

May 7, 2010

The Honorable Tom Harkin  
Chairman  
Senate Health, Education, Labor  
and Pensions Committee  
428 Dirksen Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Michael Enzi  
Ranking Member  
Senate Health, Education, Labor  
and Pensions Committee  
835 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Enzi:

<<Sent via email: ESEAccomments@help.senate.gov>>

We, the undersigned education organizations are pleased to have the opportunity to offer our comments on the upcoming reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and would like to thank you for your leadership and commitment to working in a bipartisan fashion on this important piece of legislation.

A reauthorized ESEA must support, in a substantial way, literacy development of children and youth from birth through grade 12. Literacy development is an ongoing process, beginning in early childhood and continuing through elementary and secondary school. Even before the beginning of formal schooling, children from low-income families are less likely than students from higher-income families to recognize letters and understand the relationship between letters and sounds. Without intervention, disparities in educational outcomes persist throughout elementary school and beyond. According to the most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress, more than two thirds of all fourth and eighth graders are not proficient readers, and these students are disproportionately poor and minority. For the past two decades, the reading achievement of students across the country shows very little change, and according to Secretary Arne Duncan, "By this [2009 NAEP scores] and many other measures, our students aren't on a path to graduate high school ready to succeed in college and the workplace."

As such, we recommend the creation of a new comprehensive literacy program from birth to grade 12 that spans the grade levels and is integrated across the curriculum. Specifically we support incorporating the language from the recently introduced *Literacy Education for All, Results for the Nation (LEARN) Act* (S.2740 and HR 4037) into a revised ESEA. The language taken from the LEARN Act will ensure that students from birth through grade 12 acquire the reading and writing skills necessary to succeed in school and after graduation. This bill would authorize comprehensive state and local literacy initiatives and would build on the most effective components of the federal Early Reading First, Reading First and Striving Readers programs. Districts would support schoolwide literacy initiatives that include job-embedded, continuous, high-quality professional development for teachers and school leaders to incorporate literacy across the curriculum, analyze data to improve student learning; use appropriate assessments to inform instruction; and effectively implement literacy intervention strategies for struggling students. Districts could also use grant funding to hire literacy coaches or to implement a multi-tier system of supports.

In addition to the LEARN Act, we support the separate reauthorization of a number of unique programs such as the National Writing Project, Even Start, Literacy through School Libraries, Ready-to-Learn and Reading is Fundamental. These national initiatives compliment literacy instruction nationally through separate, yet related activities, such as sustained, high-quality professional development, family outreach and book distributions for low-income children.

What students need to know and do to be ready for higher education, work, and civic life is constantly changing and becoming more demanding. Interventions are necessary because to be successful in the twenty-first century requires skills that an earlier generation never imagined. Creating globally competent graduates requires high level reading and writing skills, and these skills are prerequisites for success in other high-growth fields, including science and technology.

We appreciate your consideration of our comments, and we look forward to this continued dialogue. If you have any further questions about the LEARN Act, or if you have questions about the work of any of our organizations, please contact Ellen Fern (efern@wpllc.net) or 202-289-3900. Thank you again for your ongoing support.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Excellent Education  
Association of American Publishers  
International Reading Association  
Knowledge Alliance  
National Association of Elementary School Principals  
National Association of Secondary School Principals  
National Center for Learning Disabilities  
National Council of Teachers of English  
Learning Disabilities Association of America  
National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform  
National Middle School Association  
National Title I Association  
National School Boards Association  
Reading Recovery Council of North America  
Scholastic Inc.