

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

July 6, 2015

The Honorable Lamar Alexander  
Chairman  
Senate HELP Committee  
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Ranking Member  
Senate HELP Committee  
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray:

As leadership Members of the New Democrat Coalition and Co-Chairs of its Education task force, we write to express our views on the Every Child Achieves Act (ECAA). We applaud your efforts to write a bipartisan piece of legislation reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) that attempts to balance the much-needed federal role in education and the importance of providing states and local school districts with the flexibility they need. We are also pleased to see specific provisions in the bill that support many of the priorities of our members. For example, the bill maintains the requirement for annual testing to ensure all students are learning, while creating grants for states to help reduce the number of unnecessary and redundant tests. The bill also provides critical funding for educational technology and innovation, encourages evidence-based practices and programs, and it establishes new funding that will help expand and improve opportunities for early childhood education.

Despite these positive steps, the ECAA has a number of areas critically in need of improvement in order to ensure the federal investment in education produces achievement and learning for all students, which is critical for the nation's workforce and economic competitiveness. Earlier this year, we released our *American Prosperity Agenda*, which outlines steps to support everyday Americans, including by investing in an education system that facilitates world-class schools. We respectfully recommend amending the ECAA so that it fully serves students at the beginning and completion of K-12 education by further increasing the investment in high-quality early childhood education, dual enrollment, and apprenticeships, along with college and career ready standards. Some of our other most important concerns are detailed below.

- **Accountability:** The ECAA requires states to submit their own state-developed accountability plans to the Secretary of Education that report student academic performance, including by subgroups of students. These subgroups include low-income and minority students, English language learners and students with disabilities. Under the bill, however, states would not be required to intervene when entire schools or subgroups of students are chronically underachieving. We recommend that the legislation require states to take responsible action to improve schools when subgroups of students aren't meeting state-set goals for two or more years. Furthermore, states should be required to identify and intervene in schools with a graduation rate at or below 67 percent and schools that perform in the bottom 5 percent statewide.
- **Data:** The disaggregation of student performance data was one of the positive outcomes of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), and we are pleased to see the ECAA maintains this requirement. However, it is important that data be disaggregated by subgroup *and* be cross-tabulated, a provision that is currently missing from the ECAA. This cross-tabulation would simply cross reference existing data, including by gender, race and disability to give

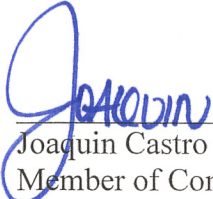
teachers, school leaders, states, and policymakers the critical information they need to have a more precise vision and understanding of which students are in need of additional support.

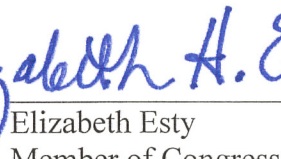
- **Resource Equity:** The ECAA continues to provide additional Title I dollars for districts with high concentrations of poverty, and we appreciate this necessary provision in the bill. Unfortunately, resources to schools within those districts continue to be distributed inequitably. We recommend adding language to the ECAA that would close the comparability loophole and require states to develop plans for ensuring precious resources, such as access to effective and experienced teachers and school leaders, advanced placement classes, rigorous coursework, dual enrollment classes, good facilities, educational equipment, and technology, are equitably distributed to districts *and* within districts. Improving collaboration with and providing the necessary resources to our state and local partners will be essential to fulfilling the aspirational goals set forth by the ECAA and addressing lessons learned from implementation of NCLB.

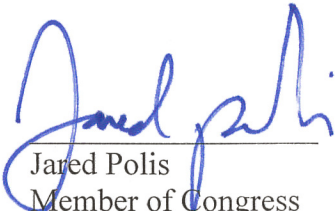
ESEA is long overdue for reauthorization. Our states and districts are forced to continue under No Child Left Behind's outdated policies or receive a waiver from the Department of Education, something that some of our own states have been denied. We appreciate your efforts to reauthorize ESEA and the many hours each of your offices have contributed to this legislation. It is our position, however, that while any reauthorization of ESEA should provide states and districts with greater flexibility, it should also maintain the law's original intent as consequential civil rights legislation. We have serious concerns about the ECAA's ability to do that. As the ECAA moves to the Senate floor in the coming days, we strongly encourage you to consider the concerns and recommendations we outline above.

We look forward to continuing to work with you on this legislation to ensure that every child receives the great education they deserve.

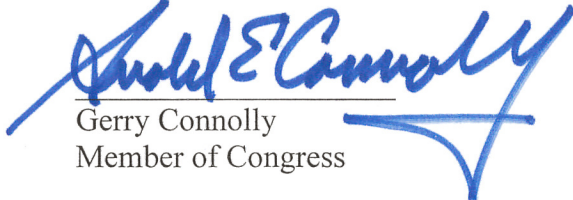
Sincerely,

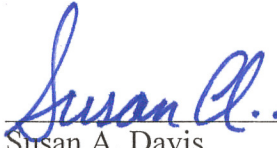
  
Joaquin Castro  
Member of Congress

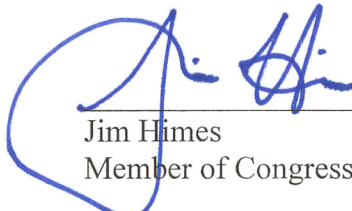
  
Elizabeth Esty  
Member of Congress

  
Jared Polis  
Member of Congress

  
Ron Kind  
Member of Congress

  
Gerry Connolly  
Member of Congress

  
Susan A. Davis  
Member of Congress

  
Jim Himes  
Member of Congress