



**Support accountability, civil rights and higher standards in
Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)
Reauthorization**

January 16, 2015

Dear Senator,

On behalf of the more than 170,000 bipartisan members and supporters of the American Association of University Women (AAUW), **I urge you to support a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) that includes critical civil rights protections, as well as provisions which support higher academic standards and proven methods for closing educational achievement gaps.**

AAUW has called for reauthorization of the ESEA since it expired in 2007. This year we marked the 13th anniversary of the last time the U.S. Congress and the president could agree on the nation's education priorities. The bill signed in 2002, No Child Left Behind, continues to be the law of the land and does not include needed changes to reflect current education priorities. AAUW maintains that congressional reauthorization of No Child Left Behind/Elementary and Secondary Education Act, not the Secretary of Education's waivers, is the best way to ensure high standards and greater accountability in our nation's public schools.

Ensuring strong academic principles and closing the achievement gap for all children are objectives at the heart of ESEA. The federal government has a critical role to play in attaining these goals, and AAUW endorses the use of a robust accountability system that helps ensure all children are prepared to be successful, participating members of our democracy.

Reauthorizing ESEA will only succeed if legislation shows support for education policies that provide equitable opportunities for all students and does not roll back important civil rights gains. We have more work to do to close achievement gaps, create safe climates for learning, and realize the promise of gender equity in education. ESEA reauthorization is the perfect time to show your support for education policies which provide equitable opportunities for all students.

It is possible—and necessary—to maintain a commitment to high standards and greater accountability in our nation's public schools through ESEA reauthorization. However, that commitment cannot be in principle only—it must be accompanied by federal commitment and financial assistance to make it a reality.

AAUW urges support for support for including the following principles in ESEA:

Use multiple measures and growth models. AAUW supports using multiple measures of student achievement such as achievement and growth in English, math, science, and, if states chose, other subjects. At the high school level, schools should also be evaluated on graduation rates, college enrollment rates, and rates of college enrollment without remediation.

Improve school accountability measures. Schools should be held accountable for demonstrating that they are meeting educational goals. The federal government should offer incentives and assistance to struggling schools rather than punishment, which only further harms students and hamstring educators from making progress in the schools most in need of improvement.

Require annual, statewide assessments for all students (in grades 3-8 and at least once in high school) that are aligned with, and measure each student's progress toward meeting, the state's college and career-ready standards. This data provides significant civil rights indicators we need to ensure all our children are benefiting from quality education.

Promote public school choice, not so called "portability" schemes. It is in students' best interests to be offered public school choice and flexibility. Such flexibility and innovation, however, must be consistent with civil rights laws, including Title IX. Public funds should only be used for public education — not private school vouchers that benefit only a few. Additionally, AAUW opposes attempts to pass, or include any provisions supporting Title I public school portability in legislation—even if it limits the funds to public schools, because they are designed to make it easier to implement private school vouchers as a next step.

Require schools to disaggregate and cross-tabulate data. Sex must be added to the group of categories for which the disaggregation of graduation rate data is required. Graduation rate and academic assessment data reported by districts should be broken down by sex within race/ethnicity (i.e. cross-tabulated). We must hold districts accountable for the performance of all subgroups of students and cross-tabulate that data by sex.

Improve school climate. AAUW supports legislation to improve school and campus safety, including efforts to promote effective student conduct policies that define and prohibit bullying and harassment. AAUW's report, *Crossing the Line: Sexual Harassment at School*, shows that our country is dealing with a pervasive problem: Nearly half of all 7th–12th grade students said that they have encountered some form of sexual harassment. Hostile school environments can lead to disastrous outcomes, especially for students who are targeted for failing to conform to gender stereotypes.

Strengthen STEM education. AAUW supports promoting and strengthening science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education, especially for girls and other underrepresented populations. AAUW's 2010 report, *Why So Few? Women in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics*, found that environmental and social barriers continue to block women's full participation in these nontraditional STEM fields.¹ Congress should direct and provide adequate funding for federal, state, and local agencies to establish outreach and retention programs for girls in STEM activities, courses, and career development. AAUW supports legislation to encourage states to allow computer science classes taught in secondary education to count toward graduation requirements and funding teacher training to include recognition and avoidance of implicit gender bias.

Utilize the Women's Educational Equity Act. WEEA was designed to give educators tools to eliminate barriers—such as sex stereotypes in classroom materials and curricula—that keep students from full participation and success in all areas of education. Such technical assistance is critical to Title IX compliance and should be included in ESEA reauthorization.

Enhance Title IX compliance by requiring data reporting about extracurricular sports. High schools should be required to publically report basic data on the number of female and male students participating in their athletic programs and the expenditures made for their sports teams. They already collect the data, there's no reason not to allow the public to see it.

Expand training in gender-fair teaching. Professional development for teachers should cover topics such as eliminating gender and racial bias in the classroom, sensitivity to gender and racial differences, and engaging students in the face of gender-based and racial peer pressure and parental expectations.

Oppose programs that rely on unproven sex stereotypes. AAUW does not oppose the idea of public single-sex education per se, so long as it is appropriate, necessary, and done in a manner consistent with constitutional requirements and antidiscrimination laws.

Invest in after-school programs. After-school programs should be expanded to enrich the school experience and improve educational outcomes.

Support early childhood education. Providing a foundation of early childhood education will help improve and sustain achievement in later years and save precious taxpayer dollars down the road.² AAUW supports access to high-quality and affordable child care, as well as funding increases for Head Start and Early Head Start to ensure all children are prepared for school.

For more than 130 years, AAUW members have fought for educational equity and achievement in our nation's public schools. Reauthorization of ESEA represents a tremendous opportunity to make significant strides in this direction, and we are committed to putting our full resources behind this effort. AAUW looks forward to working with you on this significant legislation in the year ahead.

Cosponsorship and votes associated with this issue may be scored in the *AAUW Action Fund Congressional Voting Record* for the 114th Congress. Please do not hesitate to contact me at 202/785-7720, or Erin Prangley, associate director of government relations, at 202/785-7730, if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Lisa M. Maatz
Vice President, Public Policy

¹ AAUW. (2010). *Why So Few? Women in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics*. www.aauw.org/research/why-so-few.

² HighScope. (2005). *Lifetime Effects: The HighScope Perry Preschool Study Through Age 40*. www.highscope.org/content.asp?contentid=219.