



The Education Trust

Closing the gaps in opportunity and achievement, pre-k through college.

April 14, 2015

Dear Chairman Alexander, Ranking Member Murray, and Senators on the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee:

Today, the Committee will take up the Every Child Achieves Act. There is much to like in the framework laid out by Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray, including transparency of student performance for policymakers and the public. However, the accountability sections of the bill concern us and can be improved through the adoption of four key amendments. Collectively these amendments would address a few major shortcomings in the bill and ensure a continued focus on the progress of low-income students and students of color.

The first, introduced by Senator Murphy, requires states to identify and assure action is taken in chronically low-performing schools and schools that consistently do not meet state-set goals for any group of students. Additionally, the amendment requires clear timeframes for state action if district supports and interventions aren't working. Both are critical to ensuring that schools, districts, and states have an obligation to act on behalf of students who struggle academically and deserve a real chance at the American dream.

The second, introduced by Senator Warren, builds on the recommendations from the Business/Civil Rights/Disabilities Coalition, of which we are a member — as well as the recommendations of the National Governors Association and the National Conference of State Legislatures — requiring states to set both short- and long-term goals for getting all students and all groups of students to college and career ready graduation. Such an approach is consistent with the way leading states design their accountability systems and gives schools the stability in expectations they need.

The third, introduced by Senators Bennet and Franken, requires states to incorporate student learning growth into their accountability systems. In schools with large numbers of low-income students and students of color, students are more likely to come in below grade level, and accountability systems should give credit for growing student learning from one year to the next, not just for whether or not students in one grade are meeting standards.

Finally, the amendment introduced by Senator Baldwin addresses a long-standing problem with some states adopting “n-size” rules in ways that are not only statistically unnecessary but that essentially make many of their most vulnerable student groups disappear from school accountability.

Together with the accountability provisions already in the base bill, these amendments will help ensure that states, districts, and schools act on their responsibilities to prepare all students for success beyond high school. We urge you to adopt all four of these strengthening amendments.

Sincerely,

Kati Haycock  
President