



April 13, 2015

Members, Senate HELP Committee:

Senators Alexander and Murray have produced a positive framework for reauthorizing ESEA that will continue moving our country forward in the effort to ensure all our children receive a quality education.

The bill provides resources and considerable flexibility to the states, and contains certain critical requirements we believe are essential to any broad improvement effort, 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 achievement and graduation-rate goals for all groups of students, rate schools in part on the academic performance of all groups of students, and provide dedicated funding for school improvement.

We are encouraged by the progress this draft represents, and thank Senators Alexander and Murray and their staffs for their leadership in setting us on a productive, bipartisan path.

There are, however, problems with the draft that must be fixed to ensure that states don't just report more fully on achievement patterns among their students but — in return for a substantial federal investment — act to address any underachievement problems revealed by those data.

To ensure action, we ask that you:

- Strengthen the accountability sections by including a clear requirement that states identify for intervention and support both chronically low-performing schools and schools where any group of students consistently fails to meet state-established goals;
- Limit the relative weight of additional indicators that are not direct measures of student learning in accountability ratings; and
- Ensure that the Secretary of Education has authority to enforce the law when states and districts have not met their legal obligations.

We know that you share our conviction that America cannot afford to continue squandering the talents of so many of her children. When expectations are clear, our schools have shown that they can turn longstanding achievement patterns around. Your leadership in making these changes is critical to getting the signals clear to ensure the necessary supports for all children.

We look forward to working with you in the days and weeks ahead on a new law that will advance our country's commitment to genuine opportunity for all.

Sincerely,



John Engler
President
Business Roundtable



Denise Marshall
Executive Director
Council of Parent Attorneys
and Advocates (COPAA)



Wade Henderson
President and CEO
The Leadership Conference on
Civil and Human Rights



Kati Haycock
President
The Education Trust



Joe Williams
Executive Director
Democrats for Education
Reform



James H. Wendorf
Executive Director
National Center for Learning
Disabilities



Janet Murguía
President and CEO
National Council of La Raza



R. Bruce Josten
Executive Vice President
Government Affairs
U.S. Chamber of Commerce