



January 26, 2015

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray:

The Coalition for Community Schools is an alliance of over 200 national, state and local partners all committed to uniting schools, families and communities for young people's success. The reach of community schools is significant: they can be found in nearly 100 places across 34 states, and count among their champions state legislators, superintendents, school board members, business and faith-based leaders, and others who are promoting community schools legislation and expansion.

We are pleased to see the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) moving forward, and this letter lays out our priorities for ESEA reauthorization. Our views are supported by a wide range of stakeholders, including educators, civil rights advocates, community-based organizations, and the health community. It is with this reach and momentum from the field that we offer these recommendations.

We believe that every young person should have an equal opportunity to reach his or her fullest potential, and we know a world-class education is essential to achieving this goal. This begins with quality early childhood education and concludes with graduating from high school prepared for college, career, and citizenship. Built into this education should be a full range of opportunities and supports that young people, from rural to urban communities, can leverage regardless of their zip code. We also know that schools can't do this alone. School-community partnerships are essential to providing students the opportunities to be successful.

Today's young people need enriching learning opportunities during and outside the school day that challenge and motivate them. They also need a range of supports to address and overcome the many barriers to academic achievement, whether it is a toothache, chronic asthma, trauma from experiences at home and in their communities, or mental health needs. Today, for the first time in fifty years, the majority of our nation's students are low-income¹- and they are far more likely to face these barriers.

The research is clear that many factors impact academic achievement, including the effects of poverty; school climate; school discipline; and chronic absence. Under The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), the development of the whole child (including cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and civic capacities) has suffered. The narrowed curriculum under NCLB caused budget tradeoffs that often eliminated non-tested subjects and funding for specialized instructional support personnel. Teachers and principals have taken on more responsibility and accountability with fewer supports at a time when student needs are increasing. Standards

¹ Southern Education Foundation, *A New Majority: Low-Income Students Now a Majority in the Nation's Public Schools*, <http://www.southerneducation.org/getattachment/5c53bd26-88c8-4ae2-b9ed-37a699956b1a/A-New-Majority-2015-Update-Low-Income-Students-Now.aspx> (January 2015)

were lowered, achievement gaps have stayed stagnant, and the U.S. remains mediocre in math and reading compared to other developed countries.

School climate and matters of civil rights have also suffered. The most recent data from the Office of Civil Rights² reveal that students of color and students with disabilities are being suspended and expelled at disproportionate rates from their peers, leading to a school-to-prison pipeline crisis and a shameful portrait of our state of inequity. Enriching learning opportunities through after-school and summer programs have been viewed as optional rather than essential to offer all young people. Students' health, wellness and social-emotional development are not prioritized at school even though they have such a significant impact on academic achievement. Reauthorization of ESEA gives us the chance to correct these issues and replace No Child Left Behind with legislation that equips all young people with the right conditions, supports and opportunities to succeed in school and beyond.

Coalition for Community Schools ESEA Recommendations

Based on our work with school and community leaders around the country and our national partners, we are pleased to make the following ESEA recommendations.

- 1) *Incentivize school-community partnerships at the school, district and state levels that coordinate resources between schools and community partners (public and private) to address the comprehensive needs of students and provide enriching learning and development opportunities during and outside of school hours.*

Community partners play a crucial role in providing supports and learning opportunities, while relieving the burden traditionally placed on teachers and principals to do so. Whether it is a local community-based organization, faith-based institution, public agency, business, health provider, or institution of higher education, community partners offer rich resources that schools can leverage for young people's academic, social, emotional, physical, and civic development.

