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National Latino
Children's Institute

National Migrant
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International
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January 12, 2015

Senator Lamar Alexander
Chairman
Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee
Dirksen Senate Office Building, SD-455
Washington, DC 20510-4206

Senator Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee
Russell Senate Office Building, SR-154
Washington, DC 20510-4704

Re: Latino Priorities for Elementary and Secondary Education Act Reauthorization

Dear Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray:

On behalf of the Hispanic Education Coalition (HEC), which unites 14 organizations dedicated to improving educational opportunities and outcomes for the more than 54 million Latinos living in the United States and Puerto Rico, we write to encourage you to adopt the following core principles of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in your consideration of any legislation to reauthorize ESEA.

I. Further the Civil Rights Mission of ESEA.

Passed during the civil rights era, ESEA has always been a tool to combat poverty and provide economic and social mobility for underrepresented communities. Any ESEA reauthorization should adhere closely to this mission, and expand to meet the needs of a twenty-first century America. At minimum, this means that the core provisions of the ESEA should aim toward effectively ameliorating and ultimately eliminating the educational attainment gaps faced by African Americans and Latinos.

II. Expand Latino-Serving Programs.

Latinos are the America's largest and youngest minority group. Nationwide, one in six Americans is Latino, one in five public school students from kindergarten through twelfth grade is Latino. Programs that disproportionately serve Latino students should be expanded to meet the needs of these changing demographics. These programs include: the migrant education program, language instruction for limited English proficient students, TRIO, High School Equivalency Program (HEP) and the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP), and Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP). Our investment decisions as a nation must reflect the new demographic reality, or our efforts will fail, to the lasting detriment of our future workforce and economy.

III. Increase Parental Involvement.

Because school boards often do not reflect the communities they serve, any ESEA reauthorization must include robust involvement and input of parents, including those unable to vote, in school-based decision-making and community-driven accountability. History has proven that too many locally elected school boards do not perform a sufficient role in ensuring system accountability for closing equity gaps in both educational inputs and, most critically, education outcomes. ESEA must recognize this historical inadequacy and take strong steps to ensure that all communities can engage with vigor in moving public schools toward greater equity and excellence. Without such steps, reliance on community awareness and intervention to achieve equity objectives will prove illusory.

IV. Ensure Every Child Has the Resources Needed to Succeed.

ESEA must recognize that every child must have the same opportunity to succeed, not simply to some "floor" but to the highest level of attainment, and must implement a system that seeks to guarantee every child is given the supports he or she needs. This must include strong federal oversight, and the four principles discussed below.

a. Annually Assess all Students.

Annual objective measurement of the educational attainment of all students is critical to ensure that schools, districts, and states provide every child the tools needed to succeed. Test-based assessments must be aligned with each state's college and career ready standards, and appropriate supports should be provided to English learners and students with disabilities. As under current law, test scores must only be discounted for first year English learners, and alternate assessments should be limited to students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, up to one percent of all students. Proven, objective measures of progress in addition to test scores must be included in any monitoring and assessment system.

b. Include Performance Targets to Reduce Student Achievement Gaps.

To ensure every child has a chance to succeed, schools, districts, and states must set performance targets, calibrated to reduce student educational achievement gaps and high school graduation gaps. These targets must be set for each subject and grade, and for high school graduation, for all students and for each subgroup, including: racial and ethnic groups, English learners, students with disabilities, and economically disadvantaged students. These targets must aim toward equity of outcomes at all levels of achievement, not simply to an established competency "floor."

c. Require Remedies Focused on Reducing Student Achievement Gaps.

Effective remedies to improve teaching and learning must be employed in any school or district where any subgroup of students, has consistently failed to meet the annual achievement or graduation targets. The goal of these remedies should be to reduce subgroup achievement gaps at all levels of educational achievement. These remedies must be specifically targeted at meeting the needs of those subgroups that do not meet their targets. For example, should a school or district fail to meet its target for English learners, the school or district should be required to ensure that tailored and proven steps are taken to ensure that its curriculum and teaching are addressing the needs of English learners.

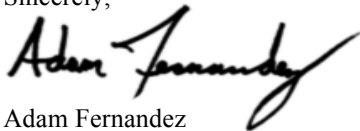
d. Require Greater Equity in Access to Resources for Educational Progress.

Except in education systems that can show that outcome gaps for subgroups have been eliminated, and that adequate steps have been taken to ensure that they do not recur, states and the federal government must use all available tools to ensure that the most critical educational inputs are distributed in an equitable manner, including recognition of the greater needs of certain students, such as English learners.

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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:

Members of the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee