

March 26, 2010

The Honorable George Miller, Chairman
Education and Labor Committee
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Kline, Ranking Member
Education and Labor Committee
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

RE: SIIA Recommendations for ESEA Reauthorization

Dear Chairman Miller and Representative Kline:

On behalf of the Software & Information Industry Association (SIIA) and our member high-tech companies, we write with our recommendations for the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). SIIA views federal leadership and investment through ESEA as critical to ensuring student academic preparedness and our national competitiveness. We thank you for your leadership on these issues, and encourage Congress and the Obama Administration to build on the progress made under the No Child Left Behind Act by further refining and enhancing the law to ensure it meets the nation's evolving education and workforce needs.

SIIA is the principal trade association for the software and digital content industry, serving more than 500 leading high-tech companies. SIIA members:

- include the leading publishers and developers of digital content, software applications, data systems, e-learning and related technologies used in education curriculum, instruction, assessment and classroom/enterprise management; and
- depend on the nation's schools to provide a skilled, high-tech workforce with both academic proficiency in the core subject areas and 21st century skills.

SIIA and our member companies have long collaborated with educators, policymakers and other stakeholders to improve education through the use of innovative learning technologies.

Core to SIIA's recommendations is the enhancement of federal ESEA leadership and support for modernizing our educational practices and system. This includes the personalization of learning and engagement of students through technology-enabled practices that more efficiently assess, identify and address individual student learning needs. It also includes transformational innovation of our education delivery system to engineer a shift from a seat-time, assembly-line education model to a more flexible, student-centered and outcomes-based model (i.e., a shift from mass production to mass customization).

SIIA provides recommendations below in the following areas:

- Systemic Transformation from Mass Production to Mass Customization
- Modernize Education Practice Through Technology
- Innovation, Public-Private Partnership and Appropriate Federal R&D Role
- School Improvement and Low-Performing Students
- Teacher Effectiveness and Connectedness
- Assessment, Data & Accountability
- High-Tech Workforce Readiness

SIIA views technology as critical to meeting the nation's educational goals and the central tenets of the ESEA. The Obama Administration's recently released plan – *Transforming American Education: Learning Powered by Technology* – also provides an important vision for technology as critical to both enable instructional and school improvement, as well as to engage and prepare students to compete in the knowledge-based, digital, global economy. The educational agencies and educators that SIIA members partner with and serve are seeking enhanced federal leadership and investment around technology-based educational delivery as the engine of instructional innovation and school transformation.

SIIA encourages the Committee to incorporate the following principles into the ESEA reauthorization:

Systemic Transformation from Mass Production to Mass Customization

- Leverage federal funds to drive transformational innovation that reengineers education delivery models. Incentivize the shift from a seat-time, assembly-line education model to a more flexible, student-centered outcomes-based model built around individual learning needs and pace, and anytime-anywhere learning.
- Support personalized learning instead of a one-size-fits-all curriculum and instructional pace. Drive practices that more efficiently assess, identify and address individual student learning needs such as through differentiated instruction and more efficient use of learning time through adaptive software and online learning.
- Further emphasize the creation of vertically integrated systemic innovation zones that reform and align federal-state-local policy, practice and budgets to allow for the transformative reengineering of education delivery models needed for our students to compete in this digital age and global knowledge economy.

Modernize Education Practice Through Technology

- Provide more explicit attention to the critical role of technology and e-learning as necessary to bring innovation to teaching and curriculum, personalize learning and differentiate instruction, engage students, deliver 21st century knowledge and skills, and overall create an education system needed for our students to compete in this digital age and global, knowledge economy.
- Provide for a separate, directed funding program focused on improving education through technology – the Achievement Through Technology and Innovation (ATTAIN) Act (H.R.558) – to ensure that teachers receive appropriate professional development on technology integration, educational agencies have leadership capacity around technology, there is equity in the distribution of resources, and to coordinate and scale up disparate program technology uses. Specifically, the ATTAIN Act would drive innovation and systemic reform that leverage technology, as well as target schools in need of improvement and low-performing students.
- Further infuse technology and related professional development throughout all major ESEA programs in a meaningful and measureable way, based on the recognition that technology will be the platform and infrastructure of choice for school reform and improvement in the 21st century. Specific provisions would include: (1) ensuring all programs allow the use of funds for technology-based means and methods; (2) requiring grantees to detail how technology will be used to meet program goals and requirements; and (3) providing for grantees to leverage at least 5% of each program's funds to meet education goals through technology and related training and support.

