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*Enhancing the mental health and
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School Psychologists Welcome Focus on Diverse Learners, Positive School Climate in Administration's *Blueprint for Reform of ESEA*

Bethesda, MD—The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) applauds President Obama for making world-class education for all children a national priority. Ensuring that every child in America develops the knowledge and skills necessary to be productive citizens both here at home and in the global economy is not only the country's greatest responsibility today but also our highest hope for tomorrow.

"The Department of Education's *Blueprint for Reform: The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act* offers a more comprehensive, meaningful focus on what is essential to helping all children learn to their fullest potential," notes NASP President Patti L. Harrison. The principles laid out in the *Blueprint* align with many of NASP's education reform recommendations outlined in [*Ready to Learn, Empowered to Teach: Excellence in Education for the 21st Century*](#).

"The reauthorization of ESEA and the Administration's vision as articulated in the *Blueprint* provide the welcome opportunity to refocus our energy and resources on approaches proven to both enable students to learn and teachers to teach," continues Harrison. "The challenge is to identify and sustain what is working now and integrate these important services with innovative new ideas."

In particular, NASP strongly supports the Department's commitment to meeting the needs of diverse learners, including children with disabilities, those who are disadvantaged, and English language learners. "Lowering barriers to learning so that all children are able to access a comprehensive, rigorous curriculum and engage positively in their school and community is essential to achieving the college and workforce readiness goals outlined in the *Blueprint*," says Harrison. "Meeting the needs of all students requires individualized instruction, inclusive and effective learning environments, and genuine school–family collaboration." Closer alignment of ESEA and IDEA and the use of more comprehensive, meaningful assessments as highlighted in the *Blueprint* will greatly improve efficiency and effectiveness in this area.

NASP also commends the Department for recognizing that school climate and social–emotional learning are central to academic success. Research and experience have long demonstrated that school engagement and

student achievement improve when schools promote positive school climates, teach students interpersonal social skills and positive behavior, and support their emotional well-being. This expanded mandate for the Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools (OSDFS), to foster successful, safe, and healthy students is essential to creating drug and violence free schools and to promoting learning environments that foster student achievement.

“Children who do not feel safe and valued cannot learn,” says Harrison. “The OSDFS budget was cut drastically in FY 2009, leaving schools with fewer resources for school-based programs that support positive school climate or the mental health of students. We hope that the FY 2011 budget will be restored to the FY 2008 funding levels to ensure the necessary resources for both continuing and new initiatives to build this capacity.”

“We also are encouraged that the President recognizes that it is unreasonable to expect teachers and principals alone to achieve the important goals laid out in the *Blueprint*,” says Harrison. “In addition to family and community involvement, we hope to see a clearer articulation of the school-based support services that are vital to teacher and student success, such as those provided by school psychologists, school nurses, and speech and language pathologists.”

School psychologists and other student support personnel support teachers’ ability to meet individual student learning needs, manage behavior, improve instruction, and monitor student progress. School psychologists also work closely with administrators to collect and use data to not only measure school and student performance but also to improve instruction and school climate. They provide mental health services that are appropriate for the learning environment, coordinate with needed community services, and help to support and engage parents and caregivers in their roles as their children’s first teachers.

Lastly, NASP appreciates the Department’s intention to improve administrative efficiency and foster innovation through changes in funding structures. However, we are deeply concerned about the proposed consolidation of funding for small and medium size programs that meet specific priority needs, such as supporting student mental health. Small and medium size programs, like the Elementary and Secondary School Counseling Program, were created in response to public demand and the need to promote exemplary practices appropriate to the school setting. NASP urges Congress to maintain the absolute priorities of programs currently proposed for consolidation and to maintain or increase levels of funding for these program’s priorities.

NASP looks forward to working with the Administration and Congress to advance the comprehensive reforms necessary to ensure a world-class education for every student in America.

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