



J. Alvin Wilbanks
Chair

Gwinnett County Public Schools, GA

Joshua P. Starr
Co-Chair

Montgomery County Public Schools, MD

Robert M. Avossa

Fulton County Schools, GA

Ann Clark

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, NC

John P. Collins

Poway Unified School District, CA

Michael B. Cowan

Mesa Public Schools, AZ

S. Dallas Dance

Baltimore County Public Schools, MD

Karen Garza

Fairfax County Public Schools, VA

Jim McIntyre

Knox County Schools, TN

Jim Merrill

Wake County Public School System, NC

Justin (Tim) Mills

Bellevue School District, WA

Patrick K. Murphy

Arlington Public Schools, VA

Chris Ragsdale

Cobb County School District, GA

Jeff Rose

Beaverton School District, OR

W. Burke Royster

Greenville County Schools, SC

Tony Sanders

School District U-46, IL

Aaron Spence

Virginia Beach City Public Schools, VA

Washington, D.C. — January 28, 2015 — In a letter to the Senate and House education committees today, the Large Countywide and Suburban District Consortium (the Consortium) expressed its views on reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) with a particular focus on the timely question of the appropriate federal role in the design and development of assessment systems.

The Consortium supports Congress maintaining annual statewide assessments as a general rule in this reauthorization, while, at the same time, providing avenues for high-capacity school districts with a track record of significant student achievement for all students to develop and pilot innovative, higher-quality assessment systems.

Because they are charged with implementing federal and state policy at the local and school level, school and district leaders must have greater stability in the system in order to focus effectively on improving student achievement for all students. Applauding the expressed commitment of the committee chairs to accomplish the long-overdue reauthorization early in this Congress, the Consortium called for the following as most urgently needed aspects of an improved approach to assessment systems:

- Higher-quality assessments;
- A balanced approach that includes summative, formative and embedded assessments;
- Reduction in the overall amount and redundancy of testing; and
- Assessment for school accountability and improving student outcomes, but not for purposes that interfere with those primary goals.

Consortium members share a strong commitment to maintaining a system of regular and ongoing assessment for all students—including annual statewide assessments and transparent, disaggregated reporting of the results. But the current overuse of those assessments for high-stakes accountability and evaluation determinations has narrowed the focus and driven disproportionate resources to those tests.

“Assessment is an indispensable part of effective instruction—when the right kinds of tests are given, for the right purposes, at the right time,” says Consortium Co-Chair J. Alvin Wilbanks, CEO/superintendent of Gwinnett County Public Schools (GA). “The reauthorization of ESEA is the perfect vehicle for educational and legislative leaders to come to agreement on those best uses of assessments and put in place a balanced approach that will get the results we all seek – improved student learning.”

The Consortium also believes that the level of prescription and control under current federal law impedes, rather than advances, efforts to innovate and improve student learning. The reauthorized ESEA should therefore encourage states – in partnership with leading, high-capacity districts with a track record of increasing achievement for all students – to develop and pilot better systems of assessment and accountability.

“No Child Left Behind ushered in a new era of transparency in public education and that has been a positive change. Unfortunately, it also led to the overuse of standardized tests and accountability systems that are not aligned with what students need to know and be able to do in the 21st century,” said Consortium co-chair Joshua P. Starr, superintendent of Montgomery County (Md.) Public Schools. “It is my hope that Congress will work with our districts and others across the country that have built thoughtful accountability systems that define the conditions of success and measure schools and districts against that criteria.”

Such pilots will, over time, help shift the current accountability focus of statewide summative assessments to a check on the quality and consistency of locally developed and administered assessments. The Consortium is confident this approach will ultimately lead to improved outcomes for all students.

For additional information, please see the Consortium's [21st Century Education Accountability: Recommendations for a New Federal Framework](#).

The full letter is available [here](#).

About the Consortium

The Large Countywide and Suburban District Consortium is a unique network of some of the nation's most highly-regarded districts and district leaders, all of whom are committed to world-class learning for all students. Together, the 17 Consortium districts serve 1.55 million students. The makeup of Consortium districts is reflective of communities across America. Most have no majority student group; racial minorities compose 55 percent of students; and 40 percent of students qualify for free or reduced-cost lunch. Individually and collectively, Consortium districts have experienced significant success. Keys to this success include strong leadership, highly-functioning organizations, and deep investments in the continuous development of knowledge and expertise. These capacities are providing the foundation for changes in teaching and learning that are essential for preparing students for success in college, career and civic engagement.