Innovation, Public-Private Partnership and Appropriate Federal R&D Role

- Empower state and local educational agencies to use federal funds for the acquisition of products and services from the provider of their choice based upon the merits, whether for-profit or non-profit, including by not limiting educators to only open-licensed educational resources.
- Target funds for innovation throughout ESEA, including a separate innovation fund, to support public-private partnerships that help develop, implement, evaluate and scale innovative educational programs, practices, products and interventions.
- Encourage educators to make policy and practice decisions base upon the best available evidence, recognizing the evidence levels and research methods vary depending upon the purpose, question, scale

and scope. Ensure that research evidence standards are applied consistently across all components of the educational system, including not only to third-party product and service providers, but also to local education policies and practices. And support the use of intermediate outcomes (i.e., improved student engagement, teacher retention, availability of data, etc.) as research evidence of a practice or intervention.

- Recognize that common standards will not lead to all communities, teachers and students adopting the same curriculum, assessments or instructional resources. Commonality of standards will likely reduce some burdens on our education system, resulting in curriculum innovation and personalized learning. But as with the situation today under a given state's standards, districts and teachers will continue to follow a variety of approaches and will expect local control in their selection from among a variety of instructional materials.
- Support the availability of a variety of educational resources, including through funding and incentivizing private research and development investment into innovative solutions such as digital content, software, assessments and other interventions. Do not limit such public-private partnerships only to open-licensed educational resources that remain unproven, may be unsustainable, and discourage investment. Provide policies and processes, including public comment requirements, to ensure that the U.S. Department of Education will not directly develop and deliver such resources unless there is compelling need, including that: (1) it is an inherently governmental function and/or delivers inherently governmental information; and (2) there does not exist a non-federal entity currently providing, or best positioned to provide, the same or similar product.
- Implementation of Reading First raised concerns of inappropriate federal interference in local decisions on curriculum and instructional materials. Include explicit provisions in federal programs to ensure that curriculum decisions are made by state and local educational agencies, and that federal funds are not used to require or establish any federal or state list of approved instructional programs, materials or interventions.

School Improvement and Low-Performing Students

- Ensure all students have access to high-quality instruction and curriculum, including online learning that can deliver highly effective teachers and high quality courses to students without access such as in rural and high-poverty schools, online tutoring to provide student instructional support, engaging digital content and learning software that adapts to support the learning needs and pace of each student, and professional development to improve teacher effectiveness.
- Provide low-performing schools with the flexibility and support to implement innovative school improvement models that redesign education delivery models, curriculum and instruction through the use of technology and e-learning to provide extended, targeted and personalized learning opportunities for those students for whom current interventions are inadequate.
- Provide direct support for instructional improvement systems, which are technology-based and other tools that provide educators with support for a cycle of continuous instructional improvement, including for real-time collection and analysis of student assessment and school data to drive school and classroom decisions, differentiate instruction, evaluate the effectiveness of the actions taken and benchmark performance.
- Support state and local educational agencies to describe how they will use Title I and Title I School Improvement funds to support the integration of education technology to carry out its activities and responsibilities, including for professional development, curriculum and instruction, data collection and assessment, parental involvement, and to provide additional educational assistance to individual students assessed as needing help in meeting the state's academic achievement standards.
- Increase parental involvement and parent-educator communication, including through the use of e-mail, school websites, and other technologies that provide home access to student assignments, learning resources and grades.

Teacher Effectiveness and Connectedness

- Ensure all teachers and education leaders have the skills needed to effectively use technology and digital resources to transform their curriculum, instruction, student assessment and school/classroom management. Place a premium on school instructional technology experts who can provide the needed vision, leadership and educator support, just as we prioritize reading and math experts.
- Modernize professional development delivery through embedded and ongoing educator support, including through online professional development, virtual professional learning communities and master teachers and instructional coaches. This model replaces episodic and isolated training with continuous, convenient and real-time professional support.
- Increase the explicit emphasis of professional development on the use of assessment, data, and technology to improve student engagement and differentiate instruction. Ensure educators can more effectively assess student performance, access and use data systems to inform instruction, leverage digital and online media to engage students, and differentiate instruction to meet the individual needs of each student.
- Enable a shift to a model of connected teaching, where teacher isolation is replaced by educator teams, teacher collaboration, and teacher connections to data, tools, resources and experts.
- Support teacher pre-service professional development around use of technology to ensure that teachers are prepared to engage 21st Century learners upon commencing their careers. More specifically, include the Preparing Teachers for Digital Age Learners (PTDAL) program authorized in the Higher Education Act, which provides grants to higher education institution-led consortia for the purpose of graduating “teacher candidates who are prepared to use modern information, communication and learning tools.”

