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July 17, 2013

U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative,

ASCD, representing more than 140,000 educators, is taking no official position at this time on H.R. 5, the Student Success Act, but supports the efforts to move forward with floor consideration of the bill to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which is now 11 years old and 6 years overdue for renewal. The Department of Education's waiver plan has resulted in a patchwork system of temporary fixes that are neither ideal nor lasting. A new law must be enacted in this Congress to address the flaws of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) while aligning with and supporting education improvement initiatives currently under way at the state and local levels.

We support efforts to update federal education policy to better address the needs of today's students, but we have numerous reservations about H.R. 5, as it fails to require student, educator, and school accountability to be based on multiple measures of performance; provide robust supports for teacher effectiveness; recognize the importance of a whole child education; and enhance school improvement strategies.

ASCD believes that the true measure of student proficiency and school quality must be based on more than just standardized state test scores in English language arts and math. We support the replacement of the outdated proficiency requirements in current law with the flexibility the bill allows states to create new statewide accountability systems that annually measure student achievement and school performance. Also included, as part of their statewide accountability structure, is a system of school improvement interventions to be implemented at the local level for poorly performing schools. Furthermore, a comprehensive picture of student achievement should track individual growth over time and include portfolios, presentations, and summative assessments. We appreciate the flexibility provided in H.R. 5 for states to use such additional indicators of student proficiency but believe the goal of measuring students should be to assess their learning progress so that instruction can be modified to ensure their learning success. Thus, we propose that the bill require the use of multiple assessment measures so that states,



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districts, and schools have a more comprehensive picture of student performance and are better prepared to improve student outcomes.

We support the elimination of NCLB's highly qualified teacher requirements, which are essentially minimal certification standards. And we appreciate the flexibility to use Title II funds for principal evaluations. Like members of any highly skilled occupation, educators welcome evaluations that use multiple measures and lead to the ongoing professional development needed to become more effective and help them improve student outcomes. Nevertheless, we would have preferred to see enhanced federal support for teacher and school leader professional development, including

- Dedicated time during the school week for teachers to receive high-quality mentoring;
- Multiyear induction for new teachers and principals;
- Professional development that closely aligns with school needs; and
- Rigorous and transparent teacher and principal evaluation systems based on multiple criteria, including student achievement and classroom practice.

Student success is highly dependent upon family support and engagement, and we appreciate the strong emphasis in H.R. 5 on providing information to parents to help them make appropriate education decisions for their children.

However, preparing students for success in today's global environment also depends upon access to a comprehensive curriculum that engages them in a wide variety of disciplines, including the arts, music, economics, health education, and physical education. Today's students are tomorrow's citizens, and our schools have the opportunity and obligation to prepare them to become active in our democratic society. Unfortunately, H.R. 5 maintains NCLB's annual testing requirements for English language arts and math, thereby perpetuating schools' overemphasis on these subjects. College-, career-, and citizenship-readiness is not limited to success in English language arts and math, but is dependent on student access to a comprehensive, whole child education, which is particularly important for underserved students. In fact, H.R. 5 eliminates most of the programs that help to support a well-rounded education, and it fails to recognize the importance of services that support the mental, social, emotional, and physical well-being of students. We would have preferred that the bill maintain and strengthen existing programs



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that support the arts, civics and history, physical education, and student counseling services.

School improvement strategies under current law are limited and do not allow for turnaround methods commensurate with a school's level of underperformance and existing and needed support structures. Although H.R. 5 allows states to select their own intervention strategies for those schools the state identifies as most in need of improvement, it would be helpful to enumerate the key principles that any school improvement strategy should include. Specifically, H.R. 5 should stipulate that schools use innovative strategies for improving student achievement, educator effectiveness, and school quality that

- Are evidence based;
- Engage all stakeholders, including families and communities;
- Support an enriched curriculum and high-quality teaching and learning opportunities;
- Enhance the school culture; and
- Are grounded in a whole child approach to education.

Furthermore, H.R. 5 perpetuates NCLB's strategy of only recognizing schools that do poorly and does not provide any type of recognition, reward, or incentive for districts and schools that consistently perform well, close achievement gaps, succeed in cohort comparisons, or improve educator effectiveness.

Education leaders are continually instituting innovative practices and implementing systemic reforms in their ongoing commitment to support students' success and school improvement. Unfortunately, the delay in reauthorizing ESEA has subjected educators to outdated policies that hamper their ability to implement such improvements. Although we do not support H.R. 5 in its current form, we believe it is very important that the reauthorization process move forward this year, and we will continue to work with members of Congress to have the necessary improvements that we have identified in H.R. 5 addressed in a House-Senate conference committee. As an organization committed to improving the excellence of teaching and leading in our nation's schools, ASCD stands ready to partner with you to achieve the goal of enacting federal education policy that supports a whole child approach to education, recognizes and supports educators, and provides for the



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education and support students need to graduate ready for college, a career, and citizenship.

Please have your staff contact Megan Wolfe, ASCD's Advocacy Manager, if you have any questions. She can be reached at megan.wolfe@ascd.org or 703-575-5616.

Cordially,

David Griffith
Director of Public Policy