Partnerships are integral to several components of young people's education such as after-school and summer learning. ESEA references to these partnerships must stress the shared responsibility necessary among stakeholders toward academic and non-academic outcomes. They must ensure that they complement and enhance the services already present in the school building in order to maximize effectiveness and coordination among school staff and community partners. They are most effective when supported by robust data-sharing agreements developed at the state, district and school levels that enable better coordination between schools and community partners. Emerging evidence shows that integrated student services, a core feature of community schools, lead to decreases in grade retention and dropout and increases in attendance and math and reading achievement.³ These strong school-community partnerships also yield a return on investment, with one study finding that district dollars leverage community resources at a minimum rate of

² U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, *Civil Rights Data Collection Data Snapshot: School Discipline*, <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/crdc-discipline-snapshot.pdf>, Issue Brief #1 (March 2014)

³ Kristin Anderson Moore and Carol Emig, *Integrated Student Supports: A Summary of the Evidence Base for Policymakers*, <http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/2014-05ISSWhitePaper3.pdf>, (February 2014)

1:3 and another finding that every dollar invested in such schools produced at least a \$10.30 return in social investment.⁴

- 2) *Authorize the bipartisan Full-Service Community Schools Act, and reference full-service community schools as an allowable school turnaround model in Title I and an allowable strategy for Safe and Healthy students in Title IV.*

Full-service community schools embody the most effective attributes of these public and private school-community partnerships. We recommend that the bipartisan Full Service Community Schools Act (HR 5168) from the 113th Congress be authorized in ESEA based on the promising results of community schools and their rapid growth across the country. At the national level it is essential that there be a focus on strategies like full service community schools that can leverage public and private resources for student success. A modest investment nationally helps to focus attention on this strategy at the state and local levels.

Funding for a community school coordinator, another essential component of a community school, should also be an allowable use of funds in Title I as was clarified in ARRA 2009 guidance. Full-service community schools should be referenced as an allowable school turnaround strategy in Title I that takes a comprehensive and inclusive approach to school improvement and that has led to promising improvements in many struggling schools across the country. Similarly, they should be referenced as an allowable strategy for Safe and Healthy Students in Title IV as they help to effectively coordinate many of the supports and opportunities noted in this section.

- 3) *Require SEAs and LEAs in Title I to identify and report results beyond academic achievement to include indicators for health and wellness, discipline, attendance, and family engagement.*

These factors all significantly influence academic achievement. Tracking these indicators will help SEAs, LEAs and the public understand the context of academic data and will be useful for effective planning and allocating of funds. They will also shed light on schools' progress toward educational equity. States and districts will be more effective in supporting schools when they prioritize and track these indicators alongside academic achievement. The DIPLOMA Act (S. 2849) from the 113th Congress provides important language to leverage for this recommendation.

- 4) *Maintain a separate funding stream specifically targeted to before school, afterschool and summer learning in ESEA so that students and families will have access to high-quality programs and opportunities within their communities. Ensure that nonprofit and community-based organizations, in partnership with one or more school districts or a consortium of schools, are eligible applicants in state sub-grant competitions.*

⁴ Blank, M, Jacobson, R, Melaville, A, and Pearson, S., Coalition for Community Schools, Institute for Educational Leadership, *Financing Community Schools: Leveraging Resources To Support Student Success*, <http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/finance-paper.pdf> (2010); Laura Martinez and Cheryl D. Hayes, The Finance Project, *Measuring Social Return on Investment for Community Schools: A Case Study*, <http://www.childrensaidociety.org/files/CASE%20STUDY%20final.pdf>, (June 2013)

Dedicated funding for before, afterschool and summer learning is critical to ensuring that all students and particularly at-risk youth have enriching learning opportunities outside of the school day. The vast majority of community schools across the country leverage 21st Century Community Learning Center funds to support high-quality learning opportunities. The unmet demand for afterschool programs has steadily risen over the last 10 years. In 2014, approximately 19.4 million children (41%) not currently in an afterschool program would be enrolled in a program if one were available to them, according to their parents.⁵ We urge Congress to ensure that nonprofit and community-based organizations continue to be eligible applicants in state sub-grant competitions in partnership with one or more school districts or a consortium given the wide range of high-quality programs and opportunities they have proven to offer.

- 5) *Include training and professional development in Title II for teachers, principals, specialized instructional support personnel and other school-employed staff to work more effectively with families and community partners during and outside the school day.*

Family and community engagement are important skills that contribute to academic achievement. Teachers, principals and other school staff should have the opportunity to continuously develop these skills. To maximize school and community partnerships, teachers, principals, school staff, families and community partners should have regular opportunities to learn and share with one another effective practices that contribute to student learning and development.

