



The Education Trust

Closing the gaps in opportunity and achievement, pre-k through college.

July 14, 2015

Dear Members of the U.S. Senate:

I write to urge you to vote yes on the Murphy-Booker Accountability Amendment to the *Every Child Achieves Act*.

Since it was originally signed into law in 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act has played a critically important role in the education of children who are often underserved in their own communities. Yes, the federal government provides only about 10 cents on the dollar in the finance of American K-12 education. But its laser focus on low-income children, children of color, students with disabilities, and English learners has helped to make sure these children don't get short-changed in their communities and states.

In previous attempts to reauthorize this critical law, Congress worked hard to incorporate lessons learned during the previous reauthorizations. By building on those lessons, they steadily improved the law's effectiveness in bettering outcomes for students who have been historically disadvantaged in our school system.

That responsibility — for improving the law's effectiveness in bettering student outcomes — is no less important today, for these students now comprise a majority of American K-12 students. Both their futures, and our collective future, are at stake.

Too often, though, low-income children, children of color, English learners and students with disabilities *still* are subjected to lower expectations, inferior instruction, and inadequate supports. Too often, they *still* perform at levels well below those of their more advantaged counterparts.

So it remains critical both that you continue to provide enhanced resources to schools and districts that serve concentrations of such children and that you expect improved results in exchange for those resources.

The bill before you on the Senate floor preserves much of the necessary framework for improved student outcomes, including:

- State-adopted standards aligned with the demands of postsecondary education and career;
- Annual statewide assessment of all students in grades 3-8 and once again in high school, with a strictly limited exception for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities;
- Transparent, accessible reporting of data — disaggregated by race, income, disability status, and English proficiency — at the state, district, and school levels so educators, parents, and students themselves have objective information on where they are on their journey to college and career readiness; and
- Statewide accountability systems that include goals for all groups of students, rate schools in part based on the performance of all groups of students, and provide dedicated funding for school improvement.

What it doesn't preserve, however, is the responsibility of schools to act when any group of children is not meeting improvement goals over consecutive years.

There seems to be general agreement that, in Conference if not before, decisive action will be required for the lowest performing schools and, perhaps, for high schools with the lowest graduation rates. But the vast majority of low-income students, students of color, students with disabilities, and English learners don't attend the lowest performing schools. Congress needs to protect these students no matter where they go to school, just like the 107th Congress did.

The 107th Congress fundamentally redefined what it meant to be a good school in America. No longer could a school be considered good just by having a high overall average or by sending a few of its best students off to fancy colleges: To be a good school, it had to be good for every group of children that it served. And that change helped usher in the fastest improvements in the achievement of low-income students and students of color since 1980.

To be sure, we've learned a lot since this law was last reauthorized, including the need for increased state ownership of accountability systems. But in granting that much-needed flexibility, Congress cannot abandon the expectation of progress for the vulnerable students who are the special focus of the law and action when progress isn't happening.

We hope you will support the Murphy-Booker Accountability Amendment, which will strengthen important accountability provisions of the Every Child Achieves Act. Without this critical improvement, the new law will do more to publicize the achievement problems of low-income students and students of color than it will to fix them. That surely won't be good for the children themselves. And it won't be good for our country, either.

More work will be needed in Conference to ensure that the accountability provisions of the law are focused where they should be: primarily on improving academic outcomes for all groups of children. But with its clear expectation of action both in chronic low-performers and when any group of students is not progressing, the Murphy-Booker Accountability Amendment is an important step in improving the accountability provisions of the *Every Child Achieves Act*.

If you don't want America's schools to take a step backward in their commitment to closing opportunity and achievement gaps, the United States Senate shouldn't take a step backward either. Certainly, our schools need flexibility in *how* they act, and the law guarantees them exactly that. But surely that flexibility — especially when it is accompanied by \$15 billion in taxpayer dollars — shouldn't include no action at all.

Sincerely,



Kati Haycock
President