April 13, 2015

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

RE: Support ESEA Baldwin/Hatch Amendment - Innovative Technology Expands Children’s Horizons (I-TECH)

Dear Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray:

The undersigned organizations urge the Committee’s approval of a bipartisan amendment to add a separate educational technology program to the Every Child Achieves Act (ECAA) of 2015 that will be offered by Senators Baldwin and Hatch. This amendment is critical to ensuring that the final version of ECAA reflects a strong commitment to supporting digital learning experiences for all students, especially those in rural areas.

When Congress passed the No Child Left Behind Act, it voiced bipartisan support for the Enhancing Education Through Technology (EETT) program. While more than a dozen years have passed since then, the reasons for Congressional support are more critical today than ever. Digital and blended learning:

- Improve educator effectiveness, integrate data systems and aid low-performing schools.
- Provide a robust, student-centered, digitally powered learning experience.
- Provide access to unprecedented learning opportunities online for students in rural and other areas that lack sufficient curriculum and course availability.
- Leverage school broadband investments and access made possible by the recently updated E-Rate program.
- Help meet the economy’s need for tech-savvy workers with the digital skills to succeed in an increasingly global economy.

The amendment brought before the Committee this week would replace EETT with the Innovative Technology Expands Children’s Horizons (I-TECH), which is designed to build on EETT’s success while making significant upgrades to its focus and structure. Specifically, I-TECH would focus funding on building educators’, principals’, and school administrators’ technology integration skills by increasing the current law’s set-aside for professional development from 25 percent to 50 percent. Additionally, I-TECH would promote innovative technology initiatives by encouraging districts to use I-TECH funds to plan and develop blended learning projects and focusing on professional learning to ensure their successful implementation. Finally, I-TECH would streamline the existing program’s application process and give states significant control and flexibility in awarding subgrants.
Our organizations are pleased that I-TECH places a strong emphasis on providing educators with ongoing, sustainable and scalable technology professional development opportunities. 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. Like any profession, educators must be supported in continually honing their craft to ensure students reach high academic success. The advent of digital assessments makes even more acute the importance of educator professional learning to harness data to personalize and strengthen instruction to match the needs, styles and interests of students.

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.

Finally, 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. Additionally, 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. For these reasons, we believe I-TECH strikes the appropriate balance between federal leadership on the importance of educational technology and the need for local control over the specifics of educational technology priorities.

Therefore, we support the inclusion of I-TECH in the Committee’s approved version of the Every Child Achieves Act of 2015.

For more information, please contact Hilary Goldmann, senior director for government relations, International Society for Technology in Education, at hgoldmann@iste.org or 703.672.5909.

Sincerely,

AASA, The School Superintendents Association
Association of Educational Service Agencies
Consortium for School Networking
International Society for Technology in Education
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Association of State Boards of Education
National Education Association
National PTA
National Rural Education Association
National Rural Education Advocacy Coalition
Partnership for 21st Century Learning
State Educational Technology Directors Association