

## Latino Elected and Appointed Officials: National Taskforce on Education

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August 12, 2010

The Honorable Arne Duncan  
U.S. Secretary of Education  
400 Maryland Avenue, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20202

RE: English Language Learners (ELL) and Race to the Top (RTTT) Finalists Selection

Dear Secretary Duncan:

As members of the Latino Elected and Appointed Officials National Taskforce on Education, we would like to formally express our concerns with the Race to the Top (RTTT) Grant application and review scoring scale. In order to ensure that states are fully committed to closing the achievement gap between English Language Learners (ELL) and non-English Language Learners (non-ELL), future competitive selection grants processes should place more weight on the ELL criteria in the scoring and review process. Additionally, as expressed in our previous letter sent in March, we are concerned that state applicants are not required to offer a comprehensive ELL strategy as part of their application for RTTT Funds.

We acknowledge that states and localities must bear primary responsibility for the educational opportunities they offer ELL students. While we accept our responsibility to continue to push reforms in our own communities, we also believe that the federal government has a unique opportunity through RTTT to incentivize and model best practices to close achievement gaps and meet the needs of all students, including ELL students.

The ability of ELL students to master both language and content is intrinsically connected to our nation's future success. Recent estimates suggest that ELL students represent more than one in 10 students in the K-12 system.<sup>1</sup> A thorough review of the RTTT Fund scoring and evaluation process suggests that the proportion of points awarded for improving student outcomes as it pertains to closing achievement gaps stipulated in Section (A)(3)(ii)(b) of the final Selection Criteria does not adequately acknowledge the importance of ELL student success in state reform strategies. Section (A)(3) of the final Selection Criteria, namely the criterion for "demonstrating significant progress in raising achievement and closing gaps," currently accounts for only 6 percent of the total possible points given to state applicants, a proportion that should be reconsidered for future grant scoring.

The urgency of our request is based on the analysis of the RTTT applications submitted by 18 second-round states conducted by Roger L. Rice, Co-Director of Multicultural Education, Training & Advocacy Inc. His findings indicate that too many RTTT finalist states are not making the suggested improvements in closing achievement gaps between ELL and non-ELL students.

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<sup>1</sup> National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2006

Addressing the growing needs of ELL students continues to be of high priority for our coalition, the only bipartisan national taskforce of Latino policymakers in the country. Serving in public office as school board members, higher education system leaders, and state legislators, our taskforce recognizes the urgency to fully address the needs of the nation's Latino students.

We are eager to better understand the selection process for RTTT, and expect the Department of Education to hold all RTTT recipient states accountable for serving the needs of our ELL students.

United for a Stronger America,



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Hon. Joaquin Castro, State Representative, Texas; Vice-Chair, Higher Education Committee



Hon. Pedro Colon, State Representative, Wisconsin; Board Member, NALEO Educational Fund



Hon. Art Jimenez, Board Member, Denver Public Schools



Hon. Carlos Mariani, State Representative, Minnesota; Chair, Education Committee and Oversight



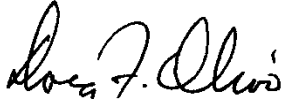
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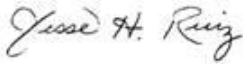
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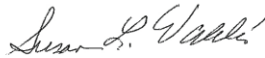
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Hon. Juan Pichardo, State Senator, Rhode Island



Hon. Susan Valdes, Board President, Hillsborough County Schools, Florida

Cc: Hon. Tom Harkin  
Chairman, U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions

Hon. George Miller,  
Chairman, U. S. House Committee on Education and Labor