



July 6, 2015

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

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

Dear Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray:

As the Senate prepares to debate legislation that would reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the STEM Education Coalition would like to thank you for your leadership in crafting a comprehensive and bipartisan bill that includes a significant focus on improving learning in the critical science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) subjects. As an alliance of more than 600 education, business, and professional organizations, we are strongly committed to the goal of elevating the education of all students in the STEM subjects as a national priority as reflected through federal education laws, policies to drive innovation, and federal and state spending priorities.

In today's economy every student needs to have a strong foundation in the STEM subjects in order to land and succeed in virtually any job – from the shop floor to the research lab to the boardroom. Further, the best, most highly paying jobs are nearly all in the STEM fields. 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 STEM fields.

As the Senate moves forward with floor consideration of the Every Child Achieves Act (ECAA), we wish to highlight the most important aspects of this legislation in helping states prepare our students for the challenges of today's increasingly competitive world.

The bill would retain current-law requirements for states to continue to assess student performance in mathematics and science and that states be required to adopt rigorous standards in these subjects. While some have called for a reduction or wholesale elimination of these testing requirements, we consider it a fundamental federal responsibility to ensure that we are accurately measuring and monitoring progress for all students in these subjects, which are essential to success.

We are also extremely pleased that the ECAA contains a provision – added during Committee consideration by a bipartisan vote – to provide each state with dedicated resources that would be focused on improving teaching and learning in STEM subjects. Section 2005 would support partnerships between schools, businesses, non-profits and institutions of higher education

which would support a wide range of STEM-focused objectives, including recruitment, retention, and professional development of educators, expansion of learning opportunities both in and outside the classroom, and closing achievement gaps for at-risk and high-need student populations.

Finally, we want to address one additional policy issue that was raised during committee consideration of the ECCA, namely that the STEM funding provision in the bill was duplicative of STEM programs at other federal agencies. It most definitely is not. The Section 2005 provision would be the only STEM education program – at the Department of Education or any other federal agency – providing direct formula-based funding to states to exclusively support STEM education learning. It is both appropriate and essential for the nation’s most prominent education law to establish STEM education as a critical nationwide priority.

If we are going to empower 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 wish you good fortune in navigating this bill through the Senate and look forward to working with you and your colleagues to ensure that STEM education is a national priority.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James F. Brown III". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underlining the name.

James F. Brown
Executive Director