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NCLB Commission Statement on U.S. Senate Hearing on Modernizing Middle and High Schools for the 21st Century

Washington, DC—Today the Commission on No Child Left Behind made the following statement in response to the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions hearing on Modernizing Middle and High Schools for the 21st Century.

The Commission on No Child Left Behind applauds the Committee for holding a hearing focused on middle and high schools. As the Commission traveled the nation studying the impact of NCLB, it was overwhelmingly clear that our high school dropout rate continues to be unacceptably high, and that too many high school graduates are not attaining the skills and knowledge they need to compete and succeed in the American workforce and compete in a global economy.

Our high schools must be stronger institutions of learning, and the Commission's report, *Beyond NCLB: Fulfilling the Promise to Our Nation's Children*, lays out specific, actionable steps that Congress can implement to meet this goal.

- Districts with large concentrations of struggling high schools should develop and implement comprehensive, districtwide high school improvement plans. Systemic failure must be addressed in a systemic way.
- States should create and implement a 12th grade assessment designed to assess content that these students need to be college and workplace ready. These assessments must be counted in adequate yearly progress calculations but should not be used as the sole determinant of whether a student receives a diploma.
- Schools should be accountable for improving graduation rates of all students by closing the graduation gap by 2014 and states should be required to conform to the National Governors Association compact on graduation rates.
- Schools should disaggregate graduation rate data and use this data as an indicator in adequate yearly progress calculations.
- A blue ribbon panel should be appointed to create model national standards and tests in reading or language arts, mathematics and science to ensure high expectations for all students in every state. These model national standards and

assessments should be voluntary. Once they are created, we recommend three options for states: 1) adopt these standards and tests as their own for NCLB accountability purposes; 2) build their own assessments based on the model national standards; or 3) keep their existing standards and tests. The U.S. Secretary of Education would issue periodic reports to the public comparing the relative rigor and quality of the standards and assessments in states that choose options 2 and 3 to the national model using a common scale. This report and the use of the common scale would be intended to allow accurate comparisons, so we can clearly see differences in the level of expectations among states and in contrast to the national model.

We urge Congress to adopt the Commission's recommendations for improving elementary, middle schools and high schools as well as our comprehensive set of recommendations to ensure that all students will succeed. These recommendations by the Commission form a blueprint for improving NCLB and accelerating the progress in meeting its goal of proficiency for all students. You can access the Commission's full report by visiting www.nclbcommission.org.

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