



## JOBS FOR THE FUTURE

### ESEA Recommendations – Chairman’s Draft – 114<sup>th</sup> Congress

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February 2, 2015

The Honorable Lamar Alexander  
Chairman, Health, Education, Labor,  
and Pensions Committee  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Ranking Member, Health, Education,  
Labor, and Pensions Committee  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray:

We applaud you for your hard work and taking the initial steps to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), a law that must be fixed in order for our nation’s schools to operate within a coherent system that encourages improvement for all schools and students, including low-income and underprepared students. While ESEA waivers have provided some relief from the outdated law, they are a temporary solution.

Jobs for the Future has 30 years of experience working with our partners on innovative, scalable models and approaches in education and workforce to ensure that all lower-income young people and workers have the skills and credentials needed to succeed in our economy.

- Based on our work with state, regional, and local partners in K-12, Career and Technical, and Postsecondary Education, we believe that a successful ESEA law must create better alignment between these education systems – including **better alignment** between education and what is expected of individuals in the current and future labor market. Currently in our nation, over 36 million adults (1 in 6 adults) have low basic skills; over 1.2 million students drop out of high school each year; 60% of postsecondary students need some type of remediation; and youth unemployment is higher than ever. Our systems cannot afford to be siloed any longer.
- One priority in creating this alignment is for a new ESEA **to support innovation and the scaling of promising and proven strategies** to improve student K-12 and postsecondary outcomes – particularly among low-income, underprepared, and minority students. Part of this innovation must be a push for more efficient pathways to and through K-12 and postsecondary credentials with value in the labor market, at low or no cost to students.

- A new ESEA law must also ***place students at the center of reforms of teaching and learning, accountability and assessment*** to ensure that our education systems provide the rigor, depth, and skill sets needed for students to succeed in K-12, postsecondary education, and the labor market. These tenets should be accomplished in the law with equity as a constant guidepost – for not only is education a civil right in our country, but it is essential to closing gaps in outcomes for our nation’s success worldwide.

**There are several provisions that can help further these goals within the Chairman’s draft reauthorization bill:**

### **Alignment of metrics and expectations**

Throughout the bill, structures and metrics for innovation and improvement, and expectations of teacher and leader skill development, can all aim towards improved secondary, postsecondary, and career or work-based learning opportunity outcomes for students. The most innovative, efficient, and effective pathways in communities are braiding federal, state, and local K-12 funds, career and technical education funds, and postsecondary education resources to ensure that students leave high school prepared to succeed in postsecondary education, careers, and civic life. The federal government can encourage such innovation with effective outcomes by:

- allowing programs to align and streamline reporting and accountability metrics in exchange for outcomes,
- encouraging partnerships,
- encouraging alignment of career-related pathways and work-based learning opportunities to current labor market information, and
- keeping an emphasis on secondary, postsecondary, career, and civic success as the long-term goals in K-12 education.

### **Innovation, improvement, and efficiency**

We applaud the bill for highlighting states and districts as laboratories of innovation and reform, and for providing them with the room to innovate as they implement K-12 system changes to improve outcomes for students. From our work with partners, we are particularly attuned to the fact that high schools in our nation are at a critical juncture, and the federal government is an important partner in ensuring that programs better align secondary education, postsecondary education, and employer needs for results.

In order to further spur innovation and improvement in regions, states, and districts, we hope the Committee will consider *our attached recommendations on high school reform and innovation in partnership with KnowledgeWorks*. The federal government has an important role to play in helping schools and districts test out and scale up more efficient, cost-

effective, pathways through postsecondary education that provide the skills sets that employers urgently need. The federal government can help provide the latitude to innovate with fewer barriers, while expecting results in return.

Specifically, in addition to small recommended changes to existing bill language to improve opportunities for systems alignment and innovation, we propose a *Bridge to College and Career program to allow partnerships to test out and scale promising and proven solutions to ready secondary students for college and careers – with active involvement from K-12, employers and postsecondary partners*. Such a program would help states and communities identify cost-effective reforms, while providing local, regional, and large employers with the prepared talent they need, and preparing students to secure a good career after secondary and postsecondary education. The proposal includes an emphasis on dropout recovery pathways leading to postsecondary success – an enormous student loss point in our current systems.

We also recommend a *Fast Track to College program* that would invest in scaling proven early college high school and other dual enrollment programs. Early college high school and dual enrollment strategies have strong data indicating their success. For example, early college students are far more likely to graduate high school. Ninety percent of early college students receive a diploma vs. 78% of students nationally. Overall college persistence among early college students is much higher than the national average (86% vs. 72%); and 1 in every 3 early college students earns a full Associate's degree or other postsecondary credential while in high school. Investing in proven directions is important to helping communities and states scale models that work to increase secondary and postsecondary outcomes for students – particularly low-income students, and lead to broader impacts nationwide.

## **State support for innovation, improvement, and pathways through postsecondary success**

Innovation requires strong partnerships at all levels in order to sustain successes. Federal, state, regional, and local resources all must be harnessed to improve the cost, efficiency, and outcomes of high school innovations. As we work with states on investing in policies, models, and programs that are proven to improve secondary, postsecondary, and labor market outcomes among all students, *we are concerned that rolling back maintenance of effort provisions could stymie the progress that has been made to date in improvement activities with proven outcomes*. While federal funding is a small portion of overall education funding in our nation; federal and state resources are critical to the work, and we cannot risk putting education reform on the back burner of state budget priorities at a time when education is more critical than ever in the global economy.

*Strong state accountability* is also essential to sustaining gains made through innovative reforms and to ensuring that more seek proven solutions when outcomes indicate that

students are not being served well by schools or programs. While many states are taking initiative on strong accountability and providing resources for school improvement, others need the partnership of the federal government to maintain strong accountability and provide the capacity and resources to make significant changes when needed.

*For this reason, we believe it is important that the adjusted 4-year cohort graduation rate and extended year rate remain central to state accountability systems and school improvement activities, and that schools have the capacity to implement the necessary reforms when their schools are not meeting students needs, based on accountability data and early warning indicators. We hope that the bill can be strengthened to preserve more of an emphasis on accountability paired with capacity to implement reforms.*

## **Student-centered learning**

We applaud the bill for incorporating provisions that would help improve pedagogy and assessment to encourage student-centered teaching and learning that prepare students for success in college, careers, and civic life. JFF's research series on student centered learning and "Deeper Learning" bear out that when assessments measure what we truly want students to be able to know and do upon graduation, teaching and learning changes to deliver the depth and rigor of education needed.

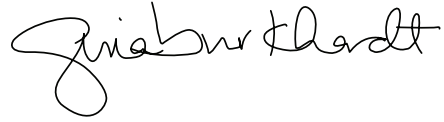
We particularly appreciate that the bill highlights the fact that *states may use assessment funds to build out or develop performance assessments and other systems of formative and summative assessment that capture the depth of student knowledge, skills, and synthesis abilities that are needed for success.*

We hope that the bill can also focus further on *ensuring that teachers and school leaders have the skills needed to provide student-centered teaching and learning and use the data from such performance assessments to improve student success.*

We are also hopeful that the Committee will *reconsider the elimination 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Center funds.* These funds help support districts and schools who are doing the hard work to rethink learning time, and provide service, civic learning, and work-based learning opportunities aligned to the labor market to fully prepare students for success in postsecondary education, careers, and civic life in their communities.

We look forward to working with you on these recommendations, and would be happy to provide further information from our work with partners in the field.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gina Burkhardt". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Gina Burkhardt  
President and CEO  
Jobs for the Future