



COUNCIL OF CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICERS

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September 5, 2007

The Honorable George Miller
Chairman, House Education and Labor
Committee
2181 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Howard “Buck” McKeon
Senior Republican Member, House Education
and Labor Committee
2101 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Dale Kildee
Chairman, Subcommittee on Early Childhood,
Elementary and Secondary Education
2107 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mike Castle
Senior Republican Member, Subcommittee on
Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary
Education
1233 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Miller, McKeon, Kildee, and Castle:

On behalf of the nation’s chief state school officers, we appreciate this opportunity to comment on the discussion draft you released last week regarding reauthorization of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The draft language seeks to address a number of critical areas for improvement to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) framework, and I want to thank you for incorporating several of the important recommendations offered by CCSSO and other state education organizations. We agree, however, that the language is a work in progress and look forward to continuing our collaborative dialogue as the Title I reauthorization process moves forward and as additional titles emerge for review and discussion.

The chiefs remain particularly committed to ensuring the revised ESEA promotes a new state-federal partnership—one that encourages innovative strategies for improving student achievement and closing achievement gaps. The new law can achieve this goal by setting a default floor, not a ceiling, for state policy and by empowering state and local educational agencies to produce results on behalf of all children through innovative solutions to the nation's most challenging education issues. States agree with the Committee that the law should be reauthorized this year, but we must first get it right by avoiding the notion that federal law can codify a single formula for success in every area and every state context. Achieving our shared education goals will require that we make room for sound education judgment and encourage continuous improvement across the states. Providing flexibility for such innovation across the law, tied to a reinvented peer review process, will help move us toward reauthorization and build on the foundations of NCLB without sacrificing strong accountability.

As you know, the nation's education system has changed dramatically since passage of NCLB in 2002. Every state has now implemented standards, assessments, systems of accountability, data reporting mechanisms, and highly qualified teacher standards – among other important accomplishments. To move to the next level, the new law must: (1) spur continuous state and local innovation; (2) facilitate increased state capacity; and (3) provide greater resources for ensuring that every child in America receives a high quality education.

The attached recommendations are presented as a working draft to provide additional direction to the Committee on how to codify these principles and address elements of the draft language we feel are overly prescriptive and unnecessarily complex.

CCSSO looks forward to continuing our dialogue and helping you move reauthorization in a direction that assures our nation's students have access to the world class public education they deserve. Thank you for your cooperation and attention to our response. Feel free to contact me or Scott Frein, Director of Advocacy, at 202-336-7010 with any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gene Wilhoit". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Gene" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Wilhoit".

Gene Wilhoit
Executive Director