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Business Group Merges With Education Center

By Catherine Gewertz

The National Alliance of Business, a prominent supporter of efforts to improve education, has merged with a group that uses data to drive better school performance. The newly configured organization will help states implement the nuts-and-bolts systems deemed necessary for higher student achievement.

With last week's merger announcement, the NAB is officially out of business. But its mission will continue under the banner of the Austin, Texas-based National Center for Educational Accountability. The merger was conceived as a way to bring the strengths of each organization to bear as states struggle to fulfill the mandates of the federal "No Child Left Behind Act" of 2001.

"Now that the legislation is passed, we are in a new stage," said Roberts T. Jones, the former chief executive officer of the NAB, who will now serve on the NCEA's board of directors. "We are getting into the detailed implementation of very complex things, because everything in that legislation is based on data collection, management, and disclosure."

"That changes the way you do business and the kinds of resources you need to bring to the table," he added.

A key resource offered by the Washington-based NAB is the business coalitions it has built across the country in its 34 years. Those coalitions can play a pivotal role in bolstering political and financial support for the adoption of academic standards, accountability measures, and data-driven improvement systems, and can help deliver resources that schools need to put improvement systems into place, Mr. Jones said.



**Roberts T.
Jones**

Leaders of the newly merged group see the NCEA as an important conduit of information for businesses to enable them to expand their role in helping improve schools. The NCEA offers schools expertise in data-driven performance analysis and improvement.

Data Expertise

Formed only a year ago, the NCEA is a joint venture of the Education Commission of the States, a Denver-based research group for state policymakers; the University of Texas at Austin; and Just for the Kids Inc., an Austin-based nonprofit organization that launched the school improvement model used by the NCEA. In that model, data on student performance are used to assess schools' shortcomings and design blueprints for improvement. ("[Texas Group Makes News With Data](#)," Nov. 28, 2001.)

Bradford C. Duggan, the NCEA's executive director, said the group posts its findings on Web sites to spark what it sees as a broad-based, problem-solving process on how to improve achievement. The data it assembled on five states and five urban districts are already posted at www.nc4ea.org, and the best practices identified in some states are posted on the Just for the Kids site, www.just4kids.org.

"Our purpose is to promote conversation and discussion," Mr. Duggan said.

The merger represents both a closing chapter and a new beginning for the NAB, which was founded in 1968 by President Lyndon B. Johnson and the automaker Henry Ford II to aid government in finding work for the unemployed.

In more recent years, it had evolved into an organization of 5,000 businesses focusing on ways to improve the nation's schools. The NAB has advocated the introduction of incentives such as shared staff bonuses to drive improvements in achievement. ("**More Incentives Would Drive Schools to Improve, Business Alliance Argues**," Feb. 16, 2000.)

The business alliance also undertook a major campaign to improve teacher quality. It released a report last year that called for better preparation and compensation for the profession. ("**Businesses Seek Teacher Renaissance**," Feb. 7, 2001.)

Though the NAB will no longer exist, its work on K-12 education will continue under the NCEA's banner, with some of its staff and board members joining the NCEA, Mr. Jones said. A small group of former NAB employees who have led the alliance's education initiatives will open a new Washington office of the NCEA, he said.