

Chairman Alexander, Senator Murray, and Members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to testify about testing and accountability in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

I am Paul Leather, Deputy Commissioner of Education in the New Hampshire Department of Education.

First, let me commend the Committee for moving forward quickly on reauthorization. Thirteen years after it was signed into law, No Child Left Behind is well overdue for renewal and has not kept up with major changes in states and school districts. I applaud you for your quick action. It will help states and schools immensely.

New Hampshire is a leading state in our thinking about the future of student assessment systems and accountability. We are a small state, but sometimes that is where the most innovation happens. I am excited about the work we have done and continue to do on behalf of our students.

We are working with several school districts to explore what the next generation of assessments might look like, beyond an end-of-the-year test. We are being methodical and careful as we roll this out in four pilot districts because we want to ensure that our assessment and accountability systems still gives accurate information to teachers, parents and students.

Based on the work we have done in our state and what we have seen happening in states across the country, we were pleased to coordinate with the Council of Chief State School Officers on its Priorities for ESEA Reauthorization. These Priorities contained three important ingredients for a stable, federal law going forward that is in line with the work we are doing in New Hampshire:

- First, it would continue to support annual assessments of student performance to ensure every parent receives the information they need on how their child is performing, at least once a year.
- Second, it would allow states to base students' annual determinations on a single standardized test, or the combined results from a coherent system of assessments throughout the year.
- Third, it gives states the space to continue to innovate on assessment and accountability systems, so important in a rapidly developing time in educational history, when the periods of authorization can last 10 years or longer.

I want to give a bit more detail on each of these aspects of the Priorities and how they align with our work in New Hampshire. But before I do that, I want to take a moment to thank the Chairman for including states' perspectives in the draft discussion bill. I believe that the draft is a good starting point for reauthorization.

We, as state leaders in education, support annual assessments of students. We in New Hampshire support having an annual assessment requirement. Through a system with annual

assessments, we promote equity, transparency, accountability, and high expectations for all students.

In New Hampshire, we are working in collaboration with four school districts to pilot competency-based assessment systems, Sanborn Regional in Kingston, NH, Epping, Rochester, and Souhegan High School in Amherst, NH. In Competency Education, we are intent on broadening the expectations of learning from the simple recitation of knowledge and facts, to also apply knowledge and skills in authentic settings, while fostering work study practices, such as persistence and creativity, as a part of this work. That is why we have emphasized complex Performance Assessments for Competency Education, or “PACE,” which is what we call our pilot project. Through a multi-year quality review process and continued technical support from the state and its partners, these pilot districts will help refine this innovative model. In addition, through existing professional development opportunities and networked cohorts of additional districts such as our Quality Performance Assessment cohorts, the state will support a pipeline to help all districts build capacity to lead this transformation statewide.

There are several key components in our Pilot model that we believe will achieve better results for all students:

- Development of statewide model competencies that describe the knowledge and skills that all students are expected to master before they exit the K-12 system.
- Use of a personalized, competency-based approach to instruction, learning, assessment, and awarding credit. In 2005, we eliminated the Carnegie Unit as the basis for awarding credit toward a diploma.
- An intense focus on ensuring that each student has meaningful and multiple opportunities to demonstrate competency that promotes equity for all student groups and every student.
- Use of performance-based assessments of competencies, in tandem with Smarter Balanced assessments of state standards in math and ELA. This way we can ensure students are gaining the same knowledge and skills across districts. This would also allow us to track and report the progress of students, schools, districts, and educators.
- State sponsored scoring calibration and large scale moderation professional development and monitoring, including expert and peer review and back-reading of assessment tasks.
- Explicit involvement of local educators and community members and other experts in designing, implementing, and scoring the new assessment and accountability system.
- Strong commitment both at the local and state level for technical quality, policy and practical guidance, and professional development.

This is a different way of doing things, and presents many challenges and opportunities. In fact, it is hard work. It is not an effort that should be taken lightly. We in New Hampshire have put in the years of effort and design work necessary to develop the system and believe it is a strong path forward for many of our students, teachers and school districts. I am submitting for the record a detailed summary of all the steps taken and the work we will do to ensure

comparability, reliability and validity of these assessments, as well as a brief description of the demographics of the participating districts.

