. Second, use Explanatory Metaphors to make abstract concepts concrete. Finally, throughout, maintain a thoroughly reasonable, explanatory Tone; to engage the general public, it's important to take a pragmatic rather than a polemic stance.*

Although America's many communities spread out over thousands of miles and an array of landscapes – along coastal waterways or inland rivers, in mountain ranges or rainforests, on the Great Plains, in the desert – we still share a common expectation of the place that we call home: that our public education system will meet the needs of our community. When we live up to this expectation, we continue to ensure that a capable, agile workforce is available to fuel our economy, and that a diversity of skills and perspectives can inform and enrich our civic life. As Congress works on updating the federal law that governs our nation's education system – a process known as ESEA reauthorization – we all have a stake in setting national policies that ensure that America's next generation has access to a quality education, regardless of where they live.

Here are two important principles that our representatives should keep in mind as they take stock, re-evaluate what's working and what needs to be improved, and set new priorities.

**Ensure that high-quality learning opportunities are available in every community.** Opportunities to learn are like charging stations that allow students to power up and take an active role in their learning. Some areas have many charging stations – great schools, well-stocked libraries, recreation centers with

a variety of high-quality programming, science centers and zoos, plenty of safe parks. In other areas, the network of opportunities for healthy development and learning is spotty at best. The federal government has a role to play in expanding and patching the system, so that every community is “wired for learning.” One charging station that every American child should be able to count on is a reliable neighborhood school. To maintain the value of the investment we have made in our school districts over many decades and to continue to provide access to education in every community, we should maintain the programs that allocate funds to public school districts with high numbers of low-income students. Another priority should be to integrate the network of “charging stations,” by providing more support for informal learning sites, such as science centers, libraries, museums, zoos and aquariums, and encouraging them to support the learning goals that schools set.

**Encourage states to adopt assessment systems that help us navigate toward our goals.** An effective approach to assessment is a lot like an automobile’s dashboard. Drivers use a broad range of tools to know what’s happening: mirrors, windows, lights, gauges, even alarms. It’s important to consult *all* of these, and to make adjustments based on what the information reveals. In recent years, we’ve under-valued some kinds of data – especially local assessments of student work - which makes about as much as sense as not looking through the windshield when you drive. The re-authorization of ESEA is an important opportunity to correct this. However, we shouldn’t over-correct. Some voices in education are calling for many fewer and much less frequent statewide exams, primarily to reduce the pressure on schools to focus narrowly on tested subjects and material. While the problem of curriculum narrowing is real, there are better ways to address it. Annual student achievement data provides an important, regular check on how well schools are serving all students, allowing for educators to pinpoint what’s working and where the trouble spots remain. Instead of getting rid of the odometer, it makes more sense to keep it as one of many indicators.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act was last updated in 2002. We’ve learned a lot since then as a nation, and even policymakers with diverse opinions agree that this law is overdue for a renovation. In taking on this ambitious remodeling project, it will be important to evaluate what’s working well and what needs a serious overhaul. Setting the priorities and agreeing on the new blueprint won’t be easy, but putting this project off for another few seasons simply means agreeing to ask our nation to make do with a system that’s outdated and doesn’t meet our current needs. Improvements are needed in providing greater fairness across places and in making more effective use of assessments. Given that the education we provide today influences the readiness of our leaders, neighbors, and workforce tomorrow, it doesn’t make sense to wait. Let’s encourage our policymakers to roll up their sleeves and get to work.

# Sample Editorial: *Teacher Appreciation Week*

*This editorial takes advantage of a perennial education news-peg: Teacher Appreciation Week. The communications challenge of this event, from a framing perspective, is that communications can reinforce public perceptions that ultimately limit policy thinking. First, if the work of schools is framed as solely as the responsibility of teachers, then the role of other actors and factors in creating the conditions for effective teaching become less visible. Second, focusing messages on “hardworking, dedicated teachers” can invigorate the public’s model of the “Caring Teacher,” which oversimplifies the complexity of effective teaching to “how much they care.” This, too, makes the role of teacher professionalism, school working conditions, and other elements of school quality “hard to think”. This piece attempts to reframe the discourse on effective teaching by emphasizing the essential nature of professional support for educators. It uses the Explanatory Metaphor of Scaffolding to provide the public with a simple, concrete way to understand complex, abstract ideas such as professional development, the role of leadership in supporting practitioners’ professional judgment, and the ways in which the overall availability of resources influence teacher effectiveness. In extensive message testing, this metaphor was shown to help the public think of the craft of teaching in ways more akin to expert thinking, and to provide communicators with a way to bring these issues to public attention without being seen as obstructionist or self-interested.*

This week, parents across the nation are acknowledging their children’s teachers with baked goods, and districts are distributing grateful messages printed on pens and post-its. These gestures are authentic expressions of thanks, and the acknowledgments are well deserved. Yet, the occasion of Teacher Appreciation Week also gives us a reason to ask: What would it mean for our education system to reflect a deep appreciation for the professional needs of teachers, all year round?

To grasp what’s needed for teachers to be effective, it helps to remember that they are building the learning environments where our nation’s future is developing. Just like construction workers, these builders need sturdy scaffolding and sufficient resources to do their work effectively. As our schools undergo a significant remodeling job, updating curriculum and instruction to reflect a more modern design that imparts the skills needed for work and life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, this scaffolding is more important than ever. It enables builders to reach all the places where improvements need to be made.

If we were to give teachers shiny scaffolding instead of shiny apples, what would it look like? It comes in the form of effective professional development that provides opportunities for teachers to learn both from outside experts in curriculum and instruction and from the expertise of one another. It comes in the form of school schedules that allow teacher teams time to carefully analyze student work and develop lessons that respond to the strengths and weaknesses they observe. It comes in the form of high quality curricula that are chosen or created with teacher input and utilize up-to-date resources and technologies. It comes in the form of access to materials like computers and high speed internet.

The biggest educational remodeling job to hit our nation's schools in some time comes in the form of new educational standards: both Common Core State Standards and the Next Generation Science Standards offer updated blueprints for what we want all students to be able to do by the time they finish high school. If we make these updates the right way, we'll be building better learning environments and therefore a stronger future for our communities, and our economy.

Our teachers are doing much of the building, in the form of creating new lessons and making more frequent use of projects and assignments that challenge students to read more widely and deeply, apply what they know, think through problems, and explain how they arrived at their answers. These are the kinds of skills and habits of mind that are essential for today's information economy, and to ensure that these abilities are developed fully, teachers are the best craftsmen to rework and retool curriculum to customize the learning experiences that will allow their students to meet the standards.

But we all have a role to play in this renovation. Districts across the nation need adequate funding to support their professional development, creative planning to give them time to collaborate and problem solve during the day, retrofitting to ensure that they have access to technology that meets the demands of new assessment tools, and wrap-around supports in the form of high quality learning spaces outside school buildings that further the learning that happens within them.

We're at that critical juncture in a remodeling project where you have to make decisions about cost-effectiveness, timelines, and prioritizing steps in the process. In this moment, it makes sense to remind ourselves that our nation's future viability is at stake and it doesn't make sense to cut corners. Let's show our appreciation for teachers by making sure they have the resources they need to demonstrate their skills as master craftspeople. Teachers need time to adjust and adapt to new teaching techniques that accompany the new standards – and access to models of practical strategies they can apply right away to aid their transition to these changes. They need materials that support the kind of hands-on learning that these

standards require. Especially if we really do appreciate our teachers – the builders who need our collective support to get the job done. What happens in our schools determines what happens in our future. There is no more important place to focus our efforts if we want to create a better tomorrow.