

August 28, 2008

Secretary Margaret Spellings
United States Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202

Re: Opposition to Moving the Title III State Formula Grant Program

Dear Secretary Spellings:

The undersigned organizations working to improve educational opportunities for Hispanics and English language learners (ELLs) write in opposition to the U.S. Department of Education's decision to move the Title III State Formula Grant Program from the Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA) to the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE).

ELL student enrollment in the public education system has increased by more than 56% over the last decade, with the most significant growth in nontraditional Latino and immigrant states, such as South Carolina (714%), Kentucky (417%), and Indiana (408%). Despite federal law requiring states to close the achievement gap for ELLs, many states struggle to effectively serve these students. As such, the education of ELLs has become one of the most pressing education policy issues facing our nation.

Currently, the OELA is the only federal office charged with addressing the educational needs of ELLs. At a time when ELLs are growing in number and prominence in policy discussions, the Department plans to parcel out core functions of the OELA. We are concerned that this sends a message to ELL educators that the education of ELLs can be addressed with a weaker federal office rather than a stronger one.

ELL students are present in almost every classroom, school, and district in the country. Providing educators with the tools to effectively serve ELLs is critical. It is equally important that the U.S. Department of Education ensure compliance with Title III and other parts of the No Child Left Behind Act. We are not convinced that shifting key functions away from the OELA to the OESE will achieve this. As such, we oppose the decision to move the Title III State Formula Grant Program out of the OELA.

On behalf of,

National Organizations:

Asian Pacific American Legal Center of Southern California
ASPIRA Association, Inc.
Cuban American National Council, Inc.
League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)
National Council of La Raza (NCLR)
National Education Association
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)
Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc.

State and Local Organizations:

Association of Mexican American Educators (AMAE), Fresno, California
BUENO Center for Multicultural Education, University of Colorado
California Association for Bilingual Education (CABE)
California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation
Californians Together
Cesar Chavez School Network, Pueblo, Colorado
Coalition for Educational Excellence for English Language Learners, New York, New York
Garcia, Rosa, Member, Maryland State Board of Education
Gutierrez, Ana Sol, Maryland State Legislator
Multicultural Education, Training & Advocacy (META, Inc.), San Francisco, California
New Mexico Association for Bilingual Education (NMABE)
Sweetwater Union High School District, Chula Vista, California
Texas Association for Bilingual Education (TABE)

Cc: Richard Smith, Acting Assistant Deputy Secretary & Chief of Staff, Office of English Language Acquisition
Kerry Briggs, Assistant Secretary, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education