



Doc H's Blog

Kentucky Education Commissioner
Terry Holliday



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Politics as usual or not?

As the dust settles from last week's election, there is much talk and speculation about the impact the election may have on public education in this country. At least that has been a primary topic for discussion this week at the Council of Chief State School Officers Annual Policy Forum that I am attending.

Secretary of Education Arne Duncan attended the meeting and took it as his opportunity to roll out the new Elementary and Secondary Education Act/No Child Left Behind waiver process to state education leaders.

In the past few months, I have been critical of Secretary Duncan and the waiver process (see my blogs, [USED action contrary to state, federal law](#); [The good news and bad news on NCLB waivers](#)). My criticism has been focused on the fact that the original language in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act said states could submit waiver requests to improve teaching and learning. As long as they met that goal, the waivers were unconditional. However, it appears in recent years waivers have become conditional – based on whether a state meets the requirements of the three guiding principles of college/career ready standards, a differentiated accountability system and educator evaluation. Additionally, I have expressed concerns about the time and resources involved at the state level in the waiver application process.

Listening to the Secretary talk about the upcoming waiver process, it was apparent that he and his team had listened not only to me, but also to other state chiefs. Secretary Duncan told us as did the [communication](#) and [guidance](#) from the U.S. Department of Education (USED) that the waiver process is being streamlined and states will be able to seek a three-year extension and in some cases a four-year waiver extension.

While I am confident that the Secretary and his staff have listened to our concerns, during our meeting, I asked him about his priorities given the recent election. Despite being there to talk about the waiver process, it was very clear that his priority was reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

I wholeheartedly agree! It is time for us to make reauthorization of No Child Left Behind the top priority. Given the new Senate leadership in Congress, I am hopeful that the Senate and House will be able to work in a bipartisan manner to pass legislation. While the waivers have been helpful, it is critical to have a long term solution through reauthorization. We will see in early January whether new congressional leadership works to govern or continues politics as usual. I certainly hope it is the former rather than the latter.

Terry Holliday, Ph. D.
Education Commissioner