

February 2, 2015

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman
Senate HELP Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Senate HELP Committee
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray:

RE: Every Child Ready for College and Career Act must include a dedicated digital learning program

The undersigned organizations — representing educators, state and local education leaders, and the high-tech industry — urge you to include a dedicated digital learning program within the Committee’s final draft of the Every Child Ready for College and Career Act. While we appreciate that Chairman Alexander’s draft bill recognizes technology as a use of funds in some programs, we believe it is imperative that the Committee’s final bill maintain a separate section focused on digital learning. Only a distinct commitment to supporting technology use in the classroom will ensure that all students, especially those in rural and remote areas, have access to the limitless educational opportunities available.

When Congress passed the No Child Left Behind Act, it voiced bipartisan support for the Enhancing Education Through Technology (EETT) program which was focused on technology professional learning for all educators. While more than a dozen years have passed, the reasons for Congressional support remain strong today. Technology and blended learning:

- Improve educator effectiveness, integrate data systems, and aid low-performing schools
- Provide a robust, student-centered, digitally powered learning experience
- Provide access to unprecedented learning opportunities online for students in rural and other areas that lack sufficient curriculum and course availability
- Leverage school broadband investments and access made possible by the E-Rate program through the necessary professional development
- Help meet the economy’s need for tech-savvy students with the technology skills to succeed in an increasingly global economy

For digital learning to become a reality nationwide, educators must receive ongoing, sustainable and scalable technology professional learning opportunities. That is only possible through a stand-alone, dedicated program like EETT. According to a 2012 survey from Project Tomorrow, one-third of all educators indicated that the lack of sufficient professional development was a major obstacle to implementing technology in the classroom. Like any profession, educators must be supported to continually hone their craft to ensure students reach high academic success. The advent of digital assessments makes even more acute the importance of educator professional learning to harness data to personalize and strengthen instruction to the needs, styles and interests of students.

The priority for a program specifically focused on digital learning is even greater today than it was in 2002. Classroom technologies and high-speed connectivity are opening the door to ways of learning that were not imaginable even a few short years ago. Students have gained opportunities to collaborate, communicate and create content through blogs, wikis, videos and other forms of project-based learning; educators can choose from a wide array of digital textbooks, online resources and assessments that provide real-time feedback of student progress to personalize the learning experience; and entire classrooms can go on virtual field trips and even talk to astronauts at the International Space Station. However, without sufficient access to devices and appropriate content and without educators skilled in digital age teaching, the limitless digital educational choices will be constrained for students and educators.

While technology underlies all facets of education, too many LEAs and states lack the personnel to implement and support its use. EETT helped develop a cadre of state and local technology coordinators with deep knowledge of technology, an understanding of the particular professional learning needed for its effective classroom use, expertise in network security and implementation, and a comprehension of the regulations governing safe and appropriate use. Diffusing technology funding throughout a new ESEA would hinder state and local capacity building.

Therefore, we submit that the inclusion of a dedicated digital learning program is critical and necessary to ensure that all students are engaged in modern learning environments so they can graduate high school with the skills they need to succeed in today's global economy. We respectfully request that the Committee include in its final bill such a program in the form of an updated version of EETT.

For more information, please contact Hilary Goldmann, senior director for government relations, International Society for Technology in Education at hgoldmann@iste.org or 703-672-5909.

Sincerely,

AASA, The School Superintendents Association
Association of Educational Service Agencies
Cisco Systems, Inc.
Consortium for School Networking
Discovery Education
Gaggle.Net, Inc.
International Society for Technology in Education
Learning Disabilities Association of America
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Education Association
National Network of State Teachers of the Year
National Rural Education Association
National Rural Education Advocacy Coalition
National Writing Project
New Leaders
Software & Information Industry Association
State Educational Technology Directors Association