

August 15, 2005

The Honorable Michael Enzi
Chairman, Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC

Dear Senator Enzi:

As your committee begins work on reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Education Coalition urges you to use this opportunity to strengthen our nation's economic competitiveness by encouraging our brightest students to study and work in the STEM fields.

Our nonpartisan coalition is composed of a diverse range of stakeholders that represent all sectors of the technological workforce – from knowledge workers, to educators, scientists, engineers, mathematicians, technicians, and representatives from the business community. The STEM Education Coalition was established prior to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act and has continually supported programs at the Department of Education, the National Science Foundation, and other agencies that offer STEM related programs for teachers and students at all levels.

Excellent mathematics, science and engineering programs in our K-12 classrooms and in our higher education institutions are both vital to our nation's long-term economic prosperity, global competitiveness, and homeland security. To this end, we are pleased with provisions in Title IV of H.R. 609, the College Access and Opportunity Act of 2005 that provide incentives for students to pursue advanced degrees and careers in the STEM fields.

As you consider legislation to reauthorize Title IV, we urge you to give careful consideration to these provisions. In particular, we support the Mathematics and Science Honors Scholarships for students pursuing a baccalaureate, masters, or doctoral degree (or a combination thereof) in physical, life, or computer sciences, mathematics, and engineering. These are designed to encourage the "best and the brightest" students in the United States to pursue advanced study in the STEM fields and become the next generation of innovators. We are hopeful that language can be developed that ensures access to these funds for those academically talented students most in need of financial support and in every region of the country.

Similarly, we support efforts to forgive interest on student loans of those who enter and remain in STEM fields, including teachers in Title I eligible schools, for at least five years. Senator John Warner has introduced a similar measure, S. 765, the Math and Science Incentive Act.

We are also very supportive of the language in H.R. 609 that would create Mathematics and Science Education Coordinating Council grants. Bringing together education, business and community leaders at the state level allows all stakeholders to work together to improve math and science education. We suggest these Coordinating Councils be allowed to create teacher professional development and other similar programs along the line of the Making America Competitive Centers as proposed by Senator Coleman in S. 1020, the COMPETE Act of 2005.

Finally, the STEM Coalition urges you to give careful consideration to the higher education STEM reform initiatives outlined in the recent report from the Business Roundtable and other leading business groups (*Tapping America's Potential: The Education for Innovation Initiative*), which calls on our nation to double the amount of STEM graduates by 2015. An electronic version of this report is available at <http://www.businessroundtable.org>.

We look forward to working with you and other members of the Committee to continue to strengthen math and science education as HEA reauthorization continues this fall. Please contact James Brown at (202) 872-6229 or Laura Kolton at (202) 872-4384 if we can provide you with any additional information or if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

American Chemical Society
American Geological Institute
American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics
American Mathematical Society
ASME Center for Public Awareness
ASTRA, The Alliance for Science & Technology Research in America
Whiting School of Engineering, Center for Educational Outreach
Institute of Food Technologists
Johns Hopkins University
Museum of Science, Boston
National Association of Biology Teachers
National Center for Technological Literacy
National Council of Teachers of Mathematics
National Education Knowledge Industry Association
National Science Teachers Association
Optical Society of America
Project Lead the Way
Society of Women Engineers
SPIE-The International Society for Optical Engineering
Triangle Coalition

