



HISPANIC EDUCATION COALITION

June 10, 2013

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
428 Senate Dirksen Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

RE: Strengthening America's Schools Act of 2013

Dear Chairman Harkin:

We write on behalf of the Hispanic Education Coalition (HEC), which unites more than 20 organizations dedicated to improving educational opportunities and outcomes for the more than 54 million Latinos living in the United States and Puerto Rico. On behalf of its member groups, HEC writes to express our appreciation for your introduction of the Strengthening America's Schools Act of 2013. This bill is an important step toward the reauthorization and further strengthening of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) so that it becomes an even greater tool to ensure all students are afforded a high-quality K-12 education.

While no bill is perfect, there is much in this bill that HEC welcomes. HEC is pleased that the bill (1) retains a role for the federal government in ensuring educational equity and excellence. The federal government has a long history of safeguarding and promoting the interests students and groups – including Latino and Latina students, migratory students, and English learner (EL) students – facing educational inequality, deprivation, and discrimination. This reauthorization is not time to diminish a robust federal role in K-12 education.

Moreover, HEC commends you for the bill:

- (1) setting ambitious and achievable annual performance targets at the state education agency (SEA), local education agency (LEA), and school levels, which avoids student progress to “nowhere;”
- (2) creating a nationwide N-size of 15 for disaggregated subgroup data, which will foster greater transparency in student data reporting;
- (3) requiring states to set college-and career-ready (CCR) academic and achievement standards by 2014 in reading, math, and science and to develop aligned statewide assessments and curriculums;

- (4) setting ambitious and achievable goals for EL students to become proficient in English within five years, which are aligned to CCR standards and identify four levels of English language proficiency;
- (5) improving SEA, LEA, and school report cards by adding release of information on:
 - (a) performance data that is aggregated, disaggregated, and cross-tabulated by traditional student subgroups plus gender;
 - (b) graduation rates, college enrollment data, and college remediation data;
 - (c) teacher and principal evaluation results;
 - (d) student discipline data;
 - (e) school climate and safety data, including suspensions, expulsions, referrals to law enforcement, and detention;
 - (f) international baccalaureate/advance placement credits data;
 - (g) pregnant and parenting teen data and plans to support pregnant and parenting teens enrolling in, attending, and succeeding in school, which like other school report card data, is not personally identifiable;
 - (h) average class size information;
 - (i) National Assessment of Educational Progress scores;
 - (j) positive behavioral interventions and supports offered, and
 - (k) mental health programs offered.
- (6) establishing a new equity report card, which would, in part, include student achievement by traditional student subgroups plus gender; federal, state, and local funding per school; and full-day Kindergarten participation data;
- (7) establishing a notice from the LEA to parents every year of the qualifications of the teacher of their child, including licensure, emergency or provisional status, degree major, and use of paraprofessionals in class data;
- (8) establishing an interventions process that is tailored to address differential student subgroup performance

HEC believes the above features of this bill are promising advancements in our national educational reform debate. These features are worth guarding against weakening amendments and we ask that you ensure these aspects remain in the bill as it moves to the Senate floor.

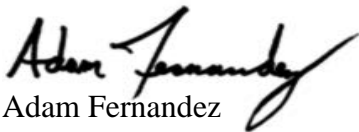
Our coalition, however, looks forward to your leadership to remedy the following flaws in the bill. Without significant progress on the items below, the member organizations within the HEC may not support the bill when up for final passage on the Senate floor. HEC urges you and other members of Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee to affirmatively:

- (1) strengthen the interventions for persistent achievement gaps in the 85 percent of schools which are neither “priority” or “focus” schools;
- (2) close the biennium loophole within maintenance of effort protections given some states use a multiple year funding structure;
- (3) factor in the use of valid and reliable home language surveys, diagnostic assessments, and summative assessments in measures of EL students;

- (4) create a pilot program to incentivize and study SEA use of further disaggregated EL student data that covers the following five sub-subgroups:
 - (a) recent-arrival ELs;
 - (b) ELs with significant interrupted formal education;
 - (c) late-arrival ELs;
 - (d) long-term ELs; and
 - (e) former ELs;
- (5) ensure all non-citizens authorized to work within the United States have a fair shot to sit for teacher and/or principal licensure or certification exams;
- (6) expand the definition of “harassment” under Section 4105 of the bill to cover harassment faced by EL students, migratory students, and homeless students;
- (7) expand the data requirements under Section 4105 of the bill to cover harassment faced by homeless students;
- (8) ensure migratory students are in reporting systems, but not in accountability systems as “migratory students”;
- (9) mandate, at the federal level, proven interventions for LEAs with significant differences in student subgroup performance (*i.e.*, “achievement gaps schools”).

Thank you refocusing the Senate on reauthorizing ESEA in a way that expands the civil right to a quality K-12 education. We look forward to working with you and your staff on the Strengthening America’s Schools Act of 2013 in the weeks ahead. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the HEC co-chairs: Adam Fernandez of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, at afernandez@maldef.org, or Luis Torres of the League of United Latin American Citizens, at latorres@lulac.org.

Sincerely,



Adam Fernandez
HEC Co-Chair
Mexican American Legal
Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF)



Luis Torres
HEC Co-Chair
League of United Latin
American Citizens (LULAC)

Cc: Co-sponsors of the Strengthening America’s Schools Act of 2013