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Civil Rights and Education Groups Respond to Final ESEA Bill

WASHINGTON – 36 civil rights and education groups issued the following statement after the release of the final conference bill to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the Every Student Succeeds Act.

“The Elementary and Secondary Education Act is our nation’s most important civil rights law for promoting educational achievement and protecting the rights and interests of students disadvantaged by discrimination, poverty and other conditions that may limit their educational opportunity.

Throughout the year, the civil rights community has fought to make sure that the long-overdue reauthorization of this law would ensure that vulnerable children get the education they’re entitled to. As a result of our diverse communities working together with a common goal, we’ve seen significant improvement in this legislation since January. We are grateful for the hard work of congressional champions and their staff. And in all of our diversity, we speak both as a coalition and as individual organizations highlighting individual priorities and areas of focus.

We believe the Every Student Succeeds Act is an improvement over the waivers and is a chance to move beyond the No Child Left Behind Act for the millions of students of color, students with disabilities, and English learner students we represent. However, the compromise that has resulted in the Every Student Succeeds Act is not the bill that we would have written.
There are provisions in the proposed legislation that we believe will help remedy deep-seated disparities in our nation’s schools. For example, with collaboration from the Department of Education and policymakers at the state and local level, we believe this law can fulfill its purpose as stated in Title I, to ‘provide all children a significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education and to close educational achievement gaps.’

The process of implementing this law will not be legitimate without the inclusion of communities we represent in all federal, state, tribal and local decisions. State and local control has too often been an obstruction to narrowing disparities, and we will not let jurisdictions with millions of dollars in federal aid off the hook for failing to equitably and adequately educate all children. This bill’s passage is a call to action for parents and stakeholders in every school district and every state to hold decisionmakers and administrators accountable for educating all students, and to demand a seat at the table as this law is implemented in their communities.”

- The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
- Alliance for Excellent Education
- American Association of University Women (AAUW)
- Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD)
- Children's Defense Fund
- Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates
- Democrats for Education Reform
- Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund
- Easter Seals
- The Education Trust
- The Expectations Project
- Judge David L. Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
- The Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
- MALDEF
- NAACP
- NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.
- National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities
- National Center for Learning Disabilities
- National Center for Special Education in Charter Schools
- National Center on Time & Learning
- National Council of La Raza (NCLR)
- National Disability Rights Network
- National Down Syndrome Congress
- National Indian Education Association
- National Urban League
- National Women's Law Center
- New Leaders
- PolicyLink
- Southern Education Foundation
- Stand for Children
- TASH
- Teach For America
- Teach Plus
- TNTP
- UNCF
- United Way Worldwide