



# FIRST FOCUS

CAMPAIGN FOR CHILDREN

July 7, 2015

Dear Senator,

On behalf of First Focus Campaign for Children (FFCC), I'm writing today regarding the **Every Child Achieves Act (ECAA)**. FFCC is a bipartisan children's advocacy organization dedicated to making children and families the priority in federal policy and budget decisions.

We are encouraged to see the bipartisan work in the Senate on reauthorizing No Child Left Behind (NCLB), as reauthorization is long overdue and these efforts reflect a desire from both Democrats and Republicans to improve educational opportunities for children. While the ECAA includes a number of provisions that contribute to positive educational outcomes, such as integrating early childhood initiatives with K-12 education, collecting data on school climate issues, and allowing states to create a continuum of the educator profession to ensure every child has excellent educators, the bill can be improved to better address educational challenges facing children across the country. As amendments are filed and voting begins, we offer the following recommendations to improve the underlying legislation for children.

## **FFCC urges you to support the following amendments:**

**Kirk/Reed/Brown/Baldwin amendment on resource equity:** Paramount among the reasons for ongoing, stubborn gaps in educational achievement is lack of resource equity for each and every student. The most recent Civil Rights Data Collection revealed stunning gaps in access to the basic components that lead to academic achievement for students: 20 percent of high school students attend a school with no school counselor; between 10 and 25 percent of high schools do not offer more than one of the core courses in math and science; and students of color and English language learners attend schools with higher proportions of inexperienced teachers than their white and native English-speaking peers. This amendment supports and improves the robust data collection included in the ECAA through plans developed by districts and states to address disparities in access to critical educational resources.

**Casey amendment on early childhood education:** The pipeline to high school and college completion, gainful employment, and successful adulthood begins at birth; the earlier we invest in our children's education, the greater return we will see on that investment. Research has shown that children from low-income families who participate in high-quality early learning are more successful in elementary school, more likely to graduate from high school and less likely to commit crimes than children who did not have access to these crucial early experiences, making early education programs very cost effective. This amendment authorizes a \$30 billion, 5-year early learning partnership between states and the federal government, which provides funds to states to expand access to and improve the quality of early learning systems for children 3 and 4 year-old-children living in low-income households. The amendment also includes a \$30 billion cost offset by limiting corporate inversions.

**Capito/Brown/Manchin school-wide comprehensive services amendment:** Across the country, results demonstrate that when schools offer comprehensive, integrated student supports, student achievement improves. Last year, Child Trends conducted a rigorous review of research findings on integrated student supports and found

that using integrated student supports: decreases grade retention and the likelihood of dropping out; increases attendance, math achievement, and overall GPA; is firmly grounded in child and youth development by recognizing the importance of whole child education; takes into account more of the factors that contribute to student success than other approaches; and produces a positive return on investment. This amendment would allow high-poverty schools to use Title I funds to provide comprehensive services for their students in partnership with local service providers, including medical services, family engagement, and other services proven to contribute to a child's successful education.

**Feinstein/Portman amendment to provide additional training to identify homeless students:** This amendment would provide training on the different federal definitions of homelessness and allow the McKinney-Vento liaison to certify a student and their family as homeless under the current Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) definition to qualify for HUD homeless assistance programs. In addition to FFCC, the American Federation of Teachers, Covenant House, the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (NAEHCY), The National Center on Housing and Child Welfare, and the National Network supports this amendment for Youth.

**Manchin/Brown amendment on Full Service Community Schools:** The Full Service Community Schools program has been funded since FY 2008, but has not been authorized. This amendment authorizes this important grant program, which allows schools to use the evidence-based community school strategy to coordinate and integrate comprehensive academic, social, and health services that respond to the needs of its students, their families, and community members.

**Brown amendment on resource coordinators:** When schools offer comprehensive services in partnership with community groups and other community partners, it is highly beneficial to have a resource coordinator to ensure that students' needs are being met effectively and efficiently. This amendment would allow schools and school districts to use Title IV funds to hire a resource coordinator to fill this role, thus improving the services offered and ensuring students receive the full benefit from those services.

**Reed amendment on definition of inexperienced teacher:** Research reveals that teacher experience has a significant impact on student learning. This definition establishes a definition of inexperienced as three years or fewer of teaching is a research-based metric and will allow for valid and reliable data collection that can be compared across states.

**Tester Amendment to reduce the burden of standardized tests:** Since the passage of No Child Left Behind in 2001, an overemphasis on standardized testing has emerged. Intended as a way to measure academic achievement gaps between student subgroups (such as students of color and students from low-income families) and ensure that schools are improving, achievement on standardized tests has become the primary focus of SEAs, LEAs, schools, and teachers, all of which are burdened with harsh accountability measures tied to these tests. But measuring achievement gaps does not close them. In fact, measuring achievement gaps with standardized tests often only measures differences of opportunity for students, and an overreliance on standardized tests is a distraction or, at worst, a detriment to the more important goal of creating equal opportunity to high-quality education for every student. This amendment would end the federal requirement that every student be tested every year from grade 3 through 8, thus reducing the burden of standardized tests on students, teachers, schools, districts, and states.

