

AMENDMENT UPDATE:

Senator Mikulski (D-MD): offered an amendment that would reauthorize the Jacob J. Javits program—a program that supports gifted and talented education. She said that her intention in reauthorizing the program was, in part, to dispel the notion that “all poor kids are dumb.” There are gifted young people in schools across the country who require specialized attention to nurture their talent and interests. Otherwise, they “fail out.” Whitehouse asked to be added as a cosponsor to the amendment and shared a story of a gifted student who created a remarkable method for early identification of pancreatic cancer and exemplified the need for the program. Murray also spoke in support of the proposal. **The amendment was adopted on a voice vote.**

During the debate of this amendment, **Senator Roberts**, who was absent from proceedings the day before, provided essentially an opening statement that addressed many issues, but focused on the Common Core reading and mathematics standards and his legislation that specifically prohibits any federal requirement or incentives to adopt them. He praised provisions in the ECAA that address this issue. There were some responses to his statements that asserted that the Common Core standards were developed and adopted by states, not the federal government. Alexander noted their adoption is not mandated by any federal entity, but Roberts asserted that an explicit prohibition is warranted.

Senator Casey (D-PA): offered his “Ready-to-Learn Television” amendment. A number of his Democratic colleagues joined him to cosponsor the amendment, as did Murkowski, making the proposal to offer competitive grants to develop, produce and distribute education and instructional video programming for preschool and elementary school students and their parents bipartisan. **The amendment was adopted via voice vote.**

Senator Franken (D-MN): offered his STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) education amendment, which is cosponsored by Kirk. The amendment would essentially reinstate a STEM-focused program in place of the Math Science Partnership program currently in Title II of ESEA. He noted that exposing young people to STEM skills is important to the future of the country. The proposal would help recruit, train and support teachers in STEM subjects and give them important professional development opportunities. During the debate, Murray, Baldwin and Bennet were added as cosponsors. Alexander noted that there are already 209 STEM programs across federal agencies and cited a report found that 83% of those programs are duplicative. Franken and Murray rebutted the Chairman’s points, noting that the programs serve different purposes and populations, and this amendment preserves the only STEM-focused program at the Department of Education, and the only one that provides professional development for K-12 teachers. Despite the Chairman’s opposition to the change, **the amendment was adopted by a vote of 12-10.**

Senator Bennet (D-CO): offered an amendment that would change Title II from a “slush fund” into a program that “is going to lead the way for a new generation of teachers.” The proposal would authorize grants to strengthen teacher leadership activities in Title II. Isakson commended the proposal and the goals, as did Collins, who asked to be added as an amendment cosponsor. **The amendment was adopted via voice vote.**

Senator Baldwin (D-WI): offered an amendment related to workforce-critical subjects. She noted that workforce demands are not being met and that the new bill could support students' attainment of in-demand skills and knowledge and close the so-called "skills gap." The subjects would be developed in conjunction with state workforce development boards; Baldwin noted that a similar amendment was included in the House ESEA reauthorization proposal. Alexander spoke against the proposal, asserting that the change is duplicative and unnecessary. **The amendment failed by a vote of 10-12.**

Senator Franken (D-MN): offered an amendment on accelerated learning. Alexander noted that the Committee would likely pass it, "unless you talk us out of it." The change would give financial support to low-income students who want to take AP or IB courses. Dual enrollment, early college high schools and other accelerated learning models would also be supported. Cassidy cosponsored the amendment, as did other Democratic members of the panel. **The amendment was adopted via a voice vote.**

Senator Burr (R-NC): offered an amendment that would, in his view, improve the formula used in the distribution of Title II funds in the law by increasing the role of poverty figures in the calculations. The weight of poverty and population figures in the formula should be changed to 80% and 20%, respectively, according to Burr and Bennet, and the proposed change would get the formula "exactly right," said Burr. Casey and Bennet voiced support for the change. **Casey noted that he has an amendment related to the "hold harmless" provisions of the program that are related to the proposal and asked if they could be considered together.** Cassidy questioned the Senators, noting that Louisiana would get 25% less funding under the change. There was much discussion of the change and its impact on various states. **Voting on both the Burr and Casey amendments related to the Title II distribution formula was delayed until the afternoon session.**

