

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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TO THE MEMBERS OF THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS:

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the world's largest business federation representing the interests of more than three million businesses of all sizes, sectors, and regions, as well as state and local chambers and industry associations, and dedicated to promoting, protecting, and defending America's free enterprise system, urges you to vote in favor of S. 1177, the "Every Student Succeeds Act."

The Chamber has consistently advocated for several key principles throughout the many years of debate regarding reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act: high quality standards and annual assessments, transparency of student outcomes and school performance, accountability for the academic achievement of all students, consequences for low-performing schools, and more choices for students and families. S. 1177 earns a passing grade in each of these areas.

S. 1177 is not perfect; no legislation ever is. In particular, the Chamber would have preferred the accountability provisions of Title I to be stronger, clearer, easier to implement, and more heavily weighted to academic performance. However, S. 1177 strikes a balance between accountability for the taxpayers' investment on the one hand, and state and local control on the other.

High Quality Standards and Annual Assessments: S. 1177 would maintain current requirements that states set their own challenging academic standards, test students on an annual basis in grades 3-8 and at least once in high school in Math and English, and conduct grade-span testing in Science. This bill would also add important provisions to prevent the federal government from mandating that states adopt consortia tests aligned to the Common Core and dramatically restrict the ability of the Secretary to regulate state testing programs.

Transparency: S. 1177 would ensure that states, school districts, and schools issue annual school report cards. These report cards would contain a variety of important, disaggregated data on school performance that are crucial to ensuring parents, teachers, the business community, and the general public have a complete picture of the performance of local schools and school systems. S. 1177 would also enable the public to better understand the financial resources provided to each school and will encourage states and districts to design easier to understand report cards.

Accountability for Academic Achievement: S. 1177 would ensure that states create accountability systems that have a significant focus on achieving academic goals, as well as measure the progress of all students and all major subgroups of students. This system would be

used to measure a variety of school performance indicators, all of which will be established by each individual state.

The Chamber is concerned with the mandate requiring states to include at least one additional indicator to their accountability systems and with the possibility of too much weight being given to “non-academic factors,” such as attendance and student and teacher surveys. To address these concerns, the Chamber is committed to working with states to develop accountability systems that focus on student learning, rather than factors that are difficult to measure and questionable in their relevance to preparing students for success in college or career.

Consequences for Low Performing Schools: S. 1177 would enable state-determined actions to improve schools in the bottom five percent of all schools in the system and that are considered high school dropout factories because one-third of their students fail to graduate. States would also be required to address schools that have chronic problems with achievement gaps between subgroups of students. As states would have additional and wide discretion in how to address each of these situations, the Chamber is also committed to working with states to ensure comprehensive, effective action is taken.

More Choices for Parents and Families: While the Chamber wishes this legislation went further, the “Every Student Succeeds Act” has important provisions that would provide more educational options for students. For example, there are improvements in the federal charter school program, a new per pupil funding demonstration program that could focus more federal dollars on low income children and the schools they choose to attend, and a provision that would allow states to reserve up to three percent of funds for direct services, such as tutoring and public school choice activities at the local level.

Passage of this conference report would be one of the major accomplishments of this Congress, and the Chamber applauds the hard work of the House Education and the Workforce Committee Chairman John Kline and Ranking Member Bobby Scott, the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee Chairman Lamar Alexander and Ranking Member Patty Murray, and their dedicated staff.

Once this bill is signed into law, there will be much work to be done at the state and local level to ensure that state education systems remain accountable for the academic achievement of *all* students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The Chamber is committed to this work.

The Chamber supports S. 1177, the “Every Student Succeeds Act,” and may consider including votes on, or in relation to, this bill in our annual *How They Voted* scorecard.

Sincerely,



R. Bruce Josten