

June 23, 2017

Mr. Jason Botel
Acting Assistant Secretary
Elementary and Secondary Education
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Acting Assistant Secretary Botel:

We are writing to express our concern that the U.S. Department of Education is discouraging states from including student performance in science as a priority within their accountability frameworks—something that is clearly permitted under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Specifically, we are referring to the Department’s June 13 letter to Delaware Education Secretary Susan Bunting regarding Delaware’s ESSA accountability plan.

Actively discouraging states from including science as an ESSA accountability measure would be a poor policy choice. It is also inconsistent with numerous public statements made by President Trump and Secretary DeVos regarding the importance of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education and the goal of maintaining a world-class American workforce.

High-quality STEM education—that starts with science in the early years—plays a monumental role in ensuring our nation’s competitiveness in the global economy and technological leadership. We should not be backing away from science being taught and measured in our schools; instead, we should be encouraging state leaders to pursue ambitious policies that prioritize science education.

Fifteen years of data and experience with the No Child Left Behind Act clearly demonstrated that the law’s narrow focus on math and reading has negatively impacted science education. The time and resources devoted to science education—especially in our nation’s elementary classrooms—plummeted because science scores were not counted in many states. We have already learned the destructive lesson that “if it’s not tested, it’s not taught,” and we should not repeat past mistakes.

Following the Department’s response to Delaware, *Politico* reported that [Council of Chief State School Officers Executive Director Chris] Minnich said state chiefs are concerned “that the Education Department excluded science tests as an option for states when considering academic factors to hold schools accountable,” and that it seems ED is interpreting ESSA as stating “only math and English tests count as ‘academic indicators’ in state accountability systems.” Mike Petrilli, president of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, told *Politico* that telling states they can’t consider science or social studies when examining academic achievement is a “terrible decision,” and he asked, “Why on earth would the Administration want to discourage that?”

We share these concerns. Your response to Delaware’s ESSA plan could set a precedent that would discourage other states from including science testing as they develop their ESSA plans. We find this very troubling, as our organizations have for many years been advocating for quality science for all students. We see state decisions to include science in their accountability systems as a major step toward achieving that goal.

Recognizing the importance of science education, we hope you will publicly clarify your position on this issue. Our organizations have an active meeting request with your office, and we would welcome the opportunity to further discuss this subject with you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David L. Evans". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

David L. Evans
Executive Director, NSTA

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J.F. Brown". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line at the end.

James F. Brown
Executive Director, STEM Education Coalition

Cc: The Honorable Susan Bunting, Secretary of Education, Delaware Department of Education