



HELP Chairman Tom Harkin Introduces the “Strengthening America’s Schools Act of 2013”

Bill Summary

Every child in this country deserves access to a quality public education that gives them the support they need to reach their full potential. The *Strengthening America’s Schools Act of 2013* provides a framework to get all children to graduate from high school with the knowledge and skills needed for success in college and/or a career. It does this by:

- Supporting teachers and principals to help provide high-quality instruction;
- Ensuring disadvantaged students get the supports they need to succeed; and
- Focusing federal attention on supporting states and districts in turning around low-performing schools and closing achievement gaps.

The Strengthening America’s Schools Act of 2013 will:

Focus greater attention on children in their early years to ensure they come to school ready to learn

- Ask states to develop guidelines for what children should know and be able to do prior to kindergarten entry to reduce gaps in school readiness.
- Provide greater access to high-quality literacy instruction for children in early childhood education programs.
- Encourage states to provide full-day kindergarten if they do not currently provide that service.
- Ask elementary schools that are among the lowest-achieving to develop or expand early childhood education to children so they can enter school ready to learn.

Encourage equity through greater transparency and fair distribution of resources

- Continue the practice of disaggregating student achievement data across subgroups to highlight any potential disparities and expand the categories of disaggregation to include gender and English proficiency.
- Disseminate an equity score card to provide school-level information to parents on the school’s climate, the school’s educational opportunity offerings (such as AP, full-day kindergarten, or gifted programming), the number of assessments required, and the school’s funding by source (state, local, and federal).
- Ensure that local and state resources per-pupil for Title I schools are equal to or greater than the average combined local and state funds per pupil in non-Title I schools.

Sustain current state reform efforts and provide them the flexibility they need to improve their schools

- If a state has an accountability system approved by the Secretary, it can continue to use the approved accountability system. If not, a state will adopt an accountability system that is equally ambitious and holds all students to high expectations of student achievement.
- All accountability systems will include student academic achievement and growth, English language proficiency and, for high schools, graduation rates for all students; systems will also include accountability for all subgroups. This accountability system asks states to identify and support –

- Priority schools - The lowest-achieving 5 percent of each Title I elementary schools and Title I secondary schools, and secondary schools with a graduation rate lower than 60 percent.
- Focus Schools - Ten percent of Title I schools with the greatest achievement gaps and secondary schools with the greatest graduation rate gaps between subgroups.
- For all other schools, districts will identify schools experiencing achievement gaps across subgroups and will develop and implement a locally-designed intervention for that school based on input from the community.

Support great teachers and principals and ensure that all children receive the best instruction.

- Help ensure there are great teachers and principals in every school by supporting evaluations that will inform professional development to help promote school success.
- Recruit and train teachers in high-need subjects like math and science.
- Provide incentives to ensure that the most effective teachers and leaders serve the most vulnerable children.
- Help more schools provide a well-rounded education with time for the arts and physical activity.
- Support student success by promoting safe and healthy schools.
- Prepare more teachers to teach the diverse learners in America's schools including students with disabilities and English learners.