



NATIONAL COUNCIL OF
TEACHERS OF MATHEMATICS

February 2, 2015

Chairman Lamar Alexander
Ranking Member Patty Murray
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510
Transmitted via email to FixingNCLB@help.senate.gov

Dear Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray:

Thank you for your commitment to federal K-12 education programs that prepare the country's young people for success in achieving their academic and professional goals.

The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) and its 80,000 individual members are strongly invested in efforts to support educators in K-12 and university classrooms. A strong pre-K–grade 12 mathematics education for all students is increasingly important to our nation's economic stability, future national security, and workforce productivity. An economically competitive society recognizes the importance of mathematics learning and depends on citizens who are mathematically literate. NCTM believes that teachers and what they do in the classroom are at the heart of making this vision a reality. NCTM supports investing in teachers at every stage of their development and supporting their efforts in classrooms, buildings, districts and states nationwide.

NCTM is pleased to have this opportunity to comment on the draft proposal to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) recently released by Chairman Alexander. A revision of the law is long overdue. Please consider the following comments on the draft of the *Every Child Ready for College or Career Act of 2015*:

- NCTM believes that a high-quality student assessment system is essential to support systemic improvement in mathematics education. Critical features of an effective system include (1) disaggregation of data for different populations of students; (2) assessment of all aspects of mathematical knowledge: procedural skills, conceptual understanding, and problem solving, reasoning and the ability to construct and evaluate mathematical arguments; and (3) mechanisms to ensure that assessments used in different SEAs and LEAs are of comparable high quality in assessing students' mathematical proficiency.



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- The discussion draft provides two options for assessments, both requiring states to continue to test in reading, math and science and other subjects, as defined by the states. NCTM strongly supports the continued inclusion of mathematics as a subject for which states and districts are held accountable. Option 1 would require states to adopt assessment systems, but would allow them to choose between the current assessment frequency (yearly in grades 3 through 8 and once in high school) or grade-span assessments, or a combination of the two. States could use performance-based, formative assessments, summative scores from multiple assessments, or any other system that the state considers appropriate. Option 2 would maintain current law regarding the frequency and type of assessments.
- As you consider the two options in the bill, there are three important things to take into account. (1) Performance-based assessments should be mandatory, not optional. (2) Including multiple statewide assessments every year should be eliminated because they take too much time and are of limited value. Investing in formative assessments at the school and classroom level provides better monitoring of student progress. (3) States must demonstrate that the data collected via assessment is valid, reliable, of high-quality, and comparable among states—not just among LEAs within each state.

Under either system, local educational agencies (LEAs) would be permitted to administer their own assessments so long as they were valid and reliable, aligned with state standards, and approved by the state. Neither option would require—or allow the Secretary of Education to require—that student test scores be used to evaluate teachers.

- NCTM supports the law’s elimination of the Highly Qualified Teacher (HQT) requirements and agrees that teachers should meet state certification and licensure requirements. The teaching profession should require certain credentials and practices of its ranks.
- Related to supporting mathematics educators, NCTM is concerned that giving states more “flexibility” on how to use Title I and Title II dollars will lead to diminished resources being allocated to professional development for mathematics educators. Under current law, mathematics educators find themselves competing for limited dollars that are often invested in classroom size reduction and other practices that do not foster continued assessment and development of teaching and classroom practice. In addition, mathematics teachers are disheartened that the draft eliminates the single STEM education-focused program administered by the Department of Education. Eliminating the Math Science Partnership program would send the signal that those who teach math, science, and other STEM disciplines do not need their own



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professional development programs. This runs counter to the current research demonstrating that teaching these subjects differs from teaching others. There is a shortage of teachers in these fields and these subjects are crucial to the economic success of the country. We ask you to include a program that invests in math and other STEM educators in a bill that moves through the legislative process.

- The draft proposes that School Improvement Grants, 21st Century Community Learning Centers, School Counseling, Physical Education, and several other grant programs be consolidated into larger school climate funding streams, awarded on a formula basis to states and LEAs. NCTM believes that these programs and their goals are crucial to student, teacher, and school success and warrant their own federal investments. The organization would prefer that each of these programs remains intact. In addition, numerous studies have shown that high-quality early childhood education, especially in mathematics, is not only crucial to success in mathematics in elementary, middle, and high school, but to students' overall academic success—particularly for students who have little to no educational experiences prior to compulsory schooling. NCTM would like to see a robust federal investment in early childhood education included in ESEA reauthorization.

Given the importance of the programs addressed by this draft, we look forward to working with your staff on additional suggestions as the legislative process progresses. If you or your staff have any questions about these recommendations, NCTM, the effective teaching and learning of mathematics, or how best to support mathematics teachers and educators, please do not hesitate to contact NCTM Associate Executive Director for Communications Ken Krehbiel (703 620-9840, ext.2102, kkrehbiel@nctm.org). Thank you for your consideration of these recommendations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Diane J. Briars".

Diane J. Briars
President

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert M. Doucette".

Robert M. Doucette
Executive Director