



July 8, 2015

United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

As the nation's largest volunteer child advocacy association, National PTA has significantly impacted improvements to the education and well-being of America's children for 118 years. Currently with millions of members and 24,000 local units across every state, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands and Europe, National PTA continues to be a steadfast advocate for federal policies to improve educational equity and opportunity for all children and their families.

Our association has consistently advocated for a bipartisan and comprehensive reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act – No Child Left Behind (ESEA-NCLB). Neither the Student Success Act (H.R. 5)—with additional amendments to be considered—nor the Democratic substitute represents a flawless reauthorization of ESEA-NCLB.

A top priority for National PTA remains the inclusion of language to support and strengthen family engagement. PTA appreciates the maintenance of the 1 percent district-level set-aside for parent engagement, as well as the state-based competitive family engagement program infrastructure. At the same time, PTA believes additional improvements can be made to strengthen family engagement through ESEA. Suggested improvements include:

- An increase to the Local Education Agency (LEA) funds allocated for implementation of family engagement programming under Title I, Section 1118 from 1 to 2 percent; and
- Establishment of a Family Engagement and Responsibility Fund as a State Education Agency (SEA) reservation of Title I funds as outlined in the bipartisan Family Engagement in Education Act (H.R. 1194).

Additionally, National PTA was pleased to see that H.R. 5 eliminates a one-size-fits-all accountability system, allows for multiple measures of student achievement in state accountability systems and maintains provisions requiring the disaggregation of assessment data by subgroups. However, as the House proceeds to a vote on the bill, National PTA would like to call attention to our concerns in the underlying bill; specifically:

- Lack of retention for state and local maintenance of effort;
- No codification of the cap on alternate assessments based on alternate achievement standards; and
- Inclusion of Title I public school portability provisions

We understand the House is considering a few additional amendments to the bill. While we encourage you to move forward with reauthorizing ESEA, we urge you not to do so at the expense of educational equity for all children and their families. National PTA opposes the A-PLUS amendment that would allow federal funding to be block granted to states to use at their discretion for educational purposes. This amendment could allow a state to contribute federal dollars to private schools, which contradicts the purpose of ESEA.

In addition, we recognize there may be attempts to eliminate assessment requirements completely or implement grade span testing instead of the current annual assessment requirement. Current policies mandated by No Child Left Behind and others included in state ESEA waiver plans inappropriately stress student performance on a standardized test as a metric of teacher effectiveness and school success. These policies mandate that high stakes decisions about students and school personnel be heavily influenced by a single data point. Proposals to do away with assessments assume that the problem is with the assessment itself. However, the problem is not with the assessment, but rather how it has been used in high stakes decision making. When used appropriately, formative and summative assessments provide critical data to help teachers inform and align their instruction with students' needs, and to support school wide improvement efforts. Therefore, our association supports the proposed requirement for states to annually assess students in math and reading for grades 3-8, and once in high school.

We ask for your consideration of our aforementioned concerns and suggestions as you continue with the reauthorization process. PTA remains committed to working with you to reauthorize ESEA this year. Please contact Jacki Ball, National PTA director of Government Affairs, at jball@pta.org or 703-405-5206, if you have any questions or need additional information.

Sincerely,



Laura Bay
President
National PTA



Nathan R. Monell, CAE
Executive Director
National PTA