May 7, 2015

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| The Honorable Lamar Alexander  Chairman  Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions  428 Dirksen Senate Office Building  Washington, DC 20510 | The Honorable Patty Murray  Ranking Member  Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions  154 Russell Senate Office Building  Washington, DC 20510 |

Dear Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray:

On behalf of the America Forward Coalition, we are writing to express our appreciation for your continued efforts to complete reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and to commend you for all of the work you have already done to advance *The Every Child Achieves Act of 2015*.

America Forward is a non-partisan policy initiative, spearheaded by national venture philanthropy and social innovation firm New Profit, Inc., which works to foster collaboration between national policy makers and innovators who have created high impact organizations that get results. The more than 60 member organizations of the America Forward coalition share a commitment to innovating to improve outcomes, using data to track progress and ensure accountability, and reaching across traditional silos and sectors to achieve better results. Working in more than 1,000 communities nationwide, America Forward members drive systemic change in workforce development, education, and early childhood – achieving measureable results every day. We believe policy approaches that foster innovation, reward results, and catalyze cross-sector partnerships can transform these local results into national change and propel all of America forward.

Passage of *The Every Child Achieves Act of 2015* by the Committee on Health Education, Labor & Pensions represents a critical step in the ongoing effort to ensure that every child has access to a world-class education, and the skills to succeed once they leave school. The proposed legislation makes important progress in supporting innovation, empowering high-quality external partnerships, promoting the use of data, and investing in what works for students; we hope to work with you and other Members of the Senate to further strengthen the bill as it moves through the process. In particular we support policies in the legislation that:

Encourage Partnerships among Schools, Districts, and Effective External Partners – We are encouraged by the proposed legislation’s inclusion of external partners – particularly the language under Section 1003 allowing states to contract directly with external organizations to provide technical assistance and support to LEAs as well as the continued priority for partnerships in the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program.

Reward Results by Investing in What Works – We applaud the consistent focus on promoting evidence-based practices, and especially the comprehensive definition of “evidence-based” included in Title IX, which ensures that programs meeting this qualification demonstrate meaningful impact on educational outcomes based on rigorous evaluation. America Forward also strongly supports provisions to authorize Pay for Success projects, expand innovative programs based on a tiered evidence funding model, and support expanded learning time programs and strategies. Furthermore, we are pleased that the proposed legislation would update the federal Charter Schools Program under Title V, Part A to support the replication and expansion of high quality charter management organizations that have success in significantly increasing achievement for all students, sound financial and business management plans in place, and transparent plans for closing schools that do not meet high standards of performance.

Promote Innovative Solutions –We support the focus on state and community-designed interventions, which will allow for innovation in school improvement. Additionally, we are pleased that the proposed bill includes evidence-based literacy activities under Title II, Part D and also strongly support the inclusion of language clarifying that states, districts, and schools can use federal funding to improve and expand early childhood education programs under ESEA.

Support Learner-Centered Systems that Personalize Learning – America Forward strongly supports the proposed legislation’s inclusion of “Innovative Assessment and Accountability Demonstration Authority” under section 1203 which allows States to develop and pilot innovative assessment systems that may include competency-based assessments as well as assessments that validate when students are ready to demonstrate mastery based on individual learning needs. We are encouraged by the focus on strategies to improve students’ non-academic skills. And we believe that increasing access to technology and digital literacy initiatives, through the I-Tech program, will enhance the ability of educators and school leaders to personalize learning at scale.

Accountability and Transparency – America Forward supports that the proposed legislation maintains the current law requirements for annual, grade level assessments, with the allowance for innovation referenced above. We agree that these important measures of student achievement will help to ensure that parents know how their children are performing and help educators support students who are struggling to meet state standards. We also support the continued requirement for disaggregation of data, which provides valuable information about whether all students are achieving. Furthermore, America Forward supports state accountability system provisions under the bill to focus on multiple measures of student success.

Ensure that teachers, school leaders, and other educators have the capacity to transform teaching and leading –We are pleased that the *Every Student Achieves Act* provides resources to states and school districts to implement activities to support teachers, principals, and other educators, including through high-quality, evidence-based induction programs, ongoing rigorous professional development, and effort to recruit new teachers, principals, and other educators to the profession.

**However, we believe the bill must be strengthened and as the process moves forward, America Forward hopes to work with you and other Members of the Committee to:**

* Increase incentives and support for effective partnerships across the *Every Child Achieves Act*, including a clear definition of effective partnerships and requiring effective partnerships under the 21st Community Learning Center Program and in expanded learning time programs.
* Maintain and strengthen focus on development of learner-centered systems, through personalized learning environments and non-academic skill development.
* Authorize the Advanced Research Projects Agency-Education (ARPA-ED) to pursue the development of educational technology and learning systems, support systems for educators, and education tools to improve student achievement and informal and out-of-school learning for individuals of all ages.
* Give parents and communities the up-to-date data they need to make informed choices and be effective partners in their children’s education by including postsecondary success measures as required elements of report cards.
* Strengthen accountability provisions for low-performing subgroups of students within all schools, low-performing schools, and those that are slow-to-improve and ensure that these schools target the most intensive, evidence-based interventions, including measures aimed at ensuring that all students have access to a culture for learning and growth, effective teachers and leaders, a multi-tier system of supports, additional learning time, and evidence-based, direct student support services and instruction to those schools.
* Use national service members and community volunteers across programs and strategies to ensure high-quality delivery of academic and non-academic support.

Thank you again for all the work you have done to advance ESEA reauthorization. Above all, America Forward believes that current law is no longer adequate to meet the challenges we face preparing all students for the jobs of the future and life success. The *Every Child Achieves Act* represents an important step forward, and we look forward to working with you and other Members to strengthen the legislation as it moves through the process.

Sincerely,

Members of the America Forward Education Task Force