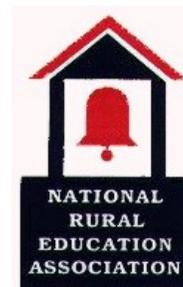


The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington DC 20510



The Honorable Harry Reid
Democratic Leader
United States Senate
Washington DC 2051

December 8, 2015

Dear Majority Leader McConnell and Democratic Leader Reid,

On behalf of the Association of Educational Service Agencies, the National Rural Education Association and the National Rural Education Advocacy Coalition, we write to express our strong support for the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

Collectively, our groups represent school system leaders, educational service agency leaders, and rural educators, including parents, teachers and administrators. ESEA reauthorization is long past due and we commend Congress' recent bipartisan and bicameral efforts to move ESSA to completion.

In reauthorizing ESEA, ESSA reinforces a proper balance between federal, state and local governments, providing more flexibility to the state and local levels while preserving the critical federal role of supporting and strengthening our nation's schools. We'd like to call attention to several specific items in ESSA that recognize the unique opportunities and obstacles facing our nation's rural schools:

- Rural Education Achievement Program: REAP represents a dedicated stream of flexible, formula dollars for local school districts, a much needed resource utilized to hire additional teachers and aides, purchase new technology, extend course offerings for students, and increase the focus on closing the achievement gaps.
- Rural Study: The Department of Education will have to administer a review/study of how it is serving our nation's rural schools.
- Rural School Consolidated Grant Applications: This language allows rural schools to coordinate, through their local education service agency, in order to submit consolidated applications. This is a practice underway in a small number of states and expands this flexibility/opportunity to all states.
- Title I Formula Study: We commend both the House and Senate versions for examining the construct of the Title I formula and for proposing changes, including the revision of number weighting to ensure that Title I dollars are allocated in an equitable manner to the neediest of schools. While the formula remains unchanged in ESSA, including unchanged enrollment quintiles, we are very supportive of the requirement of Congress to fully examine the Title I formula, including the impact of number and percentage weighting on small, large, urban and rural schools and how the formulas do (or do not) adequately target Title I dollars to the neediest of schools.

We applaud Senators Lamar Alexander and Patty Murray and Representatives John Kline and Bobby Scott for their leadership throughout this process. As the primary education bill shaping our nation's K-12 educational environment and experience, ESSA represents a significant improvement over current law and a strong reauthorization of ESEA. The legislation provides a modernized, flexible approach to federal education policy for our nation's schools and the students they serve. We strongly support ESSA and urge swift passage in the Senate, so the bill can move to the President's desk.

Sincerely,

Lee Warne
Executive Director, AESA

John Hill
Executive Director, NREA

Ray Patrick
Executive Director, NREAC

CC: U.S. Senate