

MEMORANDUM

March 26, 2010



TO: Chairman Miller, House Education and Labor committee

FR: Campaign for High School Equity (CHSE)

RE: Comments on the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)

The Campaign for High School Equity (CHSE), a diverse coalition of national civil rights and education advocacy organizations representing communities of color¹, is pleased to submit the following comments on the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

The current crisis in our public high schools affects us all. As over one million high school students drop out every year, it is our moral responsibility to strengthen and improve our schools.² In fact, America's high school students of color, including African-American, Hispanic, American Indian, and Alaska Native, have at best a six in ten chance of graduating from high school on time with a regular diploma.³ These students are disproportionately represented in the nearly 2,000 high schools (14 percent of America's high schools) that produce more than half of all high school dropouts.⁴ Unless trends in minority student achievement and high school graduation are reversed, our high schools will be complicit in creating a permanent underclass of individuals who cannot provide for themselves and their families and are prevented from actively participating in our democracy. Ensuring that all students graduate from high school fully prepared for the future is the American civil rights challenge of the 21st century.

At CHSE, our goal is to advance solutions designed to close the achievement gap for students of color and Native students and to build public will and support among policymakers, advocates and community leaders for policies that will strengthen high school quality and graduation rates for minority and low-income students. In order to best meet these goals CHSE believes that our system of education must challenge all students to meet the same high academic expectations.

Policy Recommendations

CHSE believes that American education policy can prepare all students for college, work and life by creating an environment in which all children can achieve that goal regardless of race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. To do this, ESEA should aim high and address the critical needs of all high school students through the following policies:

¹ CHSE partners include National Urban League, National Council of La Raza, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Education Fund, Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, League of United Latin American Citizens, National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials Educational Fund, Alliance for Excellent Education, National Indian Education Association, and Southeast Asia Resource Action Center.

² Editorial Projects in Education (2008). Diplomas Count 2008: School to College, *Education Week*, Vol. 27, Issue 40.

³ Alliance for Excellent Education (2008). United States' High Schools. www.all4ed.org/files/UnitedStates.pdf.

⁴ Balfanz, R. "Locating and Transforming the Low Performing High Schools Which Produce the Nation's Dropouts," presentation at the Alliance for Excellent Education's forum "Turning Around Low-Performing High Schools: Lessons for Federal Policy from Research and Practice," August 16, 2007, Washington, DC.

1. Make All Students Proficient and Prepared for College and Work

Our minimum threshold should be guaranteeing that all students have access to rigorous and engaging coursework in core subjects. Coursework should impart the knowledge and skills needed to excel in postsecondary education and career, and assessments should measure student learning against these criteria. To promote proficiency and preparedness, policies that support the following should be implemented:

- Align high school standards, assessments, curriculum, and instruction with college and work-readiness standards;
- Require states to publicly report on access to college preparatory classes and course-taking patterns by income, race, and ethnicity, both among and within schools;
- Provide meaningful information and other support for parents seeking a rigorous curriculum for their child;
- Promote culturally relevant content knowledge and teaching that prepares students to be effective in a global economy; and
- Ensure that all students, especially those in high-need schools, receive rigorous and engaging classes in core subjects.

2. Hold High Schools Accountable for Student Success

It is imperative that we hold high schools accountable for getting students successfully to graduation by including meaningful graduation rates in federal school accountability standards. A strong system of accountability would include:

- State longitudinal data systems with unique student identifiers to align student data with teacher and school performance data and to track the path to graduation;
- Graduation rates defined by a common standard;
- Requirement that schools increase disaggregated graduation rates over time;
- Consideration of graduation rates on an equal footing with high-quality assessments aligned to college and work readiness;
- Publicly reported disaggregated racial and ethnic data to highlight subgroups of students;
- Investment in technical assistance and evidence-based school improvement tools;
- Use of high-quality, valid, and accurate assessments for all students; and
- Dissemination of high school data and other information through media and other information channels that reach communities of color.

