



February 4, 2013

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

The Honorable John Kline
Chairman
House Committee on Education
and the Workforce
2181 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Health,
Education, Labor & Pensions
455 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable George Miller
Ranking Member
House Committee on Education
and the Workforce
2205 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Harkin, Senator Alexander, Chairman Kline, and Representative Miller:

On behalf of organizations representing state and local officials, we urge you to complete the long overdue reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Your work – to craft a bipartisan reauthorization of ESEA – must become a top priority for every member of the House and Senate this Congress.

ESEA’s last reauthorization as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) had a commendable intent—to identify the unmet needs of all children and to promote education reform—but also was flawed. It shifted too much control away from state and local elected officials, diluted the impact of federal resources, and relied on a method of identifying academic progress that focused on failure instead of rewarding excellence. More than 12 years later, it is past time to rewrite the law and correct its mistakes.

Without changes to NCLB, many states turned to the immediate flexibility offered by the U.S. Department of Education through the waiver process. Waivers will work for some states, but will not work for all. Moreover, waivers only provide temporary relief from specific provisions of the law and in exchange require new criteria of states, school districts and schools not formally authorized in NCLB or by Congress.

Only a full reauthorization of ESEA can adequately address the challenges state and local governments face in education. Policymakers at the state, local, and school district level need a long-term resolution and solution to NCLB. As we struggle to reallocate scarce federal resources and face economic uncertainty, we need greater federal funding flexibility. Most of all, we need federal policies that authentically support state and local innovation so that every student will be prepared for college or careers.

In short, ESEA reauthorization is truly “must pass” legislation. We stand ready to work with you to ensure that every state, district, school, and student may benefit from a federal elementary and secondary education law that works.

Sincerely,

Dan Crippen, Executive Director
National Governors Association

William T. Pound, Executive Director
National Conference of State Legislatures





David Adkins, Executive Director
The Council of State Governments




Matthew D. Chase, Executive Director
National Association of Counties



Clarence E. Anthony, Executive Director
National League of Cities



Tom Cochran, CEO and Executive Director
United States Conference of Mayors



Robert J. O'Neil, Executive Director
International City/County Managers Association



James Kohlmoos, CEO and Executive Director
National Association of State Boards of Education



Thomas J. Gentzel, Executive Director
National School Boards Association