

Forum on Educational Accountability

www.edaccountability.org

February 20, 2008

Dear Senator,

We understand that the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions seeks to mark up a reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind/Elementary and Secondary Education Act early this spring.

We believe this reauthorization will have a profound effect on our nation's students and educational systems. We therefore ask that interested groups such as ours have adequate time between the drafting of a bill and markup, and then between markup and Senate floor time, to consider and respond to the draft and then to the Committee's bill. Our organizations need time to solicit input from our leaders and affiliates on any new legislation. Allowing time for this will help ensure that the bill results in as few unintended effects as possible. While the Committee has indeed labored for some time to work through the complicated issues and views surrounding this law, it is important not to rush through a bill at the end of this process. Thus, we request two week's time at each key juncture.

The Forum on Educational Accountability (FEA) carries forward the ideas developed in the *Joint Organizational Statement on NCLB*, now signed by 143 education, civil rights, religious, disability, parent, labor and civic organizations. We have previously shared with you the *Statement* and the FEA's legislative recommendations. We support expeditious passage of legislation, but a new law must meet the criteria established in the *Statement* and the FEA legislative recommendations.

The *Joint Statement* proposes a major overhaul of the federal law. These changes would:

- Replace the law's arbitrary proficiency targets with outcome and improvement goals based on rates of success actually achieved by effective Title I schools.
- Overhaul assessments to reduce testing, support multiple indicators of student learning, including state and local assessments, and utilize growth models, while funding development of a new accountability system.
- Focus on improvement, not punishment; eliminate sanctions that do not have a record of success and allow improvement efforts sufficient time to succeed.
- Support continuing high-quality professional development and other actions necessary for schools to ensure strong learning outcomes for all students.
- Fully fund Title I and supply the additional resources needed to ensure all schools can develop the capacity to serve their students well.

The Forum on Educational Accountability (FEA) has further developed these ideas in a series of reports and comprehensive legislative recommendations.* These recommendations provide ample detail on ways to implement the concepts in the *Joint Statement*. The recommendations:

- focus on how to improve school capacity through professional development, parental involvement, and support for families, including family literacy and parenting skills programs and adult mentoring for children whose parents are not available. In particular, collaborative improvement efforts developed by school-based educators and supported by districts and states should be core activities in every Title I school;
- propose a model of "balanced accountability" that factors in both capacity-building efforts and improved outcomes as shown through multiple measures; and
- explain how to construct a sound and educationally beneficial assessment system.

The federal government must actively work for equitable learning opportunities for all students. By adopting the concrete changes and funding increases specified in the *Joint Statement* and further developed by FEA, the federal government can help ensure the educational progress that NCLB promised but has not delivered.

Sincerely yours,

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

Monty Neill, Ed.D.
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*All *Joint Statement* signers agree to the goals of the *Joint Statement* and seek to implement its recommendations. Additional statements made by FEA reflect this commitment, but may not reflect all individual positions taken by signatories.

The *Joint Statement* and all FEA reports are on the web at www.edaccountability.org. We would be pleased to discuss them with you at your convenience.