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

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

Dear Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray,

Thank you for your leadership in negotiating a bipartisan bill to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). We appreciate the tireless efforts of you and your staff and your willingness to set aside ideological differences to achieve this compromise. The Every Child Achieves Act is an important step forward in the long overdue ESEA reauthorization, and we look forward to the Committee's deliberations.

Accountability

State and local school leaders are well positioned to make decisions that affect the daily lives of their students and schools. Thus, ASCD appreciates that the draft shifts significant authority over education decision making to states and districts, while continuing to hold schools accountable. However, the true measure of student proficiency, educator effectiveness, and school quality must be based on more than just student test scores on a few state standardized tests, which, unfortunately, have been the defining measure of student achievement and school quality under the No Child Left Behind Act. This singular focus has resulted in several unintended and undesirable consequences, including overtesting, a narrowing of the curriculum, and a de-emphasis on untested subjects and concepts that are just as important to a student's development and long-term success. Furthermore, making decisions about student readiness, teacher performance, and school quality that have far-reaching ramifications should never be based solely or in large part on a single state assessment.

Although the draft bill also requires states to include graduation rates and at least one postsecondary or workforce readiness measure in their accountability systems, we are concerned that this overemphasis on college and career readiness neither encourages nor incentivizes schools to address the comprehensive needs of the whole child. And these additional readiness measures do not appear to be particularly informative or

useful for elementary and early secondary students and schools. Thus, we urge you to amend the bill to ensure that states neither rely solely on state standardized tests or other measures that provide only a narrow picture of student performance nor use these measures to make high-stakes decisions. Without setting a threshold of broader accountability, states will continue to rely on state standardized tests as the primary determinant of student achievement and school quality. We propose that the Committee adopt the following language, which continues to support state autonomy in designing accountability systems while ensuring they include additional indicators:

Results of student performance on state standardized tests, graduation rates, and measures of college and career readiness may not be relied upon as the only determinants of student performance, educator effectiveness, or school quality, and test scores alone shall not be used for high-stakes purposes.

Supporting Teachers and School Leaders

Teachers and school leaders are the two most important in-school factors affecting student achievement. Thus, the foremost strategy and funding priority for federal education policy must be adequate and effective preparation and ongoing professional development for educators to improve student outcomes. The Every Child Achieves Act provides strong support for educators, and we are particularly pleased that the bill provides specific supports for principals and other school leaders, updates the definition of professional development that recognizes today's best practices, and includes opportunities to support and encourage teacher leadership. In addition, we thank you for recognizing the importance of using multiple measures to evaluate educators and requiring that districts using Title II funds for educator evaluation systems include multiple measures in these systems.

It is vitally important to ensure robust funding for educator support in Title II. Allowing 100 percent transferability of funds between Title II and Title IV programs, and between Title II or Title IV and Title I programs, would jeopardize the availability of funding specifically targeted for educator professional development. The investments made through both Title II and Title IV help schools meet the federal goal of ensuring a high-quality education for all students, particularly the disadvantaged, for whom effective educators and nonacademic supports are particularly important. Thus, we strongly urge the Committee to amend the bill to maintain current law's 50 percent transfer authority, which would still maintain some flexibility while preserving a minimum level of funding for professional development.

Funding Flexibility

The role of the federal government in education has historically been to provide equity and access to educational opportunities for disadvantaged and underserved student populations. The federal Title I is intended to help meet these goals. We applaud you for eliminating the portability provision in the discussion draft, as it would have significantly changed the distribution formula that would have diluted the federal resources for the students and schools most in need of such support.

ASCD is a nonprofit, nonpartisan membership organization whose 125,000 members in more than 138 countries are professional educators from all levels and subject areas—superintendents, supervisors, principals, teachers, professors of education, and school board members. ASCD is dedicated to a whole child approach to education that ensures that each child in each school in each community is healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our views on the Every Child Achieves Act. For further information or if you or your staff has any questions, please contact ASCD Advocacy Manager Megan Wolfe at megan.wolfe@ascd.org or 703-575-5616.

Cordially,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Griffith". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

David Griffith
Public Policy Director