However, just because we are piloting this system in several districts does not mean we as a state want to move away from our current annual tests. We believe it is critical to measure students at least once a year on their academic performance. In fact, through the competency-based system, we measure students more frequently throughout the year – in ways that are much more embedded in classroom work. Over the last year, there has been a crescendo of voices across the country raising the concern of over-testing. Let’s be clear, 90% or more of the “testing” that occurs in schools is under the control of the teacher and the school district. Weekly quizzes, unit assessments, mid-terms, final exams, lab reports, etc. are all “tests” used by teachers to inform parents, grade student work, and most importantly, when done right, used to improve instruction and learning for students. We believe that the over-testing issue has arisen because there has been a disconnect between these local assessments used to improve learning and state and district “external” tests used for monitoring and accountability. I have sat through many local school board meetings where the Superintendent explains to their Board the meaning of the state test results, and then separately describes their own local assessments, more directly tied to curricular and instructional improvement. So there are two sets of assessments and two accountability systems going on that overlap and in some cases are redundant. Our PACE Pilot has been designed to braid these two assessment and accountability systems together. The result is less assessment overall as redundancies between local and state assessments are eliminated. However, in this more coherent system we still provide benchmark information the state and districts need without sacrificing much deeper, more actionable information at the classroom level.

Secondly, we would like to see a statement in the law that supports annual determinations based on a coherent system of state and local multiple assessments. At the end of every year, we need to communicate with parents and students about how students and schools are performing in a clear, transparent way. Our PACE model does that. Rather than relying on just one summative assessment to make this determination, we combine a series of assessment results throughout the year to make that annual determination. This is flexibility states have not had before. We would welcome this flexibility, which would create opportunities for other states in the future.

Third, because of our work advancing a competency-based learning model that is more personalized and student-centered, we understand the importance of creating freedom to innovate, where some districts and schools who have demonstrated their prior work and readiness are given the opportunity to help all of us advance the overall system. In No Child Left Behind there is a provision for a “local assessment option” that allows states to offer a local assessment system in select school districts in place of the state assessment system. However, a close reading of the Standard and Assessments Regulations and the Department’s Peer Review Guidance makes clear that what should have been simply parameters turned into “road blocks.” The current local assessment option requirements are as or more onerous than the requirements for a statewide assessment. In the thirteen years since the law has been enacted,

we can count on one hand with fingers left over the number of states that have successfully taken advantage of this “option.” My point here is that moving forward we should be clear about the differences between parameters and road blocks. We were highly encouraged to see pilot programs outlined in CCSSO’s Priorities and in the Chairman’s draft discussion bill. We welcome this flexibility to have pilots actually addressed in the law to clarify that innovation and research in improved models is a necessary part of our system.

The reason New Hampshire has become a leader in innovative assessment and accountability models today is because we have been working to bring this idea to fruition for 3 solid years, starting with intensive professional development to raise the assessment literacy of our teachers. We are not ready to take it statewide yet, but we hope to in the future, if it demonstrates improved performance over the next couple years. I will say that any model – in order to truly be successful – must be led by and supported by the state. However, in New Hampshire, the “Live Free or Die” state, we also believe that it is essential that local educational leaders help build the new system through their innovative efforts. It is this combination of state and local creative collaboration that has helped us build a new, stronger, more effective assessment and accountability system.

For these reasons, we believe that Congress should establish parameters in the reauthorization to ensure that innovative pilots do not result in a step backwards for students. First, at the federal level, we would expect that assurances of technical quality, and breadth and depth of assessments necessary to adequately assure that the requirements of a fully realized state system will be in put in place. These systems should promote equity, transparency, disaggregation, and comparability for the purposes of making annual determinations at the school level. There should also be an expectation of readiness to implement a plan at the state level that ensures innovation with fidelity with the necessary supports for local districts and schools and an evaluation of lessons learned. These parameters are necessary to protect the federal interest in effective uses of limited federal funds.

Secondly, local districts wishing to pursue innovative assessment systems should be able to demonstrate to states that they will continue to focus on college and/or career outcomes, and are committed to improving the achievement of educationally-disadvantaged students. They should maintain a clearly described internal accountability process supported by the local board of education, the commitment of resources to ensure the plan’s success, and the district and school leadership necessary to lead a substantive change process. They should demonstrate evidence of readiness to innovate, and the educational capacity to design, implement, support, and sustain the new system, if proven successful in advancing learning for students. With these parameters in place, we believe that educational improvements and innovative design will flourish throughout the life of the coming reauthorization of ESEA.

We in New Hampshire greatly appreciate the opportunity to have our views, and our innovative educational practices, considered by the Committee in the ESEA reauthorization process. We look forward to the future with a speedy reauthorization of a much improved Elementary and Secondary Education Act.