

September 18, 2015

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander:

We are writing to encourage the House-Senate Conference Committee on legislation to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) to retain and strengthen key provisions in S.1177 that support early education and its coordination with K-12 education in the final legislation. Strengthening early education opportunities for children—particularly low-income children—is an integral part of strengthening our overall education system and helping children succeed in their elementary and secondary school years. The bill passed by the Senate included a number of important provisions on early education that should be retained as the legislation moves forward.

Early learning is an investment that pays off for children, families, and our nation. The costs of these programs are far outpaced by the short- and long-term benefits, which include a reduction in special education and grade retention, higher graduation rates, improved health, and an increased financial self-sufficiency in adulthood among those who participated in early learning programs as children. Because of all these benefits, economists, business leaders, pediatricians, law enforcement officials, and military leaders support early learning investments.

Yet, many children—particularly the low-income children who stand to benefit the most—lack access to early education. Current support for early learning through federal and state programs falls short of meeting the need. The ESEA reauthorization offers an opportunity to recognize state and local leadership and expand early learning opportunities for children and supports for the early learning professionals who work with them.

The Senate-passed bill would help support early education by: specifying that Title I funds can be used for early education; requiring alignment of K-12 standards with early education standards; supporting coordination across early education programs; allowing professional development for early childhood educators, including that focused on transitions from preschool to kindergarten, to be funded with Title II dollars; allowing funds for literacy education to be used for early education programs; providing funds to support early childhood educators working with English Language Learners; allowing Title III dollars to be used to support school readiness for English language learners; allowing Title IV funds that support children's physical and mental health to be used in early learning programs; giving charter schools the opportunity to use federal funding to create early education programs; requiring Ready to Learn Television grantees to coordinate with the Department of Health and Human Services in distributing educational

media for young children; allowing literacy and arts education grants to be awarded to early learning programs; allowing Title VII funds (Indian education) and Title VIII funds (Alaska Natives education) to be used for early education programs; and authorizing the Early Learning Alignment and Improvement Grants program dedicated solely to funding early learning. All of these provisions received wide bipartisan support throughout the reauthorization process in the Senate and should be retained.

These provisions recognize that high-quality early learning experiences create the strong foundation children need to succeed when they enter school. Congress should ensure that the final ESEA legislation incorporates these measures to bolster early learning and its role in our elementary and secondary education system.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Pediatrics
Child Care Aware of America
Child Welfare League of America
CLASP
Common Sense Kids Action
Early Care and Education Consortium
First Five Years Fund
Hadassah, The Women's Zionist Organization of America, Inc.
National Association for the Education of Young Children
National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth
National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education
National Child Abuse Coalition
National Council of Jewish Women
National Black Child Development Institute
National Education Association
Nemours Children's Health System
National Women's Law Center
Ounce of Prevention Fund
Parents as Teachers
RESULTS
Save the Children
Save the Children Action Network
Teaching Strategies
United Way Worldwide