



5 Reasons Why Sen. Alexander's Draft Education Bill Fails Parents

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Earlier this month, Sen. Lamar Alexander (R-TN) proposed a bill to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, or ESEA.¹ The ESEA is seven years overdue for reauthorization. The process presents an opportunity to improve U.S. school systems and empower parents with better information about their children's progress and the success of schools in their community. Unfortunately, Sen. Alexander's proposal fails to seize this opportunity. Instead, it proposes to reduce parent access to reliable and valid information and devolves most decisions about school quality to states, which historically have not taken action to address deficiencies in school systems. Here are five reasons Sen. Alexander's bill fails parents:

- 1. Lowers academic standards:** Today, all states have academic standards that are aligned to career and college readiness. Sen. Alexander proposes to lower that bar by allowing states to establish standards aligned to the entrance requirements of any college within their borders—regardless of its rigor—without federal oversight or approval. This proposal would allow states to establish standards that are not challenging. Parents deserve to have confidence that the academic standards to which their children are taught are meaningful, high bars for what kids need to know to succeed in life.
- 2. Prevents parents from making informed decisions about where to send their children to school:** In order for parents to know whether their children are on track to graduate from high school ready for college or career, they need access to objective annual information about how they are progressing. Sen. Alexander's bill offers an option whereby states would have complete flexibility when it comes to deciding when and how to measure student progress. His bill also eliminates the requirement that states use the same assessments for all students. Without equivalent data across school districts, parents would be unable to compare school performance and make informed choices about where to send their children.

3. **Allows low-performing schools to languish:** Sen. Alexander’s bill essentially eliminates accountability for low-performing schools. In place of the system that is currently in place, states could design and implement almost any system they want with no federal checks or guardrails. As a consequence, millions of parents would be stuck sending their children to a persistently low-performing school with no real hope for intervention or improvement.
4. **Eliminates federal funding for before- and after-school programs:** Sen. Alexander’s bill removes the funding stream for 21st Century Community Learning Centers, the primary source of federal spending on before- and after-school programming.² As a result, if districts choose to shift their priorities, parents will be left without with a safe, enriching place to send their children before and after school.
5. **Fails to provide parents with protection from substantial school budget cuts:** Sen. Alexander’s bill eliminates the ESEA’s current “maintenance of effort” provision, which ensures that districts that receive Title I funding—designed to help low-income and disadvantaged students—maintain approximately the same spending levels from year to year. Without this provision, states would have free rein to cut their education budgets. As a result, children would face larger class sizes and under-resourced schools.

Endnotes

¹ *Every Child Ready for College or Career Act of 2015*, forthcoming, 114 Cong. 1 sess., available at <http://www.help.senate.gov/imo/media/AEG15033.pdf>.

² U.S. Department of Education, “21st Century Community Learning Centers,” available at <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/21stccclc/index.html> (last accessed January 2015).