April 14, 2015

The Honorable Lamar Alexander          The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair                                  Ranking Member
Committee on Health, Education, Labor, Committee on Health, Education, Labor,
and Pensions                          and Pensions
U.S. Senate                           U.S. Senate

Dear Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray:

As the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee prepares to advance legislation to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) later this month, our organizations welcome the opportunity to offer our recommendations on several critical policy matters. We are a broad alliance of education, business, and professional organizations that is strongly committed to the goal of elevating the education of all students in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematic (STEM) subjects as a national priority as reflected through education reforms, policies to drive innovation, and federal and state spending priorities.

In today’s economy, strong STEM skills are a central element of a well-rounded education and every student needs to have a strong foundation in these subjects in order to land and succeed in virtually any job – from the shop floor to the research lab to the board room. Further, the best, most highly paying jobs are nearly all in the STEM fields. As you revise ESEA, we hope you will set a high bar for our nation’s schools in preparing students for the challenges of today’s increasingly competitive world.

We urge you to incorporate two fundamental concepts into your reauthorization proposals:

First, the accountability framework of ESEA should include a requirement that states continue to assess student performance in mathematics and science and that states be required to adopt rigorous standards in these subjects that are aligned to college and career readiness. While we recognize that one of the goals of a reauthorization will be to provide states with greater flexibility on many levels, we also consider it a fundamental federal responsibility to ensure that we are accurately measuring and monitoring student learning for all students in the subjects that are essential to their success.

Second, we strongly urge you to give high priority to funding for STEM education-related activities in elementary and secondary school teacher quality, recruitment, retention, and professional development programs administered through the U.S. Department of Education (DoEd). We have long supported the DoEd Math and Science Partnership Program (Title II.B in current law), which provides the sole source of dedicated funding at DoED to support professional development activities for STEM educators in every state and has shown excellent results in independent evaluations.
If we are going to enable our students to compete in the global economy we must maintain a strong federal commitment to improve teaching and learning in the critical STEM fields. We look forward to working with you and your colleagues to ensure that STEM education is a national priority – as Congress has repeatedly agreed it should be.

Respectfully,

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