



December 2, 2015

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman
Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable John Kline
Chairman
Education and the Workforce Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Bobby Scott
Ranking Member
Education and the Workforce Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Alexander and Kline and Ranking Members Murray and Scott:

The American Federation of School Administrators (AFSA), the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), which collectively represent principals and other school leaders in the nation's 115,000 elementary, middle, and high schools, congratulate you on bringing a final conference agreement forward to fully reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). We are also pleased to offer our support for the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), and urge Members of Congress to pass this important legislation.

Enactment of the Every Student Succeeds Act is critical for our nation's students. The test-and-punish policies of the No Child Left Behind Act have dogged educators and schools through a one-size-fits-all accountability system that has done little to promote a well-rounded and complete education for every student. Further, the administration's "ESEA flexibility" waiver plans have exacerbated an overreliance on standardized testing by states and districts—oftentimes resulting in incorrect labels on schools as failing. The conference agreement will effectively eliminate problematic areas of the law, such as adequate yearly progress and 100 percent proficiency goals, and give states greater flexibility to adopt their own standards and assessments. Additionally, it will allow states to develop differentiated accountability systems that do not rely only on assessments results, but also incorporate other measures important to student success.

From our perspective, all principals, from prekindergarten to grade 12, must meet the demands and responsibilities related to effective school leadership in order to provide every student with a high quality educational experience. Research has proven that, second only to a great teacher in the classroom, principals are key to improving student achievement by creating a culture that sets high expectations of achievement and supporting effective instruction. We appreciate the Every Student Succeeds Act acknowledging the vital role that principals play in their schools and providing them with appropriate professional support to set high expectations for learning and ensure quality instruction in every classroom for every student.

Specifically, AFSA, NAESP, and NASSP support the following key provisions in ESSA:

School Leadership

- School Leader Recruitment and Support programs: Language under Title II programs of national significance that reserves funds for competitive grants to improve the recruitment, preparation, placement, support, and retention of effective principals and other school leaders in high-need schools.
- Language in Title II, Part A that allows states to reserve not more than 3 percent of the amount reserved for sub-grants to local educational agencies for activities for principals and other school leaders. While this is a critical provision to ensure additional professional development opportunities for the nation's principals, the principals' organizations believe this should be a required use of funds at the state and local levels. As noted, a strong base of knowledge has substantiated the effect of a strong school leader on student achievement, particularly in schools with the greatest needs. We believe support for principals and other school leaders must be a focus of state and local district efforts to improve schools.
- Language that retains principal evaluation as an allowable use of funds based on multiple measures of effectiveness or "in part on evidence of student achievement" instead of "in significant part on evidence of student achievement." Our members have expressed strong concerns that the new state and district evaluation systems place an undue amount of weight on student assessment outcomes.

Literacy

- The Literacy Education for All, Results for the Nation (LEARN) program in Title II, Part B to provide federal support to states to develop, revise, or update comprehensive literacy instruction plans that, when implemented, ensure high-quality instruction and effective strategies in reading and writing from early education through grade 12.

Digital Learning

- The Title IV flexible block grant that will allow educators to personalize student learning and provide professional development for educators and principals to help them implement successful digital learning initiatives. The Title IV grants allow local districts to decide how much of their allotments they wish to use on technology professional development, devices, equipment, and digital content, affording them access to a significant amount of funds to do so for the first time in five years.
- The study to determine the number of students who do not have adequate Internet access in their homes and the ability to use Title IV funds to help bridge the so-called "homework gap" too many face when they try to get online outside of school.

Early Education

- The provisions related to early childhood education alignment and associated professional development, as well as the authorization of the Preschool Development Grants. Principals believe this is an important lever for states to expand high quality early learning for all three- and four-year-old children. Principals also understand the importance of early childhood education and their role in aligning standards, curriculum, and instruction to help young children from prekindergarten to the third grade.

Middle Level and High School Reform

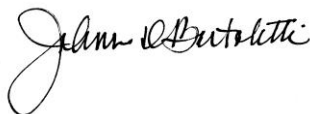
- Title I requirements of state plans to include information about how the state will work with local educational agencies to assist in the identification of middle level and high school students who are at risk of dropping out; ensure effective student transitions from elementary school to middle grades and middle grades to high school; ensure effective transitions from high school to postsecondary education; and provide professional development to teachers, principals, and other school leaders in addressing the academic and developmental needs of at-risk middle level and high school students.
- Title I language that allows extended year graduate rates to be part of a state's accountability systems and the option to use national assessments as high school exams.

Title IV

- The authorized programs and allowable use of funds under Title IV. Principals applaud the programs or use of funds that support well-rounded educational opportunities and safe and healthy students. In particular, principals support the 21st Century Community Learning Centers, arts integration, and other student support services to address student mental health and well-being, as well as other literacy and STEM educational opportunities.

Thank you for considering the comments herein, which reflect the perspective of the nation's elementary, middle level, and high school principals and school leaders from Pre-K to 12. We look forward to final passage of the conference agreement to better support educators and improve our nation's schools.

Sincerely,



JoAnn D. Bartoletti
Executive Director, NASSP



Gail Connelly
Executive Director, NAESP



Diann Woodard
President, AFSA