

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

R. BRUCE JOSTEN
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TO THE MEMBERS OF THE UNITED STATES SENATE:

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce applauds the Senate's commitment to reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The Chamber supports many provisions of S. 1177, the "Every Child Achieves Act of 2015," such as the commitment to state ownership and control over challenging academic standards and annual assessments; the focus on clear, transparent information and important student privacy protections; the streamlining of federal programs; and the modernization and strengthening of the charter school program. However, the Chamber urges that provisions be added in conference that would hold schools accountable for improving academic results for all students identified as falling behind; without such provisions, the Chamber will not fully support a final law.

The business community has a vital stake in ensuring that America's schools are producing graduates ready for college and the workforce. The Chamber is a strong supporter of ensuring accountability for results at all levels of America's education system, and its policy recommendations are founded on the premise that there must always be a national commitment to the success of every child.

While the Chamber supports the significant flexibility that would be given to states, districts, and schools to determine how to hold schools accountable for preparing students for college and a career, that flexibility must be tied to federal requirements that targeted action be taken at the state and district level to ensure every child receives a quality education and that taxpayer money is wisely spent. Given the \$15 billion annual taxpayer investment in Title I, which is intended to improve achievement for underserved students, it is not enough for states and districts to simply identify schools where students are not succeeding. A balance can and should be reached between state and local control and the federal government's responsibility to ensure America's children are prepared to compete in tomorrow's economy, and S. 1177 falls short in reaching this balance. The Chamber advocates for the following requirements:

- States must create accountability systems that focus on academic goals (such as academic achievement on state assessments, graduation rates, or English proficiency) and limit the relative weight of additional indicators (such as attendance rates, educator satisfaction, and school safety) that are not direct measures of student learning for all students and categories of students;
- Districts must identify schools where any group of students consistently does not meet those state-established academic goals; and
- Districts must implement meaningful, targeted interventions to address student academic achievement issues and help those students reach the state-established goals.

Neither S. 1177 nor the accountability amendment offered by Senators Murphy and Booker sufficiently emphasize the importance of academic indicators in the state accountability system. Additionally, while S. 1177 would not require that interventions occur when a group of students within a school are identified as not meeting goals, the Murphy/Booker amendment's requirement for action is based on all the indicators in the rating system without a significant focus on academic performance. By not limiting the role of non-academic indicators in a state's accountability system, the federal government would essentially be encouraging states to mask underachievement and retreat to a time when disadvantaged students were hidden in the averages and no attention was paid to ensuring they received the education all students deserve.

S. 1177, the "Every Child Achieves Act of 2015," would make important strides in addressing issues that were created under No Child Left Behind, but the legislation must do a better job creating state flexibility while holding schools accountable for student learning. These shortcomings can be changed, and the Chamber pledges to work in a constructive manner with both the Senate and the House in conference.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. Bruce Josten". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "R." and last name "Josten" clearly visible.

R. Bruce Josten