



Washington, D.C. — October 24, 2014 — Large Countywide and Suburban District Consortium (the Consortium) Co-chairs J. Alvin Wilbanks and Joshua P. Starr sent a letter to U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan with comments on the renewal of waivers for provisions in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

“Public schools embrace accountability, but want to make sure it is based on what really works for our students,” said J. Alvin Wilbanks, CEO/Superintendent of Gwinnett County (Ga.) Public Schools. “We hope that our federal lawmakers will put politics aside and listen to the voices of education professionals as they seek to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.”

The Consortium believes that Congress must establish a bold, bipartisan vision for public education in the 21st century through the reauthorization of ESEA. In the absence of Congressional action, we understand the need for the Department to renew the ESEA waivers that have been granted to states in order to continue efforts to ensure that all students graduate from high school equipped with the knowledge and skills essential for success in college and career and ready to fully participate in civic life and the global economy.

“It is crucial that a reauthorized version of ESEA is aligned with what our students need to know and be able to do in order to succeed in the 21st century,” said Dr. Starr, the superintendent of Montgomery County (Md) Public Schools. “Any federal education law should support strong accountability while recognizing the complexities of providing a high-quality public education to all students.”

Mr. Wilbanks and Dr. Starr stated in their letter that the waiver renewal process should capitalize on the significant progress states have made to date toward achievement of the core waiver principles. As Secretary Duncan and the Department of Education begin to focus on the principles and requirements for waiver renewal, they encourage them to consider these recommendations:

For Principle 1 - College and Career Ready Standards and Assessments for All Students

- States should continuously improve their plans for meeting established college- and career-ready (CCR) goals.
- Student learning must be measured by higher-quality, balanced assessments.

Principle 2 - State-Developed, Differentiated Systems of Recognition, Accountability, and Support

- Accountability should drive positive changes in behavior, processes, and culture, while encouraging continuous improvement and innovation.
- Transitions to new assessments must be met with flexibility.

Principle 3 – Effective Instruction and Leadership through Educator Evaluation

- New approaches to measuring student growth should be considered.
- Evaluation systems must be better connected to rich professional development.

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

If you have questions regarding the Consortium, please contact Amy Starzynski (Partner, EducationCounsel) at amy.starzynski@educationcounsel.com or (202) 545-2917.

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 16 Consortium districts serve more than 1.46 million students. The make-up of Consortium districts is reflective of the make-up of communities across America. Most have no majority student group; racial minorities compose more than 60 percent of students; and, nearly 40 percent of students qualify as free and reduced lunch eligible. 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 have served them well to date and are providing the foundation for changes in teaching and learning that are essential to college- and career-readiness and civic engagement.

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