



Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators

2608 Market Place ~ Harrisburg, PA 17110-9358
(717) 540-4448 (717) 540-4405 fax www.pasa-net.org

October 25, 2011

The Honorable Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senate
393 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Casey:

I write on behalf of the 850 members of the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators (PASA), which include school district superintendents, intermediate unit executive directors and other chief school administrators from across Pennsylvania, to express our appreciation for your leadership and support of efforts to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

Approval of the bill by the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee is an important first step to address the major problems with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Many of the changes contained in the bill correct longstanding problems caused by serious flaws in the legislation. While we applaud and support this effort, we also want you to know that we do have several concerns about the bill as approved in committee. We ask that you work with your colleagues to address these issues to the extent feasible.

While the legislation is a welcome step away from stringent and unrealistic AYP requirements and does provide some increased local control for assessments, there is strong reliance on one-time snapshot testing and schools having to test every child every year. There also is a disconnect between the fact that current assessments are broken and that it will take time to get meaningful ones in place.

The bill also retains the current, heavily prescriptive approach of utilizing turn-around models, with four of the six models requiring the firing of teachers or principals. These unproven inventions merely cause increased instability in already challenged schools. Strong, effective leadership that is supported and sustained over time is one of the key elements in successfully reversing the fortune of an underperforming school. The revolving door must stop for district and school leadership if we are to implement the change necessary to improve low-performing schools.

PASA members like the proposed use of growth models, multiple measures, and adaptive assessments, and ask that the final bill provide greater flexibility to states and local school districts in designing their own multiple-measures systems.

October 25, 2011
Page 2

With respect to teacher evaluation, we do not believe the federal government should be prescribing the number of tiers. There are requirements for comparability measures, teacher/principal distribution, and teacher/principal evaluation that, when taken collectively, tie the hands of schools in staffing their buildings, especially in small, rural schools.

Finally, we believe that codification of Race to the Top and Investing in Innovation programs creates a conflict with the original intent of federal education policy and would continue the investment of increasingly limited federal resources into programs that have not demonstrated or proven their effectiveness.

We appreciate your efforts to work with Chairman Harkin, Senator Enzi and others on the committee and within the Senate to continue working in a bipartisan manner to create the best educational policies for America's schoolchildren. We thank you for your ongoing effort in reauthorizing ESEA and greatly appreciate the dialogue you have encouraged with our organization and school administrators across Pennsylvania.

Sincerely,



Jim Buckheit
Executive Director