United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 27, 2015

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman, Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, and Education
Senate Appropriations Committee

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Labor
Health and Human Services, and Education
Senate Appropriations Committee

Dear Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Murray:

We ask that the Fiscal Year 2016 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations Bill include language to restore state decision-making and accountability with respect to state academic content standards. The decision about what students should be taught and when it should be taught has enormous consequences for our children. Therefore, parents ought to have a straight line of accountability to those who are making such decisions. Those decisions should be made at the state or local level, free from any pressure from the U.S. Department of Education.

We support eliminating further interference by the U.S. Department of Education with respect to state decisions on academic content standards by including the following language in the Fiscal Year 2016 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations Bill:

(a) In General.—Funds appropriated under this Act or any prior Act shall not be used by the Secretary of Education—

(1) to require a State or local educational agency to develop or implement any set of academic content standards common to multiple States, including the Common Core State Standards developed under the Common Core State Standards Initiative, or any other specified set or type of academic content standards selected by the Secretary, or assessments aligned with such standards, including as a condition of approval of a State plan submitted to the Secretary, an application for a waiver issued by such Secretary under section 9401 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 7861), or as a condition of approval or competitive preference for an award of Federal funds under any grant, contract, or cooperative agreement;

(2) to establish any criterion that specifies, defines, or prescribes the standards or measures that a State or local educational agency uses to establish, implement, or improve academic content standards, academic achievement standards, academic assessments, accountability systems, systems that measure student growth, measures of other academic indicators, or teacher and principal evaluation systems; or

(3) to award any grant, contract, or cooperative agreement to a consortium of States that requires or specifically authorizes the development of assessments aligned with any set of academic content standards common to multiple States, including the Common Core State Standards developed under the Common Core State Standards Initiative, or any other specified set or type of academic content standards selected by the Secretary.

(b) Rule of Construction.—Nothing in subsection (a) shall be construed to limit the discretion

of an individual State or local education agency to use funds provided through a grant, contract, or cooperative agreement that does not otherwise violate subsection (a) for any purpose consistent with the terms of the grant, contract, or cooperative agreement, including the development or implementation of any set of content standards, assessments, or curricula that the State or local educational agency chooses to develop or implement without regard to a Federal requirement or incentive.

Thank you for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,

Chuck Grassley

Pat Roberts

Deb Fischer

Steve Daines

John Barrasso

Mike Enzi