



U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

January 29, 2015

The Honorable Lamar Alexander  
United States Senate  
455 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray  
United States Senate  
154 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Alexander and Murray:

We are very pleased that both the House and Senate have expressed a strong desire to reauthorize the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB), the current version of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA), early in this congressional session. Reauthorization is long overdue, and we believe the current patchwork of state waivers has led to a great deal of confusion and uncertainty.

We appreciate the bipartisan interest in undertaking a thorough review of NCLB, and we agree that there are many provisions of the law that have either outlived their usefulness or must be significantly updated. We remain fully committed to working with you on this effort and look forward to supporting the bill that results.

Nonetheless, we are deeply concerned with the idea of ending the current system of annual reading and mathematics assessments in grades three through eight (and at least once in high school). These assessments are the cornerstone of maintaining accountability for results throughout the K-12 education system, particularly for disadvantaged children who need help the most.

In our view, annual assessments are an absolute necessity to provide transparent, objective and timely information on student achievement growth for parents, educators, the business community and the public. States' analyses of annual assessment results allow policymakers to evaluate the impact of the \$25 billion in public funds that are invested under ESEA each year. This accountability tool ensures schools and teachers are able to better target resources to improve student achievement, and it provides parents with timely and reliable information to make decisions regarding charter schools and other choices available to them.

Maintaining the annual assessment provisions and ensuring the resources necessary for this activity (as current law provides) is consistent with proposals introduced by both parties last Congress including the House-passed H.R. 5, Student Success Act; S. 1101, Every Child Ready for College or Career Act of 2013, introduced by Senator Lamar Alexander (R-TN); the amendment to H.R. 5 offered by former Congressman George Miller (D-CA); and S. 1094, Strengthening America's Schools Act of 2013, supported by all HELP Committee Democrats.

There is a valid cause for concern about over-testing in some parts of the country, and we strongly support recent efforts of states and localities to take a much closer look at the number and duration of tests in order to eliminate unnecessary and duplicative assessments. However, accountability for results demands assessing progress, at least on an annual basis, in a manner that provides useful comparable data for teachers, principals, administrators, parents and the public – and it ensures action when students are lagging behind. In our view, the best way that can be done is through maintaining the annual assessment provisions for grades three through eight and once in high school that are in current law *and* in the House and Senate Democratic and Republican proposals from last Congress.

Assessment policy is one of several issues that are important to our organizations – and not the only issue that will determine our ultimate positions on the legislative proposals you develop. However, given the heightened attention to this topic recently, we wanted to go on the record jointly now, so you were completely aware of our views.

Thank you for considering our position. We look forward to working with you on these important issues in the weeks and months ahead.

Sincerely,



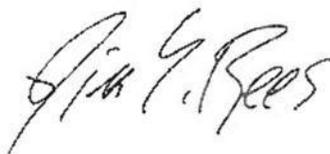
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