

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 29, 2011

The Honorable John Kline
Chairman
Committee on Education and the Workforce
2181 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable George Miller
Ranking Member
Committee on Education and the Workforce
2101 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

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

The Honorable Michael B. Enzi
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Health, Education,
Labor & Pensions
428 Senate Dirksen Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Duncan D. Hunter
Chairman
Subcommittee on Early Childhood,
Elementary, and Secondary Education
Committee on Education and the Workforce
223 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Dale E. Kildee
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Early Childhood,
Elementary, and Secondary Education
Committee on Education and the Workforce
2107 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jeff Bingaman
U.S. Senator
304 Senate Dirksen Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
U.S. Senator
455 Senate Dirksen Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Kline, Ranking Member Miller, Chairman Harkin, Ranking Member Enzi, Chairman Hunter, Ranking Member Kildee, Senator Bingaman, and Senator Alexander:

As education policy leaders, you will soon consider the reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA). We applaud your commitment to providing strong educational opportunities for all students. As the Chairs of the Congressional Black Caucus, Congressional Hispanic Caucus, and Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, jointly the "Tri-Caucus," we write to ask for your leadership to ensure that the final bill addresses the central concerns of our three caucuses and the needs of students of color. Further, we respectfully request a meeting with you and the educational leaders within our caucuses to discuss our joint priorities for reauthorization at your earliest convenience.

As the United States prepares our students for today's global economy and the responsibilities of democratic citizenry, education reform is necessary to ensure that all children succeed in school

regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, income, language status or disability. The Tri-Caucus maintains that the following priorities are critical to advancing the academic, economic and social success of our nation's children and communities.

- 1. Require disaggregated student achievement accountability at the federal level for all students in all schools.** The 2002 law required both accountability and clear information related to student performance of *all* groups of students, including low-income students, racial and ethnic minority students, students learning English as a second language, and students with disabilities. The accountability provisions within the 2002 law established the fundamental role of the federal government in setting clear goals for every school to educate all of its students regardless of their demographic characteristics. The law recognized that data collection on lack of student achievement is insufficient; accountability systems serve as a critical tool to encourage states to set high goals and increase achievement for all students. These provisions are of particular importance to our caucuses because of their potential to dramatically improve educational opportunities for students of color. We recognize that changes in the law are necessary to improve implementation of educational reforms; however, we resolutely believe that the federal responsibility to require strong accountability through performance goals for all schools and students remains critical to ensuring equal access to quality education for students of all backgrounds.

In addition, the accountability and transparency provisions should be strengthened to provide more data to help improve students' academic success. To this end, gender should be added to the information collected, data for students learning English as a second language must be strengthened, and data should be collected and disaggregated by smaller ethnic subpopulations where warranted. Specifically, aggregate data on Asian American Pacific Islander, or AAPI students, masks the needs of AAPI subpopulations and often reinforces the "model minority" stereotype. In reality, the AAPI category is comprised of individuals with diverse backgrounds, experiences, educational achievement and needs. Moreover, to ensure that all students are prepared for post-secondary education and that schools are meeting their responsibility to students, education reform must measure and hold schools, districts and states accountable for student success based on the disaggregation of data and the interaction of race, ethnicity, disability status and gender, as measured via cross-tabulation. Moreover, requiring growth models that measure individual student progress over time is a central component of accountability.

- 2. Close achievement gaps and increase achievement for all students.** Significant reform is necessary to increase student achievement and close achievement gaps based on income, race, ethnicity, gender, disability, and English language status both within seemingly high-performing schools and between high- and low-performing schools, preserving the goal that all students will master ambitious academic standards. Comprehensive student supports such as health services, family support services, and extended day are critical to student learning and should be available to students who need them, without allowing socio-economic circumstances to become an excuse for lower expectations. Efforts to close the achievement gap must contain concrete, research-based methods for closing the gap and strategies should be employed and implemented at the school, district and state levels. They must include parental involvement – utilizing tools and supports to cultivate parental engagement such as

mandated interpretation for parents who do not speak English and evening and weekend hours for working parents – as well as utilize community support.

