



COLLEGIUM OF OFFICERS

Geoffrey A. Black
GENERAL MINISTER AND PRESIDENT

W. Mark Clark
ASSOCIATE GENERAL MINISTER

M. Linda Jaramillo
JUSTICE AND WITNESS MINISTRIES

J. Bennett Guess
LOCAL CHURCH MINISTRIES

James A. Moos
WIDER CHURCH MINISTRIES

October 20, 2011

Dear Senator:

The United Church of Christ Justice & Witness Ministries implements the social policies of the United Church of Christ's General Synod governing assembly. In the tradition of the UCC's pilgrim forebears who brought community schooling and higher education to the New England colonies, and its American Missionary Association that founded schools for freed slaves throughout the South during and after the Civil War, the UCC's Justice & Witness Ministries and its predecessor bodies have historically worked to strengthen public schools and to speak out against anything that weakens the nation's public education system.

It is in that spirit that we write about the Elementary and Secondary Education Act manager's amendment that the U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee is considering today.

We Commend Congress for Addressing Several of NCLB's Serious and Untenable Provisions

- It is positive and important that the proposed bill eliminates the utopian 2014 deadline and the impossible Adequate Yearly Progress requirements.
- We are pleased to see the removal of mandatory evaluation of teachers based on student's test scores in the manager's amendment. Evaluating teachers based on students' standardized test scores has been proven neither accurate, nor reliable, nor fair.
- We commend Congress for removing two of NCLB's worst sanctions: the unworkable provision that Title I funds be used for student transfers; and the provision for Supplemental Education Services that has turned into an expensive waste of public funds as an unregulated scam.

We Also Have a Number of Serious Concerns

- **Please Do Not Perpetuate a Bankrupt Test-and-Punish Philosophy**

We ask you to reduce reliance on standardized tests and test only in ways that improve instruction, measure real performance, and encourage exploration, imagination, and critical thinking. We are dismayed that the ESEA bill you are considering today retains at its core a failed strategy for school improvement. We do not believe so much testing is good for children: it has increased pressure on teachers and children, and it has narrowed the curriculum.

NCLB has put in place a system that blames and sanctions the schools and school districts serving our poorest children, and that punishes these districts and schools, and their teachers, without providing the help they need to improve. The National Research Council recently documented that NCLB's test-based accountability system has neither significantly elevated student academic achievement nor closed achievement gaps. NCLB has not worked.

- **Please Take Steps that Begin to Close Opportunity Gaps**

We have been concerned for many years that No Child Left Behind's test-and-punish, procedural accountability system has blinded our society to the

God is still speaking,



overwhelming problem that over 20 percent of American children now live in poverty, and our society spends the least public money in the school districts that serve the most vulnerable children. We ask you to change course by initiating a process by which the federal government and the states collaborate to overcome large opportunity gaps and build capacity in the schools serving our poorest children. It is time for Congress to name inequity and ask society to address it. Please confront poverty and inequality and their impact on children, teachers and public schools as you reauthorize ESEA.

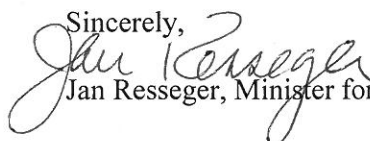
We are disappointed that in the bill under consideration today, Congress has chosen not to address 3:1 inequality in school resources from school district to school district. In 2011, as state legislatures across the majority of states face budget crises, we see teachers being laid off, school social workers being eliminated, school librarians being laid off, school nurses sharing buildings, and students paying to participate in co-curricular activities. We ask Congress to recognize and at least begin to address these overwhelming challenges by fully funding the Title I formula program and by using federal leverage to incentivize states to equalize school funding, especially in these times when, due to financial shortages, states are stepping back from the equity provisions in their school finance systems.

- **Please Help and Don't Punish the Schools in the Bottom 5 Percent, School in America's Poorest Communities**

The goal of the ESEA should be helping, not harming, schools and districts that have been inadequately supported by their states. Instead, unfortunately the ESEA bill you are considering today will cast into federal law many of the most punitive turnaround plans in Race to the Top and the 2010 Blueprint. These turnaround plans fire principals and teachers and close schools. In contrast, we ask you to build stability within schools where children already move too frequently and within communities where poverty has already imperiled core institutions. Sociologists emphasize that organizational trust is essential among the staff in each school as the foundation for serving children and families. We ask you to reject the technocratic turnaround strategies from Race to the Top and the Blueprint and instead to invest in professional development and mentoring for school leaders and teachers and in the resources that will create conditions where teachers can work and children can learn.

Finally we support the amendment to be offered by Senator Bernie Sanders to strike language that would make it easier for teachers in alternative certification programs to be rated "highly qualified." Our nation will benefit from the continued development of a certified teaching profession, with emphasis on on-going staff development for teachers as well as school leaders.

In the church, as a people called to love our neighbors as ourselves, we look for the optimal way to support balancing the needs of each particular child and family with the need to create a public system that secures the rights and addresses the needs of all children. Thank you for considering our comments today on the important matter of the reauthorization of ESEA.

Sincerely,

Jan Resseger, Minister for Public Education & Witness