

The ALL CHILDREN are EQUAL (ACE) Act

Background: The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) is the farthest-reaching federal legislation affecting education. Title I of ESEA distributes funding to local education agencies (LEAs) to improve the achievement of disadvantaged children.

In order to allocate more funding per Title I student to local education agencies (LEAs) with higher concentrations of poverty, the current formula weights the count of eligible students in an LEA. However, the current weighting system has the perverse effect of diverting funding from higher-poverty LEAs to lower-poverty LEAs, regardless of the actual poverty rate.

This misallocation stems from the use of two alternative weighting systems. One is based on the percentage of disadvantaged students (“percentage weighting”) and one on the sheer number of disadvantaged students (“number weighting”). Each LEA’s eligible student count is weighted using both approaches, and the LEA receives an allocation based on which system is of the most benefit.

The current weighting system has the perverse effect of diverting funding from higher-poverty School Districts to lower-poverty School Districts.

How? Number weighting gives a big boost in student count to a large LEA even if it has a low percentage of poverty, while small LEAs, even with high poverty rates, get no benefit from number weighting. Since the Title I formula distributes a fixed appropriation, all funds gained by LEAs that benefit from number weighting are at the expense of LEAs that do not. As a result, all small and moderate-sized LEAs with high poverty rates receive far less than they would if all districts were weighted using percentage weighting only. Some of the highest poverty LEAs disadvantaged so much by number weighting that they receive less than if there were no weighting system at all. This runs counter to Congressional intent and negates the fact that poverty is poverty and all children should be treated equal under the law.

What the ACE Act Does: The ACE Act would gradually phase out the number weighting system while leaving percentage weighting in place. By reducing the weight factors used in the number weighting system by 10 % per year over four years, the formula becomes balanced and accurately reflects Congressional intent to allocate funding to LEAs with higher concentrations of poverty. Large LEAs with high concentrations of poverty would still benefit from percentage weighting, as would all smaller LEAs with high percentages of poverty. Correcting this injustice should be a priority and is a simple issue of fairness for all Title I eligible children.

Who Supports the ACE Act?

American Association of School Administrators, National Alliance of Black School Educators, Save the Children, American Farm Bureau Federation, Parent Teacher Association (PTA), Pennsylvania Association of Rural & Small Schools, Arkansas Rural Education Association, California Small Districts Association, Center for Rural Affairs, Challenge West Virginia, Michigan Small & Rural Schools Association, Minnesota Rural Education Association, Missouri Association of Rural Education, Montana Small Schools Alliance, National Farmers Union, National Rural Education Advocacy Coalition, North Carolina Rural Education Working Group, Organizations Concerned About Rural Education, Rural Community Alliance (AR), The Rural School and Community Trust, Save Alabama’s Small schools, South Carolina Rural Education Grassroots Group, Southern Echo, Tennessee School Systems for Equity, Texas Rural Education Association, Vermont Rural Partnership, YouthBuild, USA.