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Congress should invest in success

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With last year's campaign season behind us, it is time for Democrats and Republicans to join forces and govern. Just last week, the outgoing Congress passed, and the president signed, a bipartisan agreement to temporarily avert the worst effects of the fiscal cliff. This was the first of many issues in a queue of challenges that loom on the horizon for the new Congress, including controlling our national debt, job creation, immigration and education reform and putting in place a comprehensive strategy to help prevent tragedies like the one in Newtown, Conn.

The American people are losing hope that Washington can resolve national problems but have made it clear they want elected officials to get our fiscal house in order while investing wisely to strengthen our country. Because tough choices must be made, this is a moment to invest in programs that work, reform those that can work better, cut others and draw from smart compromises being negotiated by policymakers and leaders outside Washington. It can be done, and there are examples around the country that prove it.

As Congress works to solve our country's fiscal issues, it also must make smart investments in programs that are generating real results. We must call for the use of measurable outcomes to evaluate the effectiveness of federal programs. As policymakers chart the course forward, they should replicate efforts around the country that are working across sectors and ideological lines to support innovative programs that generate positive outcomes and maximize impact.

While education bills languish in Congress, determined school districts from New York City to Richmond, Ind., are taking significant steps to boost high school graduation rates through strong school leadership, rigorous curricula, more personalized learning environments and supports for students whose attendance, behavior and course performance signal early trouble. In areas with high dropout rates, such as Cleveland, Republican Gov. John Kasich joined Democratic Mayor Frank Jackson to work with the teachers union on a plan that includes evaluating teachers on student performance, as well as seniority and tenure, and expanding school choice for families while giving the city and district a voice in which charter sponsors can open new schools.

In states across the country, employers are partnering with community colleges and high schools to develop enterprising pathways for students that give them the credentials and skills businesses need for today's 29 million middle-skill jobs.

As Congress sets the course for federal education policy through the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, they should look to Ohio, and other places, where stakeholders have joined to develop effective measures to get results.