Assessment, Data & Accountability

- Continue to hold state and local educational agencies accountable for ensuring all students have demonstrated mastery of the knowledge and skills necessary for success, including through disaggregating of data by student subgroups. Add flexibility to NCLB accountability by allowing alternative AYP models that measure year-to-year individual student growth, are based on more than a single test score, and allow for differentiated consequences to target resources and support to those schools and students most in need of support.
- Enhance support for local and state data-driven decision making to improve student learning, including local and state longitudinal data systems and related educator training.
- Increase the explicit emphasis on adoption and implementation of local data and instructional improvement systems. State systems are critical for accountability and large-scale decisions, but local systems are needed for informing daily teaching and learning decisions. Local systems are designed for classroom and school use and can include local formative and interim assessment as well as school/classroom-level data needed to enable differentiated instruction and a cycle of continuous instructional and school improvement.
- Support computer-assisted and online assessment to provide educators, parents and students with more timely data to: (1) inform instruction, improve teacher effectiveness and drive accountability; (2) more efficiently assess learning through the use of adaptive testing; and (3) enable the more robust and context-based assessment of a full range of student knowledge and skills required for success in the changing global economy.
- Target resources to local acquisition, classroom implementation and educator training in the use of formative and interim assessments that can provide more timely (i.e., compared to state assessments) information about student understanding, knowledge and skills in order to inform and differentiate curriculum and instruction to meet individual student needs.

High-Tech Workforce Readiness

- Encourage K-12 standards, assessments and curriculum frameworks to better align to what all students must know to graduate from high school with college and the career readiness, including by improving

the rigor of the curriculum, avoiding a narrowing of the curriculum, and providing accountability for student technology literacy and other 21st century skills such as problem-solving and communication.

- Target support to improve science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education, including through improved teacher professional development, innovative approaches to engage students via simulations and hands-on project learning, online access to courses, instructors and experts not otherwise available, and use of interactive multimedia software that helps represent STEM concepts in alternative, reinforcing ways to better support today's digital-native students.
- Provide guidance to states on the advanced skills necessary for students to be competitive in the 21st century by enhancing the current NCLB goal that all students be technology literate by the 8th grade. Include the related ATTAIN Act provision that student technology literacy is defined by the state as the "Student knowledge and skills in using contemporary information, communication and learning technologies in a manner necessary for successful life-long learning and citizenship in the knowledge-based, digital and global 21st Century, which may include, *as determined by the state*, the following abilities: to effectively communicate and collaborate; to analyze and solve problems; to access, evaluate, manage and create information and otherwise gain information literacy; and to do so in a safe and ethical manner."
- Ensure student online access to courses, instructors and experts otherwise not available, such as for students in rural or economically-disadvantaged districts and in the areas of Advanced Placement, rigorous math and science, and critical foreign language courses.

These SIIA's ESEA policy recommendations are supplemented and reinforced in two coalition documents:

1. Recommendations detailing the role of technology in ESEA from a coalition of education and industry groups, including SIIA, submitted under separate cover.
2. Recommendations from the Business Coalition for Student Achievement, including SIIA, submitted under separate cover and available at <http://www.biz4achievement.org/>.

Our nation's continued success will require that our educational system adopt modern methods and means to remain not only effective, but even relevant, in a 21st century marked by innovation, knowledge, technology, and global competition. Information and communication technologies are responsible for the "flattening" of the world, integral to our society and our student's daily lives, and key to innovation and knowledge in this century. We believe ESEA and other federal policies are necessary to ensure our education sector better leverages these technologies in a manner necessary to provide our students with a learning environment that both reflects and prepares them for the world today.

SIIA looks forward to working with you, your staffs and other Members of the Committee to ensure reauthorization of a strengthened Elementary and Secondary Education Act that helps provide the federal leadership and targeted investment necessary to foster the very innovation in our schools that our schools themselves are being asked to foster in our students. Please do not hesitate to contact me or Mark Schneiderman, SIIA's director of education policy, at 202-789-4444 or marks@siia.net.

Sincerely,



Kenneth A. Wasch
President
Software & Information Industry Association

cc: The Honorable Dale Kildee
The Honorable Michael Castle
Members of the House Education & Labor Committee