



Large Countywide and
Suburban District Consortium

May 28, 2013

Jack Dale
Chair
*Fairfax County Public Schools,
VA*

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman
Senate Committee on Health,
Education, Labor & Pensions
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Kline
Chairman
House Committee on Education
and the Workforce
2181 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

J. Alvin Wilbanks
Vice-Chair
*Gwinnett County Public
Schools, GA*

Robert Avossa
Fulton County Schools, GA

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Health,
Education, Labor & Pensions
455 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable George Miller
Ranking Member
House Committee on Education
and the Workforce
2205 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

John Collins
Poway USD, CA

Michael B. Cowan
Mesa Public Schools, AZ

S. Dallas Dance
*Baltimore County Public
Schools, MD*

Dear Chairman Harkin, Senator Alexander, Chairman Kline, and Representative Miller:

Michael Hinojosa
*Cobb County School District,
GA*

On behalf of the Large Countywide and Suburban District Consortium, the "Consortium," I am writing in support of your efforts to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The districts that comprise the Consortium are among the largest, most diverse, and most successful districts in the nation. Collectively, we serve nearly 1.4 million students and their families. Roughly 60 percent of our students are non-Caucasian and nearly 40 percent qualify for free and reduced lunch. We have come together at this time to inform and accelerate transformative change in education. It is in this spirit that we want to offer recommendations for changes in the law and express our desire to work with you in moving the reauthorization forward.

Richard Matkin
Plano ISD, TX

James G. Merrill
*Virginia Beach City Public
Schools, VA*

Tim Mills
Bellevue School District, OR

Among the diverse viewpoints being expressed about the future of public education in America and the appropriate federal role, we want to be clear that we embrace accountability. We believe there should be a federal framework through which states and districts are expected to ensure 21st Century outcomes for all students, particularly those historically under-served. The Consortium's recommendations seek to promote the right framework – one that provides high-quality supports, builds capacity within education systems, and values local judgment and decision-making.

Heath Morrison
*Charlotte-Mecklenburg
Schools, NC*

Patrick Murphy
Arlington Public Schools, VA

W. Burke Royster
Greenville County Schools, SC

Our preliminary recommendations center on two areas that would require significant shifts in federal law. Additional information about the Consortium and its priorities is provided as an enclosure.

Joshua Starr
*Montgomery County Public
Schools, MD*

1. Adopt 21st Century Outcomes for Students as the Goal of Title I

Federal law should make college, career, and citizenship readiness the goal for all students, recognizing the importance of student mastery of deep content knowledge and the ability to apply that knowledge through higher-order skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, and creativity. Acknowledging the states' inherent province regarding the adoption of standards and assessments, Congress should support (and not impede) state and district efforts to align their limited resources in pursuit of this goal and to benchmark their performance against the highest-performing systems in the U.S. and worldwide.

2. Adopt an Accountability Framework Centered on Comprehensive Systems of Support, Continuous Improvement, and Autonomy for Innovation

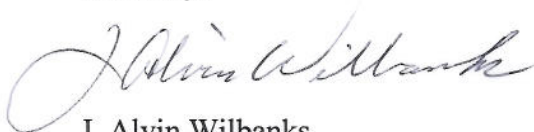
Consortium members believe there is an important federal role in promoting transformative teaching and learning through innovation that leads to more impactful, personalized learning for each student. Federal law should establish a framework for holding states and districts accountable for supporting all students in attaining 21st Century outcomes without undue intrusion on the legitimate realm of state and local policy-making. Districts that demonstrate success in meeting and exceeding outcome goals for students should be subject to fewer federal rules and reduced oversight.

Specifically, in amending the existing law Congress should:

- a. Affirm that a federal framework of accountability is just that—a framework, which should be adaptable by states and districts so they can address their particular needs and support their improvement initiatives most effectively;
- b. Ensure that accountability and support systems are aligned with the goal of helping all students achieve 21st Century outcomes, as described above;
- c. Shift the focus of accountability from regulation and monitoring to capacity-building and support. The use of robust diagnostics to identify and address the root causes of under-performance are essential here; and
- d. Support innovation toward the development of successful, scalable, and sustainable practices, while removing barriers to innovation.

In sum, Consortium members strongly believe that the adoption of these principles will strengthen the ability of education leaders across the country to be authentic drivers of meaningful reform. We look forward to working with you to achieve this vision.

Sincerely,



J. Alvin Wilbanks
Consortium Vice-Chair
CEO/Superintendent, Gwinnett County Public Schools

Enclosure: Statement of Consortium Purpose, Priorities, and Principles