



December 10, 2019

The Honorable Lamar Alexander  
Chairman  
Senate Committee on Health, Education,  
Labor & Pensions  
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Health, Education,  
Labor & Pensions  
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Bobby Scott  
Chairman  
House Committee on Education  
& Labor  
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Virginia Foxx  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on Education  
& Labor  
U.S. House of Representatives

Dear Chairmen Alexander and Scott, and Ranking Members Murray and Foxx,

Four years ago, Congress passed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) that empowered states and local communities with greater authority to promote equitable educational opportunities for all students, including those from diverse backgrounds and circumstances who have been historically underserved. ESSA has given parents, teachers, and principals a greater voice in implementing federal law, while preserving a strong focus on educational equity and allowing flexibility to make improvements consistent with local needs

and assets. We have worked together with a bipartisan coalition in Congress and those who prioritized K-12 education by supporting passage of ESSA and then making down payments on the funding necessary to carry out its promise.

As organizations representing diverse groups of educators and leaders across the country who work tirelessly to serve our students every day, we come together to reiterate our support for ESSA on this anniversary much as the educators and leaders we support are coordinating in the field to realize ESSA's goal of ensuring a high-quality education for every student. The law set in motion meaningful collaborations between state chiefs, governors, legislators, state boards of education, local school boards, principals, teachers, parents, and countless others who care about the future of America's schools, and we strive for this productive work to continue under the solid supports ESSA has provided. Looking forward, we are encouraged by the opportunity continued ESSA implementation presents to serve all students well, and we reaffirm our commitment to working together to build on this foundation in the coming years.

With the freedom and flexibility to tailor state plans to local context, Congress fostered a sense of shared responsibility and ownership over educational accountability and school improvement that had been missing from many communities for far too long. Since ESSA was signed into law, states have been collaborating within their communities to create more meaningful accountability systems with a wider range of indicators, advance evidence-based policies to support and improve schools, and much more to provide high-quality, equitable educational opportunities for all students.

Since the passage of ESSA in 2015, states have engaged with educators, families, advocates, and local leaders to craft their required state plans. While it is too soon to expect longitudinal outcome data on the effects of ESSA implementation on student outcomes, ESSA has opened doors for important discussions in communities across America about each state's vision for education and their role in achieving that vision to improve opportunities and outcomes for students.

Changes made possible by ESSA are beginning to take root in schools. For example, school systems are increasingly measuring and focusing upon improving student wellbeing to ensure that all students are ready to learn. Stakeholders have also used the opportunity ESSA presents to reconsider what it means to graduate high school prepared for success in college and careers, and education systems are moving beyond traditional academic outcome measures to better support student learning.

In addition, many states have been working to leverage ESSA to enable struggling high schools in high-needs communities to explore innovative strategies to better support students. One example is New Mexico's partnership with Johns Hopkins University and 17 high schools across the state to launch New Mexico's first-ever High School Redesign Network, that focuses

on redesigning curricula, targeted professional development for teachers, and ongoing high-impact support around the planning, implementation, and monitoring of individualized, evidence-based redesign plans. This initiative is part of the Cross-State High School Collaborative that also includes Alabama, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New York, and Ohio.

Last fall, states began rolling out school improvement interventions under ESSA, and full implementation has begun in earnest this school year. ESSA allows for more tailored supports for schools than the law's predecessor, No Child Left Behind. States are focused on identifying the schools and student groups within schools that are struggling the most and are implementing innovative, evidence-based approaches to meet diverse student needs. For example, Arkansas developed a network of Equity Labs to explore issues and data concerning educational equity where district stakeholders examine data to identify equity gaps, consider root causes, and create a plan for equitable access to effective educators.

As the recent National Assessment of Educational Progress results that reveal persistent academic achievement gaps clearly demonstrate, there remains much work ahead. In many ways, the work of implementing ESSA to address these challenges is just beginning, and we must stay the course and allow these changes to fully take effect. We must continue to monitor schools' progress, support hard-working educators in the field, hold education systems accountable for appropriately resourcing public schools and delivering outcomes, celebrate student successes, and ensure that student outcome data for all students – no matter their zip code, background, or race – is collected, reported, and acted upon so that all students have access to a high-quality education. We also must continue to consistently engage with stakeholders at all levels to ensure that all students' needs are met.

Creating access to an equitable education for every student takes time and strong partnerships. States have proven that when policy leaders unify their voices and actions to achieve a strong vision for education, our students thrive. For example, Mississippi's education leaders are united in their steadfast commitment to equity and excellence and are leveraging evidence and innovation to improve teaching and learning, with resounding success for their students.

We know that when Congress comes together for the good of the country, it can accomplish great things. That's why as the work continues, we urge Congress to continue to prioritize meeting the needs of students, especially historically disadvantaged students, as it weighs appropriations and other education priorities. Collectively, we believe we've built a stronger foundation for American education under ESSA and are eager to continue to build partnerships among our constituents resolutely focused on elevating our education systems toward equity and excellence.

Sincerely,

AASA, The School Superintendents Association

American Federation of Teachers

Council of Chief State School Officers

National Association of Elementary School Principals

National Association of Secondary School Principals

National Association of State Boards of Education

National Conference of State Legislatures

National Education Association

National Governors Association

National Parent Teacher Association

National School Boards Association