

Forum on Educational Accountability

www.edaccountability.org

September 5, 2007

The Honorable Edward Kennedy, Chair
Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Michael Enzi
Ranking Member, Senate HELP Committee
379A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Sirs:

As Congress reconvenes and you lead the HELP Committee in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, we would like to remind you that 139 education, civil rights, religious, disability, parent, civic and labor organizations, representing more than 50 million Americans, have signed the Joint Organizational Statement on No Child Left Behind calling for significant changes to the law.

We are pleased that members of the Committees and their staff are considering the Forum on Educational Accountability's (FEA) recommendations, including some of our detailed legislative proposals. FEA is a working group from among the signers of the Joint Statement; we have submitted detailed legislative recommendations to both houses of Congress.

Specifically, we ask the Senate HELP Committee to ensure that the new law incorporates the following changes:

Accountability: *Ensure that law's emphasis shifts from applying sanctions for failing to raise test scores to holding states and localities accountable for making the systemic changes that improve student learning.* Replace rigid annually escalating sanctions that wait for individual Title I funded schools to fail Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) with systemic and other flexible improvements for all Title I funded schools ("capacity building"), initiated from the beginning. Ensure states and localities publicly report what steps they have taken to implement the systemic improvements, as well as assessment results for each school on a disaggregated basis. Replace current AYP requirements, which researchers agree cannot be met by 2014, with expectations that within five years all Title I schools will attain a rate of improvement now reached by more effective Title I schools ("a positive trend in learning outcomes"). Remove the governance-change sanctions schedule in the current law. Provide for mandatory district intervention in schools unable to implement systemic changes. States must assume responsibility for changes in schools that after five years are unable to implement the systemic changes or to show a positive trend in learning outcomes. This may include such changes as replacing principals or other staff.

Assessments: *Support the use of multiple measures – multiple assessments and multiple indicators of school progress – across core subject areas.* Support development of local and

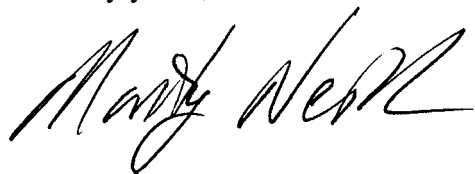
state assessments that enable assessment of higher order thinking and that are instructionally useful. Authorize significant sums to encourage states to develop these new systems. Allow growth measures that track the progress of the same students from year to year. Reduce the amount of mandated testing, because testing every child every year is not necessary for accountability purposes. Support research, development and dissemination of high-quality assessments for English language learners and students with disabilities, including tools to be used by, and for the professional development of, teachers. Allow assessment results in subjects other than reading and math, as well as important indicators such as graduation rates and grade promotion rates, to carry enough weight in school evaluations to counter the tendency to narrow curriculum and instruction to reading and math.

Capacity Building: *Build the capacity of teachers to effectively teach a strong and rich curriculum to all students through professional development that addresses student learning needs identified by school staff.* This includes: regular peer collaboration; intensive mentoring; creation of positions for mentor teachers; and intensive training in how to engage families and in instructional leadership. Build the capacity of principals to be effective instructional leaders; of districts to provide high quality technical assistance to schools in carrying out the school improvement process; and of states to assist districts and take ultimate responsibility where necessary, through training and funding for this purpose. *Strengthen parent involvement and build the capacity of parents* to support their students' academic learning at home by offering adult literacy and family skills programs and adult mentoring or similar programs for children without available parents. Sustained professional development and parent involvement are two key components of the systemic reforms all Title I schools should engage in.

Funding: *Fully fund Title I, so all eligible students can benefit from major school improvements and the resource and opportunity gaps can be closed.* Require that 20% of Title I funds be allocated to implement the systemic changes in professional development, with states providing a matching amount for this purpose, and 5% of Title I funds be allocated to implement the systemic changes in family involvement and support. If this approach is not accepted, authorize similar sums within the law to support these programs.

The Joint Statement and the FEA recommendations are on the web at www.edaccountability.org, or we would be pleased to send them to you electronically.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Monty Neill". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "M" and "N".

Monty Neill, Ed.D.
Chair

Cc: All members of the Education Committees