- 3. Ensure that all students have access to effective teachers and other critical educational resources.** Resource disparities must be addressed both between school districts and within school districts, including closing the comparability loophole and ensuring accountability for actual dollars spent at the school level. Teacher quality is the most significant in-school factor driving student achievement. In order to provide low-income students and schools with the most qualified and effective teachers, we must ensure that those classrooms and schools are desirable places to be with particular incentives to attract and retain the best teachers to the lowest performing schools. Significant reform must ensure that critical educational resources, particularly highly qualified and effective teachers, are available to all students on an adequate and equitable basis. This must include consideration for compensation, working conditions, and professional development that enhance a teacher's enthusiasm and ability to do the job well, particularly in low-income and remote areas. This must also include effective leadership and administration, adequate school resources and community support. Furthermore, a highly effective and diverse teaching workforce is important to serving a diverse student body, particularly in areas where there are shortages of minority teachers serving minority students and bilingual teachers serving students learning English as a second language. Unfortunately, people of color are underrepresented in the teaching profession at a time when student diversity is skyrocketing. As a result, reform should provide resources that will help schools recruit and retain a diverse workforce. Student support personnel – including school counselors, nurses, teacher aides, librarians and paraprofessionals and others – are also integral to highly effective schools and student learning.
- 4. Provide educational services and assessments for all English Language Learners.** Approximately 10 percent of students in the United States, including almost 40 percent of Latino students, 25 percent of AAPI students and almost 1 percent of African American students, are learning English as a second language. Unfortunately, most school districts are not required to provide, and therefore do not provide, sufficient services for students learning English as a second language. To help address the needs of these students, a reauthorized ESEA must provide services and programs that: (1) create and fund policies for states and school districts to develop, implement, and maintain funding for robust bilingual programs; (2) encourage school districts to improve the processes for assessing newly enrolled students for English language services and for identifying when students learning English as a second language become proficient in English; (3) increase the resources for the preparation and training of all teachers with students learning English as a second language, as well as increasing the number of English language acquisition specialists; and (4) increase the resources available to ensure cultural competence of teachers working with diverse groups of students. In order to be effective, reform must also include measures of progress and proficiency in English Language acquisition in the accountability provisions of Title I and include assessments that: (1) provide incentives for states to develop and utilize native language assessments for students learning English as a second language that utilize population triggers at the district or county level to determine mandated use; (2) mandate and provide funds for states to develop accountability systems that are based on multiple

measures in addition to testing; and (3) ensure that school accountability systems are designed to bring additional resources to diverse school populations, instead of diverting resources.

- 5. Increase high school graduation rates and ensure that students graduate college and career ready.** One third of all high school students fail to graduate with their peers, and the rate is even worse for students of color. Under the current system, struggling students of color, including students learning English as a second language, do not receive the interventions necessary to keep them in school and they too frequently drop out, often sensing encouragement from the school to do so. Schools must be held accountable if they do not retain students through graduation, and policies should incentivize schools to implement strong dropout prevention programs and reengage students who have already dropped out. Improvements to the law should make certain that more Title I funds reach middle school and high school grades. Reform must also ensure that the skills associated with college and career readiness are similar across state lines and must address the unique needs of migrant students, including aligning rigorous and holistic curricula from early childhood education through high school graduation to ensure that all students are prepared for the rigors of credit-bearing college work and have access to financial aid information and guidance counseling.
- 6. Ensure that school intervention strategies use best practices to increase student achievement, involve the community at every step and address the needs of individual schools.** Reform should include a substantial investment to improve severely underperforming schools. Interventions should be research based and designed to address the strengths and weaknesses of the targeted school as identified by an individualized evaluation. Any intervention should involve the community at every step. There is room for different models of public schools; however, all schools must be held to the same high academic standards, serve all students and protect the civil rights of every child. The goal of any school improvement strategy should be to ensure that all schools are high performing, rather than to allow some students to leave ineffective schools while other students continue to languish in them.
- 7. Measure, report and address the disproportionate representation of students of color in discipline referrals and special education.** Research demonstrates that African American boys and other students of color are over-referred to special education and for disciplinary action. It is necessary to require states, districts and schools to monitor and intervene quickly to address disparate discipline treatment and inappropriate special education placement for students of various racial, ethnic, gender and socio-economic groups. Given that the disparities in discipline occur from preschool through high school, states, districts and schools should report various discipline strategies used and disaggregate the data by demographic characteristics across preschool, primary, and secondary grades. Further, given that research demonstrates that boys of color disproportionately receive discipline, any discipline data should allow for consideration of the interaction of race/ethnicity by gender. Strong support should be provided to districts, schools and teachers to ensure that behavioral and academic interventions meet the intended goal of improving outcomes for identified

children and the school community as a whole. This includes both an emphasis on the cultural competence of educators and a better understanding of effective interventions.

