

Alliance for Excellent Education ❖ Business Coalition for Student Achievement
League of United Latin American Citizens ❖ National Council of La Raza
National Urban League ❖ Southeast Asia Resource Action Center
The Education Trust ❖ U.S. Chamber of Commerce

September 29, 2011

The Honorable Johnny Isakson
131 Russell Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
455 Dirksen Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mark Kirk
524 Hart Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Pat Roberts
109 Hart Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Marco Rubio
317 Hart Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roger Wicker
555 Dirksen Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators:

As committed advocates for education reform, we appreciate your effort to advance the prolonged conversation on the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), currently known as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). As you well know, the law has been expired for four years, and there is consensus on many of the ways in which it can be improved. While a number of the policies outlined in the bill you have introduced reflect that consensus, we write to express our concern regarding the approach taken in the Elementary and Secondary Education Amendments Act of 2011 regarding accountability and improvement. A federal focus that is limited to only 5 percent of the nation's schools would overlook thousands of low performing schools and millions of children. As the ESEA reauthorization process moves forward, we urge you to improve upon current law while maintaining accountability and improvement for all students.

There is an inextricable link between the nation's economy and its system of public education. The 21st century global economy requires an education system that prepares students for a dynamic workplace in which tremendous amounts of information are applied in ways not yet conceived. Unfortunately, the indictment on America's approach to education issued by education experts, business leaders, and others over 25 years ago in *A Nation At Risk* rings true today: "If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war."

Current law needs to be improved; however, it is important that key principles of the law be maintained. Although the bill you have introduced asserts such critical policies as college and career ready standards and the disaggregation and public reporting of data by student subgroup, these policies will be undermined by only applying rigorous accountability and improvement to five percent of the nation's schools. As a result, this legislation threatens to overlook millions of the very students that federal education policy was originally designed to support.

Borrowing the label it has applied to thousands of schools across the country, NCLB is itself "in need of improvement." We urge you to improve the law while maintaining its commitment to accountability for all students. Accountability must apply to all of the nation's low performing schools, and all states should be required to have accountability systems that include rigorous improvement strategies, such as targeted interventions, whole school reform or replacement, and more options for students in low performing schools to attend higher performing schools or to seek additional academic support. Our individual organizations look forward to providing you with specific recommendations on your legislation. By improving the education system for all children, we will secure the economic vitality of the nation for generations to come.

Sincerely,

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