Senator Cassidy (R-LA): offered an amendment related to dyslexia "as a Senator and a parent," noting his own daughter suffers from the condition. He asserted that 18% of the population has some form of dyslexia. The proposal would carve out an allowable use of Title II funds for supports for dyslexic students in Title II. He noted that some argue that the proposal elevates dyslexics over other students with other learning difficulties and countered that this is not the case; the change simply gives these students services as early as possible. Murray argued that while she sympathizes with the intention of the amendment and the personal passion of Cassidy, the amendment is unacceptable to her because it singles out one condition. She said dozens of disability organizations strongly oppose the measure. "The amendment sends the message that the Committee cares more about one group of students with disabilities more than others," she said. She went on to say that setting a preference for one particular disability is unfair and inappropriate. The debate of this proposal was fairly pointed, with Cassidy characterizing a number of groups representing students with disabilities as "special interest groups" and other members repeatedly arguing that students with dyslexia shouldn't have a particular mention or carve out in ESEA. Murray invoked the "Nothing without us about us" mantra of the learning disability community to again point out that the proposal is not inclusive. After some of the day's most heated debate, **the amendment failed on a vote of 10-12.**

Senator Casey (D-PA): offered an amendment to ensure teachers, principals and other school leaders are “profession ready” in their practice. The proposal would require educators to have completed a teacher preparation program, be certified or appropriately licensed, demonstrate content knowledge and demonstrate teaching skills. Alexander said he opposed the proposal and said it was reminiscent of the Highly Qualified Teaching provisions in current law, which have proven to be unworkable. **Casey withdrew the amendment.**

Senator Alexander (R-TN): offered the en bloc amendments, without explanation or debate. They addressed afterschool programming and the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program, Project SERV (School Emergency Response to Violence), financial literacy, literacy and arts, education in rural school districts, innovation in education and physical education programs (PEP). **The en bloc amendments passed by voice vote.**

Senator Franken (D-MN): offered an amendment that would reauthorize current law’s school counseling program. Noting that the ratio of counselors to students in schools in Minnesota is 700:1, Franken argued that the country needs far more school counselors. The current law’s program is the only federal support for school counselors and he argued that there is a continuing need for such a program. Alexander opposed the proposal and said he thought other block grants in the revised law could support counselors, if states or districts choose to use the funds in that way. **The amendment passed on a vote of 13-8.**

Senator Bennet (D-CO): offered an amendment with Franken around family engagement. The amendment would give resources to family and parent engagement programs and essentially reauthorize the Parent Information and Resource Center program. Senator Alexander noted that 1% of Title I funds are currently set aside for parental engagement programs and opposed the measure. **The amendment was withdrawn.**

Senator Kirk (R-IL): was at the session and very briefly discussed his proposed amendment that would amend part A of Title I of the Act to include an Opportunity Dashboard to hold States accountable for providing a meaningful opportunity for each student to meet challenging State academic standards and be assured of graduating prepared for postsecondary education and the workforce. **The amendment was withdrawn.**

Senator Bennet (D-CO): offered an amendment to establish a weighted student funding flexibility pilot program. He noted that the formulas that currently govern myriad programs are dated and do not adequately support the students and teachers they should. Alexander acknowledged broad support for the idea and said he expected it to be approved. **The amendment passed on a voice vote.**

Senator Casey (D-PA): offered an amendment with Baldwin to authorize his “well-rounded education” program. The proposal would support funds to ensure that subjects outside of reading and math are taught well in K-12 schools. Specific subjects would include economic and financial literacy, computer science and others. He noted that research shows that students exposed to many subjects achieve to higher levels, and that a similar amendment was adopted by voice vote during the Committee’s consideration of ESEA in 2013. Alexander argued that the

would-be new program is unnecessary and redundant. **The amendment was defeated by a vote of 10-11.**

