

August 2, 2007

The Honorable Robert Scott
1201 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Robert Scott:

Thank you for your leadership in introducing the *Every Student Counts Act* to ensure meaningful accountability for the graduation of America's students. This critical legislation continues your longstanding commitment to advancing civil rights by ensuring a high quality education for all students. It also represents an important correction and improvement to the No Child Left Behind of 2002 (NCLB).

The principles of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) have helped to focus the nation's attention on the unacceptable achievement gap and the imperative of improving outcomes for all students, particularly that of minority students, English Language Learners, and students with disabilities.

Yet NCLB has proven to be a weak instrument for improving, NCLB does not place enough importance on *graduating* the nation's high school students. In a global economy that demands an educated workforce, it is no longer acceptable that only 70 percent of our nation's high school students—and far fewer of our poor and minority students—graduate with a regular diploma.

Distressingly low graduation rates have long been obscured and accepted for far too long due to inaccurate data, misleading calculations and reporting, and flawed accountability systems. Because NCLB does not ensure that graduation rates are calculated consistently and accurately, disaggregated, and required to increase over time, high school students are being left behind.

If we are going to truly hold high schools accountable for leaving no child behind, we must address the flaws in the law's graduation rate provisions. As the Congress works to reauthorize NCLB, it is critical that graduation rates are calculated consistently and accurately; disaggregated; and required to increase annually as part of AYP.

The *Every Student Counts Act* does just that by

- Building on the National Governors Association's Graduation Rate Compact, originally signed in 2005 by all fifty of the nation's governors, to ensure the use of accurate and consistent measurements for high school graduation for reporting and accountability purposes;
- Giving schools credit for graduating students who need extra time by allowing increases in both the four-year and five-year graduation rates to count towards achieving AYP;
- Ensuring that schools are held accountable for increasing the graduation rates of all students by requiring graduation rates to be disaggregated for both reporting and accountability purposes.
- Mirroring the mounting support for "growth models" of accountability by setting annual benchmarks as a specified increase from current graduation rates;
- Reflecting existing research by setting meaningful annual goals based on rates of improvement that have been achieved in successful high schools; and
- Providing for the issuance of waivers to allow for the use of up to a six-year cohort graduation rate for alternative education programs and early college high schools.

The undersigned advocates, researchers, and practitioners, each have their own assumptions and recommendations about the improvement that should be made to the broader accountability system, but share your commitment to leaving no child behind, and support the *Every Student Counts Act*.

We know that accurate measuring, transparent reporting, and meaningful accountability of graduation rates can be important levers in ensuring every child receives the excellent education required to be successful in the 21st century. In a global economy that demands an education workforce, it is no longer acceptable that only 70 percent of our nation's high school students—and far fewer—of our minority

students graduate with a diploma. We applaud your commitment to making high school graduation a priority in Congress, during the reauthorization of the *No Child Left Behind Act* and in our nation's high schools.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Excellent Education
Center for the Social Organization of Schools
Easter Seals
Jobs for the Future
National Alliance of Black School Educators
National Center for Learning Disabilities
National Council of La Raza