- 6) *Do not make 100% transferable funding between Title II (High-Quality Teachers, Principals and Other School Leaders) and Title IV (Safe and Healthy Students), and increase combined authorization levels to pre-sequester levels.*

We are deeply concerned about the provision to allow 100% transferability between Titles II and IV as they serve two very distinct but necessary purposes for improving student achievement. Some level of transferability could be negotiated to allow for local flexibility, but we urge Congress to consider the need to adequately fund the activities of both of these titles, and the vulnerability they face in the appropriations process when they are perceived as essentially one pot of transferable funds. We are also concerned that combined authorization levels in the bill are below pre-sequester levels and would freeze ESEA funding for the next six years. Given the stark reality that over half of our nation's students are now low-income, we urge Congress to adequately fund ESEA to pre-sequester levels to provide SEAs and LEAs the critical federal support they need for young people's success.

- 7) *Throughout ESEA, we urge inclusion of a few key elements that emphasize the importance of partnerships and that complement our other recommendations: a) consultation by state and local education agencies with a broader array of stakeholders to reflect the greater involvement of community partners in education; b) increased alignment of programs and funding streams toward results important to student success across federal and state agencies; and c) stronger definitions of family and community engagement and clarity about how they can contribute to student achievement and well-being.*

⁵ Afterschool Alliance, *America After 3PM*, <http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/AA3PM/>, 2014



These elements should be embedded throughout ESEA to support the complete set of recommendations we put forth. In particular, we offer the definitions below for family engagement and community engagement for inclusion throughout ESEA. Research continues to demonstrate that family and community engagement are essential to school improvement, and must factor more strongly in a reauthorized ESEA.⁶ We recommend the following definitions:

Family engagement means the process of engaging families in meaningful ways and assisting them to actively support their children’s learning and development. Family engagement is a shared responsibility of families, schools and community-based organizations. This shared responsibility is continuous from birth through young adulthood and reinforces learning that takes place in the home, school, and community.

Community engagement means systematic efforts to involve, engage and collaborate with parents, community residents, members of school communities, community partners and other stakeholders in exploring the needs of their students and schools, developing a plan, and working together to address the needs. Effective community engagement is an ongoing process to develop a welcoming school and school system and mobilize the community’s assets to support student achievement and growth.

Thank you for considering our recommendations, and we look forward to working with you to pass a strong ESEA reauthorization worthy of the talent, skills and dreams of our nation’s youth.

Sincerely,

Coalition for Community Schools and our partners:

AASA, the School Superintendents Association

AFT

Afterschool Alliance

After-School All-Stars

American Public Health Association

American School Counselor Association

Annenberg Institute for School Reform Brown University

Boys and Girls Clubs of America

Center for Health and Health Care in Schools

Center for Popular Democracy

Child and Family Policy Center

Children’s Aid Society

⁶ Bryk, Anthony S. et al, *Organizing Schools for Improvement: Lessons from Chicago*. The University of Chicago Press, 2010.



Citizen Schools

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)

Council of Educational Facility Planners International (CEFPI)

Elev8

First Focus Campaign for Children

Forum for Youth Investment

Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN)

Harlem Children's Zone

Healthy Schools Campaign

National Association of Elementary School Principals

National Association of School Psychologists

National Collaboration for Youth

National Education Association

National Institute on Out-of-School Time

National League of Cities

National PTA

National Summer Learning Association

Netter Center for Community Partnerships

Opportunity Action

Organizations Concerned About Rural Education

PolicyLink

Poverty & Race Research Action Council

Promise Neighborhoods Institute at PolicyLink

Public Advocacy for Kids

Rural School and Community Trust

School-Based Health Alliance

School Social Work Association of America



The After-School Corporation (TASC)

United Way Worldwide

Yale School of the 21st Century

YMCA of the USA

21st Century School Fund