

# Every Child Achieves Act: A Step in the Right Direction

**The Every Child Achieves Act, the most serious effort to rewrite the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in more than a decade, represents a strong bipartisan effort to improve upon the failed policies of No Child Left Behind and the U.S. Department of Education’s policy of granting waivers to the law.**

## WHAT THE BILL DOES RIGHT

- ▶ **Moves decision-making** to the people who know the names of the students they educate while maintaining supports that ensure zip codes do not determine the quality of education
- ▶ Incentivizes supports and interventions that are **tailored to local needs** while preserving the historic federal role in protecting the most vulnerable: children of poverty, students with disabilities, and English-language learners
- ▶ Recognizes that the one-size-fits-all approach does not work, and encourages communities, parents, and educators to **work together to improve their local schools**
- ▶ Requires the use of **multiple measures of student success** in elementary, middle, and high school
- ▶ Requires state-designed accountability systems to include **indicators of school success or student support**—such as access to advanced coursework, fine arts, regular physical education, and counselors or nurses—to ensure that states report on opportunity gaps and take action to close them
- ▶ Creates a pilot program for **state-designed assessments** driven by teaching and learning, not accountability alone, and allows all states that meet the criteria to participate in the pilot program
- ▶ **Incorporates the SMART Act** to provide funding for states to audit and streamline assessment systems, eliminate unnecessary assessments, and improve the use of assessments.
- ▶ Maintains the **right of parents and guardians** to opt their children out of statewide academic assessments where state and local policies allow them to do so
- ▶ Provides greater access to early childhood education by authorizing alignment and improvement grants to improve coordination of current funding

## IMPROVEMENTS STILL NEEDED

- ▶ **Build on progress in the underlying bill with further development of a new accountability system with an “opportunity dashboard” as its centerpiece.** To help ensure that students are college- and career-ready, we need a fairer accountability system, built around an opportunity dashboard, that includes

indicators of school quality and student success, such as graduation rates, as well as indicators of students' access to resources and supports like advanced coursework, fully qualified teachers, specialized instructional personnel, high-quality early education programs, and arts and athletic programs.

- ▶ **Give students more time to learn by addressing over-testing and decoupling the tests from high-stakes decisions.** Less high-stakes testing would allow teachers to spend more one-on-one time with students, especially those most in need of extra help, and undo narrowing of the curriculum. States and school districts also need flexibility to determine which tests provide the most useful information to help educators improve instruction and help students learn.
- ▶ **Require more transparency and accountability from charter schools.** The Every Child Achieves Act largely preserves the status quo: an aggressive federal push to expand the charter sector coupled with weak and inadequate requirements for accountability, transparency, and equity. Charter schools need to be held to the same standards of transparency and accountability as other publicly funded schools.
- ▶ **Enhance community schools.** Promote additional ways to serve the needs of the whole child through the research-based community school model, which provides wraparound services and supports for children in high-need communities.

## PROPOSALS THAT CAUSE CONCERNS

- ▶ **Outcome-based accountability systems like Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).** As we have seen with No Child Left Behind, using arbitrary goals based on test scores to label and punish schools does not work. The opportunities offered to students must be taken into account as well.
- ▶ **Title I “portability.”** Allowing limited funds to follow the student, the first step to vouchers, would dilute the impact of Title I, harm students attending Title I schools, create overly burdensome administrative and accounting headaches for local school districts, and do nothing to address the failure to fund Title I adequately.
- ▶ **Vouchers for public and/or private schools.** Vouchers divert essential resources from public schools to private and religious schools while offering the overwhelming majority of students no real “choice.”