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**Testimony of Gene Wilhoit, Executive Director, Council of Chief State School Officers
before the House Appropriations Committee, Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies**

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Chairman Obey, Ranking Member Tiahrt, Members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to address the subcommittee today about the Fiscal Year 2011 federal education budget. My name is Gene Wilhoit, I am the Executive Director of the Council of Chief State School Officers, a national non-profit organization serving public officials who head departments of elementary and secondary education in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, the Department of Defense Education Activity, and five U.S. extra-state jurisdictions.

Education must be among the highest priority investments for the country. Especially during these difficult budgetary times, the nation must be committed to helping every child achieve his or her full potential by ensuring that all students have access to a high quality education. These investments will not only help individual students and families, but will serve to strengthen the nation's economy over the long term. I intend to focus my remarks today on the critical role State Education Agencies play in developing, implementing and scaling comprehensive, statewide education reforms. I also want to highlight the core federal investments states believe are needed to strengthen the nation's schools, so that all students graduate ready for college and career.

First, however, I want to thank you and reiterate the important role the Recovery Act played this past year in shoring-up state and local education budgets, which kept teachers in the classroom and helped keep longer term education reforms on track for success.

As you know, states and localities continue to struggle with budgetary challenges associated with the severe economic downturn, even as a greater number of American families – and their school age children - need support from their communities, including their public schools. This crisis would be far worse, however, had Congress and the Administration not included significant education funding in the Recovery Act. The federal government's decision to use the Recovery Act to provide additional funding for core programs such as Title I and IDEA – along with the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund - coupled with reform focused programs such as the State Longitudinal Data Systems, Race to the Top, Teacher Inventive Fund and other programs, helped to stabilize distressed state and local education budgets, while also continuing – and spurring – new reforms. In addition, students in every state will benefit from the Recovery Act's increased investment in school improvement, data systems and other key programs.

State and local budgets, however, remain deeply troubled and CCSSO urges Congress to provide additional funding for the coming school year to help maintain teaching and other key positions in the nation's public schools. Fewer teachers in the classroom during the coming school year, will frustrate needed reforms in the nation's persistently lowest performing schools and the

improvements that all schools must make to ensure that all students leave high school ready for college and career. CCSSO strongly supports the \$23 billion approved by the House last year to help school districts avoid layoffs during the coming year and we hope Congress will act soon to approve this critically needed funding.

Looking beyond the current economic crisis, I want you to know that despite the challenges facing the country, American education is experiencing a significant transformation. States are focused like never before on strengthening standards and assessments, improving systems of educator development, developing comprehensive data systems and developing next generation systems of learning. For example, CCSSO and the National Governor's Center for Best Practices are facilitating an historic state led effort to develop a common core of college and work ready standards. And the Race to the Top competition provided chief state school officers from across the country another lever for convening key education stakeholders from around their states to not only develop groundbreaking reforms for the competition, but also develop a education reform "road maps" for their states.

Through these and other reforms, states are working to develop coherent birth-to-20 statewide education systems with clearly defined school, district and state level roles for promoting continuous improvement at levels of education. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act and federal education investments, however, have not kept pace with this changing landscape and we urge you consider the following issues as you develop the Fiscal Year 2011 budget and work with your colleagues to reauthorize ESEA.

As the bold reforms I just described demonstrate, the role of states in promoting and supporting education reform has increased dramatically over the last decade. State Education Agencies now play a central role in supporting school and district improvement; developing and managing longitudinal data systems; improving teacher and leader effectiveness; and promoting higher standards and the use of high quality assessments, among other core areas. In this new framework, States are responsible for not only developing and over seeing sophisticated statewide education systems. They also routinely provide critically needed guidance and other supports including:(1) targeted technical assistance to build sustainable district capacity for promoting continuous school improvement; (2) high quality professional development tied to statewide professional standards and evaluation systems; (3) longitudinal and instructional data supports, including key research; and (4) direct supports and intervention for school turn-around when districts lack the capacity to improve their schools independently.

These are just a few examples of the important role SEAs are playing across the country, which current federal investments do not always sufficiently support. Recent increases in the School Improvement Grants program, and longitudinal data systems grant program were a major step forward toward helping states develop the robust capacity needed to ensure that all states are able to effectively support federal initiatives designed to improve under performing schools and ensure that all students have access to a high quality education that prepares them for college and career. Greater state level investment, however, is needed.

One major area of under investment by the federal government at the state level is for student assessment. The federal State Assessments program has provided just over \$400 million a year

to help states implement the annual testing required by No Child Left Behind. Although significant, this funding is insufficient to develop the types of high quality summative assessments needed to assess student progress and it falls far short of the investment needed to develop better formative and interim assessments, which are needed to inform classroom practice and better tailor instruction to meet individual student needs. States appreciate the \$350 million set aside by the Department of Education for the Race to the Top assessment competition, which has already promoted the development of six national assessment collaborative that are working jointly to propose exciting new assessment systems. States are ready to lead in the development of the next generation of assessments, but increased, and long term, funding is needed to ensure that states are able to develop, implement and sustain the high quality assessment systems we know are needed to move all students toward college and career readiness.

Another area of federal under investment in states is in school improvement. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act requires all states to develop statewide school improvement plans and as described above states now play a central role in providing technical assistance and other supports to struggling districts and schools and in some cases SEAs are directly intervening in state's persistently lowest achieving schools. These intensive state level supports and interventions are needed if the country is going to reform it's dropout factories, but additional resources must be provided to ensure that all states have a robust capacity to meet their obligations under the ESEA to support school improvement.

In addition to the programs I just mentioned, state education agencies respectively urge Congress to increase funding for ESEA Title I, IDEA, the State Longitudinal Data Systems program, the Enhancing Education Through Technology program, teacher and leader effectiveness programs, as well as Head Start and Early Head Start. These investments are needed to ensure that all students, regardless of income, race, special needs, or other characteristics, are receiving a high quality education that prepares them for later success.

Lastly, I would like to comment on the Department of Education's proposal to consolidate programs into a eleven more coherent funding streams and provide states with greater flexibility to target resources toward their greatest areas of need. CCSSO strongly supports the flexibility and greater coherence proposed by the Department. This change will enable states to better allocate federal resources, help eliminate redundant reporting, and focus funding where it is needed. However, any consolidation approved as part of ESEA reauthorization must include several key safe guards. First, while a strong mix of competitive programs are vitally important, the equitable and reliable funding offered by formula programs is also needed to ensure that reforms can be successfully implemented nationally at the state, district and local levels and to ensure that small and rural states are not under-funded. Second, any consolidation should ensure that new funding streams specify clear objectives. The Secretary has said "tight on ends, loose on means" and we believe this approach should be embedded in any consolidation considered by Congress through ESEA reauthorization. Lastly, consolidation must, as I mentioned before, ensure that sufficient resources are allocated to build state capacity for promoting and sustaining reform.

Thank you again for inviting me to testify before the subcommittee today. I look forward to answering your questions.