3. Redesign the American High School

In order to address students' diverse needs, states and districts must provide their schools with the means to explore and implement new educational models, as well as other effective interventions such as literacy programs, personal graduation plans, and expanded learning programs. To meet the needs of America's diverse learners, high schools must be redesigned in the following ways:

- Implementing a variety of quality high school models shown to support different learning styles and student situations;
- Providing integrated student supports that utilize both in-school and community-based services (for example, high-quality high school counselors, graduation coaches, social workers, and health care and mental health services);

- Promoting strategies (such as literacy coaches or native language instruction) and targeted interventions (such as afterschool programs or block scheduling) that improve student numeracy and literacy skills without sacrificing access to high-level academic subjects;
- Promoting instructional practices designed to meet the needs of diverse learners such as reflexive learning and culturally competent learning techniques; and
- Ensuring that legally and educationally valid criteria are used to appropriately inform decisions regarding student eligibility for services in special education, services for ELLs, college preparatory curricula, and gifted and talented programs.

4. *Provide Students with Excellent Leaders and Teachers*

The federal government can support programs that establish incentives to recruit, train, support and retain effective leaders and teachers in high-poverty high schools. Federal education policy that promotes culturally based teaching, a practice wherein teachers align instruction to the cultural practices and experiences of their students, is also critical to helping all students succeed. To ensure all students have great leaders in their schools and effective teachers in the classroom, CHSE recommends:

- Provide higher pay and other incentives, such as home-buying or tax credits, to attract highly effective school leaders and teachers to serve in high-need middle and high schools;
- Establish incentives for leaders and teachers whose students and schools exhibit marked improvement in academic achievement and other outcomes;
- Equip and train school leaders and teachers working in high-need schools by supporting in-school clinical training, effective induction and mentoring programs, and other professional development opportunities designed to better enable school leaders and teachers to teach students effectively, as well as to understand the students' school, family, and community environments;
- Support principal and teacher diversity recruitment and preparation programs in schools of education that diversify the gender, socioeconomic, racial, ethnic, and linguistic composition of the nation's principal and teacher pool, integrate culturally competent school and classroom instructional leadership methods with effective management techniques, and provide additional financial assistance to teacher candidates;
- Develop and support education centers of excellence at minority-serving institutions to strengthen their capacity to recruit and train a diverse pool of teachers;
- Promote the development of principals and teachers from the community by creating a pipeline that draws from sources such as teacher aides and existing high school students, and by recruiting highly qualified traditional and nontraditional professionals; and
- Develop standards for managing diversity in the school context and require quality diversity management training and certification as a standard part of principal and teacher training.

Our vision also contemplates teacher effectiveness policies that:

- Are based significantly on growth in academic achievement for all students;
- Improve classroom instruction and leadership decision-making;
- Include and support high school specific solutions;

- Ensure teachers (and school leaders) are culturally competent; and
- Ensure Teachers of Diverse Learners are prepared and well-resourced.

For more information on these policy recommendations please read CHSE’s policy brief entitled, “Effective Teaching: A Key to Ensuring Success for High School Students of Color” at (http://www.highschoolequity.org/images/stories/pdf/effectiveteachingbrief_03171.pdf).

5. *Invest Communities in Student Success*

The school environment is critical to student success, but we also know it is not the only factor that impacts secondary school students’ academic and social outcomes. Families and communities also play key roles. Students in low-performing schools often do not receive the same exposure to outside learning opportunities as their more affluent counterparts. Our policy must harmonize the incentive and disincentive structures of the external and internal environments to support all students’ ability to stay in school, excel academically, and develop into a productive individual by doing the following:

- Create and support multilingual parent centers to train parents and other caregivers in interpreting school and student performance data, advocating on behalf of their children, working with their children and school personnel to develop personal graduation plans, and selecting courses their children need in order to graduate from high school prepared for college and overall success in life;
- Provide more support for community-based organizations running afterschool and out-of-school programs, and coordinate these programs to ensure alignment with students’ academic goals and needs;
- Improve access to community-based resources that support students’ ability to learn by locating services, such as health clinics and child-care centers, within or near schools; and
- Create business and community partnerships that support student enrichment opportunities (such as internships) and facilitate community and college linkages.

6. *Provide Equitable Learning Conditions for All Students*

Persistent disparities in the allocation of key education resources often bar low-income and minority students from receiving the high-quality education they deserve. Research demonstrates that, across states, school districts that enroll the highest percentage of students of color and low-income students receive fewer resources than school districts serving white and affluent students.⁵ Resources must be distributed equitably, used effectively, and directed to where they are needed the most by:

- Create a new federal secondary school improvement fund that would be used to turn around low-performing middle and high schools;
- Provide sufficient additional resources to appropriately serve English language learners (ELLs);
- Offer federal incentives to encourage states to develop alternative school-finance formulas that minimize heavy reliance on local property taxes and increase resources for the students and schools that need it most; and
- Require states to compare and publicly report resources available to achieve a sound and basic education at every school; for states where inequities appear, develop five-

⁵ Carey, K. (2004). *The funding gap 2004: Many states still shortchange low-income and minority students*. Washington, DC: Education Trust.

year plans for equalizing resources and require a publicly reported biannual report that evaluates progress toward the five-year goal.