Senator Alexander (R-TN): offered an amendment to address bullying and harassment in schools. Any schools that receive Title IV funds would be required to establish anti-bullying and harassment policies, although the guidelines around those policies would be few. Casey said that while he appreciated the Chairman's proposal, he preferred his approach, outlined in a to-be-offered amendment that would mandate rules and reporting in a different and more uniform manner. Murkowski said she agreed with both Casey and Alexander, but preferred Casey's approach to addressing the bullying and harassment issues that are plaguing the country's schools, particularly via electronic devices. She said she would support the Chairman's proposal, but hoped it might be strengthened before the bill is on the floor or be improved on the floor. Baldwin spoke against the Alexander plan and in favor of the Casey one. Alexander offered to work with Casey in lieu of a vote on the two proposals. **Ultimately, the Alexander and Casey amendments were withdrawn and the senators agreed to work together on a compromise before floor debate of the bill.**

Senator Casey (D-PA): offered his bullying amendment (which has the support of Kirk) after Alexander offered his, but before the two agreed to work together. He noted that technological advances have made it so that bullying does not end for its victims once tormenter and tormented are physically separated. He again argued that all districts receiving federal dollars should be required to establish policies based on federal guidelines to prevent bullying and harassment, asserting that 160,000 students are currently staying home from school daily due to bullying. The requirements would include addressing eight different classes or categories of students. Murray spoke in support of the Casey proposal; Alexander reiterated his strong opposition, saying federal lawmakers and agencies shouldn't be giving districts prescriptive guidelines on bullying. **Ultimately, the Alexander and Casey amendments were withdrawn and the senators agreed to work together on a compromise before floor debate of the bill.**

Senator Cassidy (R-LA): returned to the issue of dyslexia in criticizing the bill's inclusion of the LEARN program—a comprehensive literacy program, arguing that it does not address the need of dyslexic learners. His amendment would require that the new program recognize the specific needs of students with dyslexia and other disabilities. He argued that if the new program is meant to help students who read below grade level, it should explicitly help those students who suffer from a condition that is a leading cause of slower acquisition of reading skills. Murray spoke against the Cassidy amendment strongly, noting that she and a broad group of literacy advocates have been working on the LEARN Act for six years, including groups that advocate on behalf of students with dyslexia and other disabilities. She noted that the Cassidy amendment would fundamentally alter that proposal and wrongly suggest that the Committee cares more about one group of students with disabilities than others. **The amendment failed by a vote of 8-14.**

Senator Murray (D-WA) and Senator Isakson (R-GA): offered a bipartisan early childhood education amendment. The amendment would authorize a competitive grant program for states in support of early learning alignment and improvement. Isakson said the measure would maximize the effect of federal dollars invested in early childhood education, thanked Murray for

her work and urged his colleagues to approve the amendment. Casey spoke in favor of the amendment, which he cosponsored, and said, “If kids learn more now, they’ll earn more later.” **The amendment was passed by voice vote.**

Senator Baldwin (D-WI): formally offered the so-called “I-Tech” amendment after Hatch mentioned it and his support for the proposal. The amendment would award grants to encourage State educational agencies, local educational agencies, and schools to utilize technology to improve student achievement and college and career readiness, the skills of teachers and school leaders and the efficiency and productivity of education systems at all levels. **The amendment was passed by voice vote.**

Senator Warren (D-MA): offered an amendment that would establish a college information demonstration program. She noted that the policy would support getting more information to would-be college students about affordable strategies for getting into college and successfully completing postsecondary degrees. Alexander asked Warren if she would withdraw the proposal to work with him on something similar during conversations around the Higher Education Act. **The amendment was withdrawn.**

Senator Whitehouse (D-RI): offered an amendment to support innovation in K-12 schools by establishing a competitive grant program that would support giving schools “mutually assured regulatory relief.” The concept is that local and state governments, as well as the federal government might agree to give innovative schools regulatory relief as they experiment with innovative educational strategies. **Whitehouse withdrew the amendment in the hopes of working with his colleagues on the concept.**