



April 13, 2015

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman, Committee on Health,
Education, Labor and Pensions
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member, Committee on Health,
Education, Labor and Pensions
154 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray:

On behalf of the Foundation for Excellence in Education (ExcelinEd), I am writing in support of the Every Child Achieves Act of 2015. This legislation provides a strong foundation for moving forward in a bipartisan fashion to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

ExcelinEd is pleased the Every Child Achieves Act includes the current-law annual testing requirements as well as provisions which reinforce state authority over education policy decisions, especially those regarding the adoption of academic standards and assessments. However, as this bill moves forward, more must be done to promote the availability of high-quality educational options for students.

Annual Testing and Accountability

ExcelinEd strongly supports the provisions under the Every Child Achieves Act that preserve the annual testing requirements in current law. These requirements ensure that students, parents, teachers, schools, and the public have honest, objective information on academic achievement. Annual assessments also identify struggling students and schools to make sure they receive the help and resources they need to be successful, upholding the promise of equity for all children. Annual tests are also critical in informing the extent to which state and local policies and interventions are working and for holding states and localities accountable to the taxpayers who fund them.

Although annual assessments are critically important, there is also a need to support new and better ways of assessing student learning. Therefore, we are supportive of the bill's inclusion of the "Innovative Assessment and Accountability Demonstration Authority", which would support states in the development and piloting of innovative assessment systems such as those able to validate when students are ready to demonstrate mastery based on individual learning needs. This will help support a number of states who are exploring competency-based models of learning.

ExcelinEd is also pleased with language in the bill ensuring states establish a flexible, yet meaningful, statewide accountability system that must entail goals for achievement and graduation-rates for all students and groups of students. As the legislation moves forward, we urge you to make these academic goals a more central component of how individual schools are identified by states and thus subject to evidence-based interventions under the direction of local educational agencies.

ExcelinEd supports the local and state report card provisions in the Every Child Achieves Act that ensure parents have valuable information about the extent to which all students and subgroups of students are achieving on a wide variety of indicators. We also support added provisions, which expand the type of information made available to parents and the public related to the distribution of effective teachers as well as the per-pupil expenditures of Federal, State and local funds for each school and district in the state.

State Authority over Education Policy Decisions

ExcelinEd supports provisions under the Every Child Achieves Act that set clear limits on the federal role in education. In particular, we endorse the expanded prohibition against federal “mandates, direction or control” over states’ standards (including Common Core State Standards), curriculum, or assessments. We also support new limits on the Department of Education’s ability to issue waivers that would prohibit the Secretary from mandating additional requirements for states or school districts seeking waivers from federal law.

We believe these provisions will protect states’ future decisions about individual standards, curriculum, assessments, and other accountability elements from any appearance of federal coercion and ensure maximum trust in those decisions.

Educational Options for Students

ExcelinEd is a strong proponent of ensuring the availability of high-quality educational options and giving parents the financial freedom to choose the best school and courses for their child. ExcelinEd is pleased that the Every Child Achieves Act updates and strengthens the federal Charter Schools Program to provide better support for the startup of new charter schools, replication and expansion of high-quality charter models, and acquisition, construction, or renovation of facilities for charter schools. We also support provisions in the bill that provide incentives for states to adopt stronger charter school authorizing practices, increase charter school transparency, and improve community engagement in the implementation and operation of charter school to help ensure success.

However, we are deeply disappointed that the legislation drops the Title I portability language included in the prior draft released by Chairman Alexander. We urge you to reinstate this important provision and provide states the option of empowering parents to use Title I funds to select the educational options that meet their child’s needs.

ExcelinEd also believes that the public school choice options available to students under the Every Child Achieves Act should be strengthened by making the five percent reservation for transportation for public school choice a requirement for schools districts, including schools identified by the State. In addition, the bill would be strengthened by including provisions from H.R. 5, the House Committee-passed version of the reauthorization of ESEA,

related to “direct student services” that would offer tutoring or public school choice options to students.

Finally, ExcelinEd believes that it is critical for every student to have access to the high-quality course offerings necessary to graduate prepared for life and work in the 21st century. We ask that you include provisions related to “course access” programs to support state policies that allow K-12 students to access a variety of quality courses outside the four walls of their school, particularly those leveraging online and blended learning delivery mechanisms.

During the 14 years since ESEA was last reauthorized the education landscape has undergone significant transformation, particularly with respect to the active role of states in education reform. ExcelinEd believes that the Every Child Achieves Act – as currently drafted – recognizes these changes and will help bolster state-based education reform.

As you continue your efforts to reauthorize this historic piece of legislation, ExcelinEd looks forward to working with you and other Members to advance the Every Child Achieves Act while maintaining the critical provisions outlined above.

Sincerely,



Patricia Levesque
Chief Executive Officer
Foundation for Excellence in Education