For more information on the above six policy priorities, please see CHSE's *Plan for Success* that can be found at <http://www.highschoolequity.org/images/stories/pdf/PlanforSuccess.pdf>. In addition to the *Plan for Success*, below are some of the emerging issues that CHSE has addressed by developing policy briefs on and responding to federal regulations.

➤ *State-led Common Core Standards*

The state-led effort on common standards can be a critical first step in reforming the American educational system. If developed and implemented effectively, high common standards can help to improve our education system with significant benefits for students of color. The federal government should support states when necessary, as these standards have the prospect to challenge all students to reach the same high expectations. States can support the movement by:

- Encouraging community-based organizations and tribes representing communities of color to be partners at every stage of developing and implementing common standards to ensure that the standards lead to increased opportunities and better outcomes for all students;
- Providing resources to ensure parents and communities receive accurate and timely information in a language and manner that they can understand about the common standards, the processes for their development and implementation, and how it will affect their children's educational opportunities; and
- Ensuring that the cultural relevance of common standards is addressed. Standards must reflect the general American culture, with room for states to make standards more relevant to the needs of their communities.

To read the entire brief please visit CHSE's website at:

http://www.highschoolequity.org/images/stories/pdf/communities_of_color_issue_brief.pdf

➤ *Expand Learning Opportunities*

Creating high-performing high schools that give all students the support they need to succeed is no small task, and it requires changing the school in addition to a community investment. To truly serve the needs of America's diverse learners, expanded learning programs must be made available to more high school students and students of color than are currently being served by such programs. As such we believe expanded learning opportunities should:

- Be equitably distributed among elementary, middle, and high schools. Increased funding to middle and high schools will provide older youth with increased expanded learning opportunities;
- Use innovative practices and partners, not the same models as elementary-level programs, to better develop the assets and interests of high school students;
- Include academic rigor and be aligned with core school curricula and designed to prepare students for college, career, and life;
- Complement and enhance what students are already learning in school while also allowing youth to explore beyond the school-day curriculum and pedagogy;

- Address the needs of communities of color when developing, implementing, and evaluating expanded learning opportunity programs;
- Be developed with built-in assessments and evaluations to ensure high-quality services and accountability; and
- Allot additional funding for school districts, public schools, minority-serving CBOs, and Native American tribes so that they can engage in meaningful and innovative practices that can enhance and inform future programs.

For CHSE’s brief on expanded learning opportunities visit:

http://www.highschoolequity.org/images/stories/pdf/chse_expandedlearningfinal.pdf

➤ *High School Graduation Rates*

In January of 2009 to convey our strong support for the final Title I regulations regarding graduation rate accountability we submitted a letter of support to Sec. Duncan. Within the letter, we urged that these regulations remain in force as a step in the right direction because ensuring graduation rate accountability can make a significant difference in holding high schools accountable for the success of all students, particularly students of color and youth from low-income neighborhoods. Specifically, we note that the graduation rate accountability regulations will be an improvement over previous policy and practice because they:

- Require a uniform, four-year, disaggregated graduation rate definition;
- Allow cohort adjustments only in cases of documented transfer, emigration, or death, so that states cannot pre-identify certain groups of students for reassignment to a new cohort;
- Make the use of extended-year adjusted cohort rates optional; and
- Require implementation of a statewide graduation goal and growth targets that represent “continuous and substantial improvement.”

Taken together, these regulations represent a significant improvement over previous law and practice and we would like to see them codified into law. Most importantly, they are a meaningful step toward achieving our goal of ensuring that all students graduate from high school prepared for college and work.

To read the entire comment letter please visit:

<http://www.highschoolequity.org/images/stories/pdf/grad-rate-letter.pdf> .

We look forward to working with you and Congress as a whole to ensure that a reauthorized ESEA is better able to serve all of America’s students. If you have questions regarding these comments, please feel free to contact me at (202) 772-1137, mwotorson@highschoolequity.org.

Sincerely,

Michael Wotorson
Executive Director
Campaign for High School Equity