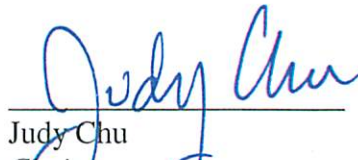
- 8. Replace the Cradle to Prison Pipeline with a Cradle to College and Workforce Pipeline.** Far too many children of color are currently dropping out of school, entering the juvenile justice system, and going to prison. This “Cradle to Prison Pipeline” must be transformed into a “Cradle to College and Workforce Pipeline,” which requires the breaking down of institutional silos that serve young people. Local communities and those interested in the well-being of their youth (including educators, parents, students, social service providers, physical and mental health providers, local law enforcement, and faith-based and community organizations) must work together to serve children and keep them on track for college and career. Reform must include collaboration between government agencies and local community stakeholders to improve outcomes for students. The Department of Education, through partnerships with the Departments of Justice, Health and Human Services, Labor, and Housing and Urban Development, can leverage participation and investment to transform these communities through school-based community partnerships, driven by evidence and designed to be sustainable on a long-term basis.
- 9. Support and strengthen quality early learning programs.** For children in poverty, achievement gaps begin well before kindergarten. Study after study has shown that investing in quality early learning programs can yield a huge return-on-investment by reducing the costs of special education, high school dropouts, teen pregnancy, crime, incarceration, and dependence on social services later in life and increasing the likelihood of college attendance and completion. ESEA reform should increase alignment between early childhood and elementary by strengthening joint professional development, P-20 data systems, encouraging use of Title I funds for school readiness, and standards of social and emotional development.
- 10. Ensure full and equitable inclusion of students throughout the U.S., the U.S. territories and residents of the U.S. from the Freely Associated States.** Reform needs to address several issues in order to ensure full participation of all students under the jurisdiction of the U.S. federal government, including students in the U.S. insular areas of American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. First, the territories should be fully eligible for all funding under federal education programs, whether funding is allocated by formula or on a competitive basis or is limited by caps in keeping with the President’s stated ESEA goals of fostering equity and opportunity for all students and closing the gap between students. Further, reform should expand the federal Impact Aid program to reimburse schools for the costs of educating students from the Freely Associated States (FAS), residing in the United States and the territories.

Thank you for your consideration of these priorities and our request to meet with you. We look forward to working with you as both chambers move forward with the reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Brandon Garrett with the Congressional Black Caucus (Brandon.Garrett@mail.house.gov; 202-226-1990), Joseph Mais with the Congressional Hispanic Caucus (Joseph.Mais@mail.house.gov; 202-225-2435), and Lelaine Bigelow with the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (Lelaine.Bigelow@mail.house.gov; 202-225-5464).

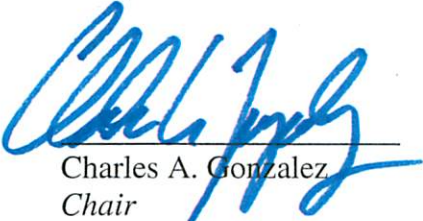
Sincerely,



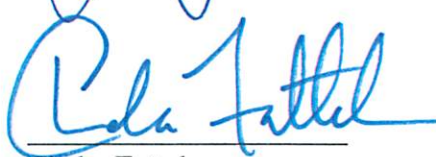
Emanuel Cleaver
Chair
Congressional Black Caucus



Judy Chu
Chair
Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus



Charles A. Gonzalez
Chair
Congressional Hispanic Caucus



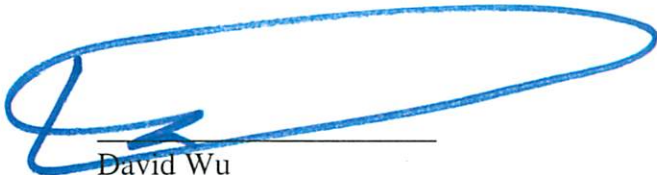
Chaka Fattah
Co-Chair
CBC Education and Labor Taskforce



Danny K. Davis
Co-Chair
CBC Education and Labor Taskforce



Raul M. Grijalva
Chair
CHC Education Taskforce



David Wu
Chair
CAPAC Education Taskforce