



1201 16th St., N.W. | Washington, DC 20036 | Phone: (202) 833-4000

Lily Eskelsen García

*President*

Rebecca S. Pringle

*Vice President*

## **Testimony of Becky Pringle, Vice President National Education Association**

### ***ESSA Implementation in States and School Districts: Perspectives from Education Leaders***

**Senate HELP Committee, February 23, 2016**

Thank you Chairman Alexander, Senator Murray and Members of the Committee. My name is Becky Pringle and I am a middle school science teacher from Pennsylvania with over 31 years of teaching experience. I also have the honor and the pleasure of serving as vice-president to the more than 3 million teachers and education support professionals who make up the National Education Association. There is no one more excited than our educators for the opportunity that the Every Student Succeeds Act provides for our students in the classroom; especially those students who are most in need.

In the months leading up to the enactment of ESSA, we heard loud and clear from our members what they wanted to see in a new law that would:

- Ensure students' access to opportunity that really matters in the accountability system
- Guarantee educators' expertise is included in decision-making, and
- Reduce the volume and over-reliance on standardized testing

The new law has the potential to deliver on all three, and paves the way for opportunity to become a real part of 'what gets counted' now, an historic development for our education system. The law also returns significant responsibility to states and schools districts to ensure decision making is in the hands of people who know the students' names. This shift offers the U.S. Department of Education the opportunity to focus on its enforcement authority to ensure students have equitable access to a robust and well-rounded education and to the supports they need to fulfill their full potential as constructive members of their communities, productive participants in the economy, and engaged citizens of the US and the world.

This kind of monumental transition will require deep collaboration among multiple stakeholders, some of whom are not used to working together, and making sure more voices are at decision-making tables. None of us can afford to fall victim to the allure of shortcuts. It is only through the authentic commitment of all stakeholders to engage in the deep listening, professional respect and collective effort that this new law will be successful for students. The time to do this right is built into ESSA and we urge the U.S. Department of Education to set a good example by not rushing its part of the process for the sake of expediency.

The implementation process will be simultaneously developing at the national level, at the state level, at the district level, and ultimately in schools across this country as policies are updated. We have urged the Department to ensure the regulatory process is designed to include the best thinking, ideas, and concepts from educators and other stakeholders from across the country.

We must see more listening, not less.

And we're practicing what we preach! The National Education Association has embarked on its own listening tour because we want to hear from teachers, education support professionals, specialized instructional support professionals, librarians, and higher education faculty and staff about how to make sure we engage our practitioners in taking advantage of this opportunity to get this right for our students. The Every Student Succeeds Act restores student learning to the center of everything educators do, and we intend on preparing our members to lead this transformation.

Since January, NEA has joined with our state affiliates to create a cadre of educators to act as our ESSA implementation team. During the last holiday weekend, we brought over 60 state and local leaders to Washington, DC to provide our educators the time and space to discuss what is happening in their states and districts, what they are hearing, what they are planning, and to identify the tools and resources they need to ensure a successful implementation of ESSA at the school level.

We saw the spark in the eyes of classroom teachers and paraeducators who got excited at the prospect of allowing more flexibility in the classroom to bring out students' joy of learning. We talked about the historic moment we have to work with districts and states to ensure all students, no matter their zip code, have access to the resources, services and supports that they need.

As educators, we know we are lucky because we have the privilege of inspiring our students' curiosity, imagination, and desire to learn, and the opportunity to provide them with the caring, committed, and qualified educators they deserve. We know we cannot do this alone. It will take educators and parents, superintendents and school boards, state chiefs and state boards, state legislators and governors all putting aside our differences and working together with the

best interests of students in mind. We need to follow the example that all of you set for us in finding a way to collaborate to create a law that recognizes our collective responsibility to promote opportunity, equity and excellence for every one of our students.

We are ready to chart new pathways for student success and we are excited about the opportunity to help lead the change ahead of us.

On behalf of our members and our students, thank you for providing us with this incredible opportunity.