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February 7, 2013

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

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Ranking Member
Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin and Senator Alexander:

Thank you for holding today's hearing on "Early Lessons from State Flexibility Waivers." As a recognized leader in providing expert and innovative solutions to improve education, ASCD has a deep interest in the implementation of the waivers and their effect on teaching and learning throughout the states.

The Department of Education's offer to waive some of the most challenging requirements of NCLB was a welcome relief to schools and districts that were facing the drastic consequences of failing to meet NCLB's outdated regulations, but the substitution of state-by-state negotiated waivers in its place is not the preferred way to establish federal education policy. ASCD members have shared with us numerous concerns about the waiver plans and we want to highlight several of these with the committee.

First, the schools and districts in states granted waivers from NCLB accountability are now subject to a new set of federal requirements that were neither reviewed nor approved by Congress, resulting in an exchange of the administration's education priorities for federal statute. Furthermore, the waivers provide only temporary relief and no stability for schools and districts beyond 2014.



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Second, many states have already begun to implement education reforms such as the adoption of the Common Core State Standards, developing the next generation of assessments aligned to these new standards, or new teacher evaluation systems. This multitude of initiatives has overburdened local education officials. Besides the overlapping or conflicting deadlines and timeframes that have proved confusing and challenging to local education systems, most districts simply do not have sufficient staff or resources to devote to these increasing administrative demands. Successful implementation of improvement strategies also requires significant time and effort, stretching already thin state and local budgets beyond their capacity.

ASCD and its members are committed to ensuring that federal and state policies support high-quality education for all students. Education leaders are continually instituting innovative practices and implementing systemic reforms in their ongoing commitment to support students' success and school improvement. Thus, we must view any flexibility provided by the federal government not as an end unto itself, but as a means to reward states and schools that are performing well and closing achievement gaps.

As the committee once again prepares to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), examination of state and local education reform initiatives already under way is crucial. Any ESEA reauthorization bill should not hinder states from moving forward with innovative and effective reforms already in progress, but it should recognize and support the work those states are doing.

Thank you for your leadership in federal education policy. ASCD appreciates your commitment to students, educators, and schools. We respectfully ask that this letter be inserted into the official hearing record.

Cordially,

David Griffith
Director of Public Policy