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The shaping of federal education policy over time

When looking at education issues today, it is interesting to review the events and people involved in shaping federal education policy over time. There is rich history of landmark events that directly influenced today's education policy climate, including the debate over appropriate roles for states and the federal government.

This issue of [The Progress of Education Reform](#) from Education Commission of the States provides an overview of major events in education policy history such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), arguably the most significant K-12 education policy event in history.

"During each twist and turn there has been ongoing debate over federal versus state versus local jurisdiction for decisions on what is believed to be best for America's students," said Christopher T. Cross, chairman of the education consulting firm Cross & Joftus, LLC, and guest author of the report. "While all parties throughout time share the same overarching goal of access and the opportunity for success for all students, consensus on the role of the federal government in education policy remains elusive."

Some items of note from the report:

- The federal government has had a role in education since the founding of the nation, dating back to the Northwest Ordinance of 1787.
- It wasn't until 1979 that Congress narrowly passed a bill to create the U.S. Department of Education, which initially was located in the former U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare.
- It can be argued that states have been in reaction mode since 2002 with the requirements of No Child Left Behind, the Race to the Top competition and waivers necessitated by the now more than eight-years-late reauthorization of ESEA legislation.

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