



February 27, 2012

The Honorable John Kline  
Chairman, House Committee on Education and the Workforce  
Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC

Dear Chairman Kline:

The American Association of School Administrators, AASA, congratulates you for initiating the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, ESEA, by marking up the Student Success Act HR 3989 and the Encouraging Innovation and Effective Teachers Act HR 3990. AASA strongly supports your vision of a more fair and accurate accountability in tandem with greater transparency and a return to state and local control over critical educational processes. Reauthorization of ESEA is four years behind schedule and improvement is badly needed. In the absence of reauthorization the Administration is reauthorizing through waivers with no public comment and participation which may result in back-tracking and confusion for states that get very far along in the waiver process if ESEA is enacted this year or 2013.

The reauthorized ESEA must include achievable goals focused on student progress and a comprehensive assessment of student performance based on state established standards

The Student Success Act focuses on college and career readiness, goals that are both attainable and a stretch. The Student Success Act eliminates the mandate for reliance on a single test score and thus improves accuracy in describing student outcomes. Finally HR 3989 returns the evaluation of results to the states, guaranteeing the prospect of a nuanced and balanced evaluation of results rather than the current 'one size fits all' model, where one missed cell equals total failure. Passing the Student Success Act means that state and local education leaders will have more control in the implementation of federal policy, a marked improvement over current law, wherein state and local educators are less empowered to avoid close scrutiny for flawed, unwise federal policy.

Returning authority over critical educational processes to the states is controversial and uncomfortable to federal policy makers who have called all the shots since 2001. Tension is built into the federal role in education. The federal government has helped protect children's constitutional rights and provided leadership in piloting new ideas. Those roles have proven invaluable. Wisdom and good will are not solely located in Washington, DC, and the successful implementation of federal education policy depends on active participation of a panoply of voices from the local and state levels.

Disaggregation and reporting of student subgroup results are the great contributions of NCLB. The Student Success Act continues disaggregation and strengthens public reporting. HR 3989 continues measurement of student academic achievement and graduation rates disaggregated by the subgroups identified by NCLB. Further, the Student Success Act also requires both greater transparencies in reporting and parental engagement which should produce the push for improvement at the local and state levels.

The Student Success Act relies on the skill and knowledge of school people and wise oversight and direction from state and local policy makers, thus holding the promise of returning to a period when state and local cooperation produced the large growth in achievement found in 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade NAEP math scores between 1990 and 2004. This is in stark contract to what happened under NCLB, where the law's rigid goal, top down policies, high stakes

testing and inaccurate accountability system, caused teaching only what was tested and resulted in flat NAEP scores between 2004 and 2009.

While we celebrate the positive changes in HR 3989 and HR 3990, both bills have flaws that should be addressed through amendment in committee or on the floor. Our greatest concerns are: the elimination of the funding lever Maintenance of Effort provides local school districts, the overly prescriptive and bureaucratic equitable participation provisions and the Title I funding cap. We hope the final bill will retain the current Maintenance of Effort and Equitable Services language, and eliminate the proposed funding cap for Title I.

It is also important to address the unfair method of distributing Title I dollars. Current law permits using number weighting or percentage weighting of poverty to distribute funds under FIG and Targeted grant formulas. AASA urges support for the All Children Are Equal Act which will weight funds based on percentage of poverty rectifying the current situation where smaller districts with higher poverty receive less per pupil funding than the largest districts with lower poverty rates.

On balance, the Student Success Act and The Encouraging Innovation and Effective Teacher Act place decisions with state and local policy makers and education leaders who are more familiar with local schools and likely more open to changes when policy is clearly flawed. As such we support reporting HR 3989 and HR 3990 from committee, with some needed changes.

AASA thanks you for the receptivity to input from teachers, principals and superintendents in the process of developing the Acts and stands ready to work with you as The Elementary and Secondary Education Act moves toward enactment.

Yours Truly



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