



U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

**Dear Senators on the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee and Representatives on the House Education and the Workforce Committee:**

The undersigned organizations disagree on many things. But we come together at this critical moment — as many of us did back in 2001 — because of our common conviction that America cannot afford to keep squandering the potential of so many of her children. Whether we think about our country's future economic competitiveness or about social mobility and social cohesion, nothing is more important than an educational system that educates all of its children, rather than just some, to high standards. The American Dream is imperiled by the uneven quality and grossly disparate results of our educational system, and none of us can afford to sit by quietly and watch.

Over the course of the next few weeks and months, each of our organizations will work with Members of Congress on many of the issues you face as you work to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Some of us will focus on getting adequate resources in the law, especially for schools serving concentrations of low-income children, students of color, and English Learners. Some will focus on shoring up Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) programs, so our children are prepared for careers in the new economy. Some will concentrate on provisions affecting teacher quality, including much-needed supports for teachers as they implement new standards, while others focus on equitable access to the general curriculum and high expectations for children with disabilities.

But we have come together in the belief that none of those investments will make a sufficient difference unless the essential backbone of the law — assessment, public reporting and accountability for student outcomes — is strong. That means:

- All students must be assessed by the states in reading and math on a statewide assessment annually in grades 3-8, as well as at least once in high school, so they and their parents know where they are on state standards;
- The results of those assessments must be reported publicly, both overall and for all groups of students, so parents and taxpayers have honest, consistent information on how their schools are performing;
- States must establish accountability systems that expect faster improvement for the groups of children who have lagged behind, and prompt action when any group of students underperforms, so parents can have confidence that their children matter and that schools will partner with them in getting them to state standards and graduating with a regular diploma.

These ideas, of course, were the underpinnings of the 2002 law — a law that, we want to remind you, helped usher in the fastest improvements in the achievement of low-income children and children of color on the longest-standing national assessment (NAEP Long Term Trends Exam) that we have seen since 1980. There were also real gains in both inclusion and performance for students with disabilities and those still learning English. But we should be clear that we are not asking for the same rigid approach, where both goals and consequences were dictated from Washington. Rather, we urge that — in return for the billions it invests, mostly in supports for the very groups of children who are now lagging behind — Congress ask the states that accept these dollars to design their own assessment, public reporting and accountability systems in accordance with the set of common sense principles appended to this letter.

The Chairman's discussion draft of the Every Child Ready for College or Career Act contains elements of these principles, but falls short in several key areas. We are especially worried about the sections on assessment and accountability. Without much-needed changes, parents across America will not be able to be confident that the information they get from their child's school is accurate and honest or that their child's school will actively

partner with them in getting their child to state standards and graduation regardless of background or disability. It seems to us that parents deserve to be confident both that their school will provide transparent, reliable information and that it will be accountable for results, and that taxpayers more generally deserve a return on their substantial federal investment.

We look forward to working with you and with Members of the relevant committees in both Chambers to embed these principles in the law.

Sincerely,



John Engler  
President  
Business Roundtable



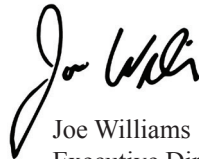
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