



February 11, 2015

United States House of Representatives  
Committee on Education and the Workforce  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the 1.6 million members of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), I write to offer comments on the strong substitute to the Student Success Act Ranking Member Scott is offering in committee. We are disappointed that Representative Kline declined to adopt the Senate's approach, and instead—without a hearing or any public input—adopted a partisan approach on an issue affecting all our children.

Representative Scott's alternative upholds the Elementary and Secondary Education Act's historic commitment to leveling the playing field and expanding opportunity for disadvantaged children. With half of public school students living in poverty and more than 30 states funding public education at pre-recession levels, now is the time to invest in America's public schools and to support our students, communities and educators.

Representative Kline's Student Success Act allows funds to be significantly diluted and to be redirected from the programs and the students for whom they are specifically targeted. It also allows states and districts to reduce their own investments in public schools. In contrast, the Scott substitute maintains provisions in ESEA that ensure federal, state and local governments invest in public schools, and it concentrates resources for the communities that most need them.

Representative Scott's proposal reflects a solid understanding of many of the challenges facing educators in classrooms today and provides them with the supports and tools they need to help students succeed. The bill includes language on career ladders and induction programs that would benefit educators throughout their careers. It includes a requirement that districts conduct an assessment of educator supports and working conditions, and it requires states to detail their supports for educators in their implementation of college and career-ready standards. These provisions would elevate the teaching profession and improve student learning outcomes in the long term.

The substitute also recognizes that teacher evaluations cannot be mandated nor prescribed by the federal government. Obviously, teacher development and evaluation are very important to ensuring that children have access to great teaching and learning. However, the federalization of educator evaluations,

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through Race to the Top and the waivers, has been the primary reason for the escalation of high-stakes testing, which has taken the joy out of teaching and learning, has narrowed the curriculum, and has hurt efforts to attract teachers to our most struggling schools and to keep them there. Given the deep distrust throughout our nation of Race to the Top and the waiver process, we are especially pleased that the substitute includes strong language against the federal government mandating the development of teacher evaluations in the future. The substitute could be further strengthened by adding a prohibition that the Secretary or any other office or employee of the federal government cannot mandate teacher evaluations. The substitute also maintains the current law's high standards for paraprofessional qualification requirements, which will ensure that paraprofessionals continue to be qualified and well-prepared to provide needed instructional support.

Representative Scott's alternative also rightly maintains a requirement for college and career-ready standards. In 2015, we should demand nothing less of a K-12 education law.

We agree that testing can provide useful information about whether students are working at grade level, inform instruction and help teachers better address students' needs. Used in these ways, the federal requirement for annual tests in grades 3-8 and once in high school has a purpose. And we believe that the allowance for assessments in the form of portfolios, projects or performance tasks is an important step toward better quality assessments. Though we believe more work needs to be done, the Scott substitute furthers and informs the conversation on what a robust accountability system should look like. The accountability system in the proposal elevates equity indicators, such as measures of student engagement and student health and wellness, so that they are true components of an accountability system. In the final ESEA reauthorization, we would like to see these indicators treated on a par with assessment results, rather than as lesser components.

We are concerned that without this new accountability system, the status quo of high stakes testing eclipsing all else will continue. As we know, that was the key strategy of the No Child Left Behind Act, a law that didn't work. To address this, the first step should be to relieve the pressure associated with annual high-stakes assessments. The inclusion of assessment results in accountability systems should be limited to tests taken once per grade span—that is, once in elementary school, once in middle school and, as it is done now, once in high school. I know we share the same goals, and I am confident that by working collaboratively we can produce a result that benefits all children.

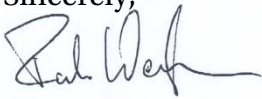
The Scott substitute also shifts ESEA interventions from the top-down punish models instituted under the waivers to a model focused on the needs and voices of educators and communities by requiring that school improvement teams comprised of parents, educators and community members develop and

implement the interventions that will be of most assistance to their school. Along these lines, the AFT is pleased that the substitute authorizes the community schools model, which is crucial to supporting high-needs schools. And we are delighted that the substitute contains a separate title to provide states with grants to support high-quality early childhood education.

The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act offers an opportunity to meaningfully fix the law so that all students receive the high-quality education they deserve. We urge Democrats and Republicans to work together throughout the reauthorization process. The AFT looks forward to collaborating on this effort with all offices in the days and weeks ahead.

Thank you for your consideration of our views on this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Randi Weingarten". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Randi Weingarten  
President

RW:ct opeiu#2 afl-cio