

Bob Wise
Governor of West Virginia, 2001–2005



October 11, 2011

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman
Committee on Health, Education Labor and Pensions
United States Senate
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Michael Enzi
Ranking Member
Committee on Health, Education Labor and Pensions
United States Senate
835 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Enzi:

The Alliance for Excellent Education applauds your effort to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The law has been expired for four years, and its flaws are well known. Your bipartisan effort to improve federal education policy is critical in order to strengthen the nation's education system.

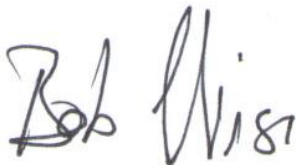
Your effort is particularly important for the nation's high schools. Under current law, high schools are an afterthought. ESEA does not require an accurate calculation of graduation rates, its improvement requirements are inappropriate and ineffective at the high school level, and current law provides little financial support for low income high schools. For example, high schools receive only 10 percent of Title I funding but educate nearly one-quarter of low income students. Further, according to the Department of Education, high school students are more likely to be eligible for supplemental educational services and public school choice, but less likely to receive such services.

The legislation you have developed establishes a common, accurate definition of graduation rates and requires schools with graduation rates under 60 percent, commonly referred to as "dropout factories," to undergo rigorous reform. The nation's dropout factories comprise 12% of America's high schools, but produce 40 percent of its dropouts. These schools are identifiable, and can be improved through strategic, research-based reform efforts. Your legislation will help to ensure that the thousands of students attending low performing schools have the opportunity to succeed.

As you move forward with the ESEA reauthorization, the Alliance encourages you to strengthen provisions in the legislation regarding goals and targets for achievement and graduation rates, as well as improvement strategies for all low performing schools. With limited resources, it is appropriate for the federal government to focus on the nation's most struggling schools, those that persistently fail to provide students the education they deserve. Still, federal policy should ensure that states have strong systems in place to require improvement of all underperforming schools.

Education has traditionally been a bipartisan issue. In today's polarized climate, it is especially important that the effort to improve federal education policy move forward with bipartisan support. Thank you for your commitment to the nation's high schools, and to America's future.

Sincerely,



Bob Wise
President