October 5, 2015

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

The Honorable John Kline, Chairman
House Education and the Workforce Committee
Washington, DC 20515

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

The Honorable Bobby Scott, Ranking Member
House Education and the Workforce Committee
Washington, DC 20515

RE: Retain the Innovative Technology Expands Children's Horizons (I-TECH) program in the final Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) bill.

Dear Chairman Alexander, Chairman Kline, Ranking Member Murray, and Ranking Member Scott:

The undersigned organizations and companies urge the Conference Committee's retention of the Innovative Technology Expands Children's Horizons (I-TECH) program in the final version of Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) reauthorization legislation. This bipartisan program, included in the Every Child Achieves Act (ECAA), is critical to ensuring that all students gain access to digital education resources, both at home and at school, and that all educators receive technology professional development that will allow them to use technology and incorporate it effectively into their curricula. Through I-TECH, students will not only gain the technological fluency to achieve academically, but also compete in the modern economy and support US economic growth.

The bipartisan I-TECH program, which would replace the Enhancing Education Through Technology (EETT) program, possesses three key strengths: 1) it would focus funding on building educators', principals', librarians', and school administrators' technology integration skills by increasing the current law's set-aside for professional development from 25 percent to 50 percent; 2) it would promote innovative technology initiatives by encouraging districts to use I-TECH funds to plan and develop blended learning projects; and 3) it would streamline the existing program's application process and give states significant control and flexibility in awarding subgrants.

Our organizations are particularly pleased that I-TECH prioritizes providing educators, including librarians, with continuous, feasible and robust technology professional development opportunities, which we view as the linchpin for academic success. Indeed, the advent of digital assessments, digital textbooks, flipped and blended learning and myriad of other devices, tools and services makes even more acute the need for technology professional development. 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. Further, a recently released report from the Organization of Economic and Co-operative Development concluded that: "What this shows is that the successful integration of technology in education is not so much a matter of choosing the right device, the right amount of time to spend with it, the best software or the right digital textbook. The key elements for success are the teachers, school leaders and other decision makers who have the vision, and the ability, to make the connection between students, computers and learning."

We also approve of I-TECH's dedication to innovation, as evidenced by its support for blended learning programs. Only a few short years ago, many of the innovative technology practices prevalent in today's wired classrooms, including blogs, wikis, digital textbooks, flipped learning courses, MOOCs and online assessments, were barely known and little used. Because individual educators, schools, districts and states were willing to embrace and support innovative approaches to learning fueled by technology, important innovations were tested and, if proven useful, scaled. I-TECH's support of classroom technology innovations like blended learning is critical if our nation's schools are to fully leverage the potential of educational technology. We note here that the House version of ESEA reauthorization also supports this blended learning vision by its incorporation of an optional blended learning program.

In addition, we support I-TECH's limiting of federal requirements for state and district application processes and allowing state officials to determine priorities for subgrant competitions. Our organizations well understand the importance of minimizing the federal paperwork burden on states and school districts and welcome I-TECH's streamlined application process. Further, we recognize that state education agencies have a better sense of their own districts' technology needs than the federal government and appreciate the flexibility I-TECH provides to fill the technological readiness gaps that states have identified.

Lastly, our groups support retaining provisions added into the bill, via amendments from Senators King and Capito, which would address the "homework gap" issue. According to a recent Pew report, one third of families lack access to adequate broadband in their homes, creating unnecessary obstacles for students attempting to complete digital homework assignments, research and apply for colleges and jobs, or apply for government services. The King-Capito provisions would require the Department of Education to conduct a study to determine the extent of this problem on a national scale and would clarify that schools and districts can use I-TECH dollars to purchase broadband access devices, like hot spots, to help close the homework gap. Maintaining the King-Capito language in the final bill would bring our nation one step closer to closing the digital learning equity gap facing thousands of underserved students across the country.

For all of the aforementioned reasons, we support the retention of I-TECH in the final version of the ESEA bill.

For more information, please contact Jon Bernstein, representing the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE), at jbernstein@jbernsteinstrategy.com.

Sincerely,

AASA, The School Superintendents Association
American Federation of Teachers (AFT)
Association of Educational Service Agencies (AESA)
American Library Association (ALA)
Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO)
Cisco
Common Sense Media
Consortium for School Networking (CoSN)
Discovery Education
Follett

Gaggle
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt
Intel
International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE)
National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP)
National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP)
National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA)
National Education Association (NEA)
National Rural Education Association (NREA)
National Rural Education Advocacy Coalition (NREAC)
National Writing Project
SMART Technologies, Inc.
Software and Information Industry Association (SIIA)
State Educational Technology Directors Association (SETDA)
The Source for Learning, Inc.