**Booker/Wyden Amendment to improve reporting for foster and homeless youth academic outcomes:** While the Every Child Achieves Act takes the important step of including foster and homeless youth as student subgroups for academic achievement on state report cards, it fails to include these student subgroups for other

reporting, including graduation rates. Foster and homeless students face significant challenges to education that their peers do not, and failing to collect and report on data specifically for these students makes it harder to assess their academic progress and enact policies and regulations that reduce the challenges they face. This amendment simply makes the data collection and reporting requirements uniform, so states report on the graduation rate and other academic indicators of homeless and foster youth specifically, in addition to including this subgroup on the state report cards.

**Baldwin/Whitehouse amendment on middle and high school improvements:** Though high school graduation rates have been gradually rising, students of color and low-income students experience disproportionately lower graduation rates compared to their peers. The Middle School Success and High School Graduation Initiative Amendment would upgrade the High School Graduation Initiative, currently authorized under Title I, Part H of NCLB. This amendment incorporates evidence-based practices to keep student on track for graduation, beginning in middle school. The amendment authorizes grants to eligible middle and high schools, in partnership with institutions of higher education and industry the local workforce, and other community entities.

**Franken Student Non-Discrimination Amendment:** This amendment would forbid schools from discriminating against LGBT students and require schools to respond when a student reports harassment. It is currently illegal to bully a student based on their race, ethnicity, or disability, and this amendment would add LGBT students to that list. LGBT students are among the students most likely to be bullied, making this amendment an important and common sense step toward reducing bullying in schools. The Student Non-Discrimination Act (S. 439) has 37 co-sponsors, and is supported by a large group of national organizations, including the AFT, ACLU, NAACP, National Association of School Psychologists, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, the National Council of La Raza, the National Education Association and the National Women's Law Center.

Additionally, we urge you to reject amendments on the following issues:

**Portability of Title I Funds and Private School Vouchers:** The original Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 was a supports-oriented civil rights bill intended to close academic achievement gaps and ensure that every child has equal opportunity to succeed. Title I, Part A was that principle codified in policy, with formula grants to help LEAs with high concentrations of poverty to meet the unique needs of children living in poverty and make up for lower state and local education funding as a result of being located in an area of high poverty. Though never fully funded, by allowing LEAs to direct Title I funds to schools that need it most, Title I has had a positive impact on schools and their students. Still, funding inequities persist, with serious implications for students. New research reveals the importance of funding for student outcomes; a 10 percent increase in per-pupil spending per year for all twelve years of a child's education increases educational attainment and adult wages and decreases the likelihood of living in poverty as an adult, with a greater impact for children from low-income families. Money matters because it pays for educational resources for students, resources of particular importance for students who face challenges outside the classroom like poverty or homelessness.

Provisions that allow portability of Title I, Part A funds to public school and, worse, provide private school vouchers, would significantly waken Title I, Part A and negatively impact student achievement across the country. These provisions would take away the ability of LEAs to make local decisions about how to use funds and greatly increase inequity.

**Weakening Teacher Preparation:** We urge you to not support any amendment that would result in more underprepared teachers entering the classroom as the teacher of record and being concentrated in schools and

classrooms that would benefit most from fully prepared teachers. In particular, we are concerned about amendments similar to the Growing Education Achievement Training Academies for Teachers and Principals (GREAT) Act, which allows for-profit and other entities to create teacher preparation programs with little to no oversight, standards, or requirements. These “academies” would weaken teacher preparation in the United States, and to do so in a way that experience shows us will undermine the preparation of those who teach our most high-need students. Teachers need the depth and rigor of completing the full range of courses and experiences that are part of a full preparation program. Requiring states to have authorization and approval processes for “academies” separate from those for current teacher and principal preparation programs would create a second set of standards for teacher preparation that divides rather than unifies efforts to prepare all teachers in the most effective ways. In addition, prohibiting the requirement of accreditation for these academies would set up a second tier of schools not evaluated by the national bodies devoted to quality in teacher education, and allows these academies to operate without adequate quality assurance.

The preparation of those entering the education profession should be parallel to those of other professions – requiring all candidates to meet the same high standards and assessments to enter the field. Other professions, such as law and medicine, do not have a shadow system of preparation of lawyers and doctors who do not benefit from professional preparation in an “academy” with no real oversight or standards. Amendments that would create such a shadow system for the education profession and set a precedent that would undermine the very goal that all of us share – to provide effective educators for all students – should be rejected.

**Segregating Homeless Students:** The McKinney-Vento Act of 2001 prohibited segregation of homeless students, with good cause. There is no sound rationale for separating homeless students from their housed peers; children who experience homelessness have the same academic needs as their peers, while the additional services these students require, such as tutoring, transportation, and counseling, are best provided by mainstream schools. Further, most communities that had previously segregated homeless students have integrated their homeless students with great success. For these reasons, we urge you to reject proposals to increase segregation by funding separate schools for homeless students.

We look forward to working with you further to improve educational opportunities for every child in this country. If you have any questions please contact Kevin Lindsey, Director, Education Policy, at [KevinL@firstfocus.org](mailto:KevinL@firstfocus.org).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bruce Lesley". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

President