



July 18, 2017

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

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the three million members of the National Education Association and the 50 million students they serve, we thank you for holding a hearing tomorrow on the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the cornerstone of the federal presence in K-12 education. In connection with that hearing, “ESSA Implementation: Exploring State and Local Reform Efforts,” we would like to submit for the record the following comments.

ESSA is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to redefine teaching and learning, and restore the law’s original focus on equity and opportunity. To attain these goals, it is essential to implement ESSA as Congress intended. This committee can help by using its oversight role to highlight examples of best practices at the state and local level, and ensure that the U.S. Department of Education hews to both the letter and spirit of the law when reviewing and approving state plans.

ESSA puts decision making for our nation’s education where it belongs — in the hands of local educators, families, and communities — while keeping the focus on the students most in need. The key to successful implementation is having students, educators, parents, community members, and other stakeholders work together to improve their schools. To help advance that goal, NEA created an opportunity checklist built around five proven elements of successful schools: community involvement, healthy students and learning environments, well-rounded curricula, a school climate where students feel safe and respected, and quality educators. The full checklist is available at <http://bit.ly/2urMAUJ>.

NEA’s state and local affiliates are striving to encourage stakeholder engagement in multiple ways. Here are some examples:

- The **Anchorage Education Association** sponsored a statewide ESSA summit during which a panel of educators, parents, and students broke into five groups that discussed the law in detail. The most-discussed issues were over-testing, oversight of student needs, how to weigh indicators that go into measuring school quality, and how Alaskans should respond to the flexibility in ESSA provides. Details of their discussions are available at <http://bit.ly/2txQkiT>.
- To enhance collaboration and build a holistic vision, the **Louisiana Association of Educators** convened a statewide community conversation among educators, parents,

young people, and other stakeholders. The resulting report, *Ensuring a Better Future for Louisiana's Children*, addresses a wide range of issues and concerns. They include parental involvement, building community relationships, rating school quality, school funding, resource equity, teacher preparation, test reduction, and improving struggling schools. The full report is available at <http://bit.ly/2uvmJim>.

- The **Maryland State Education Association** played a lead role in building broad, bipartisan support among educators, parents, and other stakeholders for the Protect Our Schools Act to help close opportunity gaps, reduce testing, and prevent school privatization across the state. Another bill, passed unanimously by both chambers of the Maryland legislature, would eliminate more than 900 hours of standardized testing across 17 districts.

NEA and our affiliates stand ready to work with Congress to ensure that ESSA fulfills its potential to help ensure that all students have the resources and support they need to succeed. We urge the committee to continue to focus on implementation and use its oversight role to ensure equity and opportunity for all students, no matter what zip code they live in.

We thank you for the opportunity to submit these comments.

Sincerely,



Marc Egan
Director of Government Relations
National Education Association