



The Education Trust

Closing the gaps in opportunity and achievement, pre-k through college.

April 4, 2014

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman
Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services,
Education and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate
S-128, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jack Kingston
Chairman
Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services,
Education and Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
H-305, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jerry Moran
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services,
Education and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate
S-128, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services,
Education and Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
H-305, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Harkin, Ranking Member Moran, Chairman Kingston, and Ranking Member DeLauro:

Thank you for your continued leadership on education funding. As the Subcommittees begin work on the FY 2015 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies appropriations bill, we respectfully urge you to support funding for the following programs to help provide all students at all levels with a high quality education. Nothing is more critical than ensuring that programs that benefit disadvantaged students, including low-income students, students of color, English learners, and students with disabilities, have the resources necessary to close achievement gaps and accelerate postsecondary success.

K-12 PROGRAMS

Fund Race to the Top—Equity and Opportunity at \$300 Million

Research indicates that teachers are the biggest in-school factor contributing to student academic achievement. Unfortunately, the research is also clear that low-income students and students of color disproportionately receive more novice, out-of-field, and ineffective teachers than their peers. Closing achievement gaps and increasing achievement for all students requires that we also close this teacher quality gap.

As proposed by the Administration in its FY 2015 budget, RTT—Equity and Opportunity would support a subset of states and districts in tackling this problem head on, helping to show the way forward for other jurisdictions. It would give states and districts willing to move forward faster to implement innovative strategies for improving teacher equity the extra financial support they need to do so. We would note, however, that paying attention to equitable access is a requirement of current law. As such, we support the Administration’s request and urge the Subcommittees to provide this level of funding, but funding should be tied to a requirement that the Department of Education finalize its already announced 50-state strategy on teacher equity, which would set forth minimum requirements for all states.

Support \$320 Million for the Teacher and Leader Innovation Fund

The Teacher and Leader Innovation Fund, in its current iteration, has allowed local school districts and not-for-profits to bring successful, innovative results-driven programs into schools and classrooms through strong collaboration between teachers and administrators. The program has driven innovative pay and personnel practices that have provided greater access to effective teachers for low-income students and students of color. The initiative has played a key role in driving an expectation of results that rewards teachers for the academic success of their students and provides them with much-needed supports. To further the impact of this program, we back the Administration’s FY 2015 request of \$320 million and urge the Subcommittees to include this level of funding. We also suggest that the Subcommittees consider including language from Sens. Bennet and Alexander’s GREAT Act that would support innovative teacher and principal preparation academies.

Increase Support for the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act Part B State Grants

Special education services are critical to helping students with disabilities graduate high school both college- and career-ready. For too long, too little attention has been paid to the academic success of these students. We support the President’s request to include \$100 million in funding for competitive grants to foster better academic outcomes for students with disabilities. In addition, we support increased funding for the Part B Grants to States program. This increased focus on outcomes, coupled with funding to support key services and further innovation, provide a solid foundation for students with disabilities to graduate high school college- and career-ready.

Increase Funding for the Charter School Program

Charter schools, and the federal funding they receive for startup, replication, and expansion of highly successful models, are one of several important tools for improving the overall quality of the American educational system. Recognizing this, we request that the Subcommittees provide an increase for the charter school grant program for FY 2015. High quality schools are critically important to low-income students and students of color; high quality charters are often one of the fastest routes to providing these students with the education they need.

HIGHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Provide Sufficient Funding for the Pell Grant Program to Support the Maximum Pell Grant in FY 2015 and Subsequent Years

Low-income students depend on Pell Grants to continue their education after high school and earn a postsecondary credential or degree. These grants are an investment in the future: They will have high returns as these students graduate with less debt, enter high-skill careers and put that money back into the economy. Unfortunately, the Pell Grant program faces future shortfalls as eligibility for the program and college-going rates remain high. To help hard-working, low-income students earn the postsecondary degrees that will help them achieve their dreams, we ask that the Subcommittees provide sufficient discretionary funding to support the scheduled maximum Pell Grant of \$5,830 and subsequent statutory increases in coming years.

Support the College Success Grants Through the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE)

Colleges have shown that strategies such as partnering with K-12 school districts to improve preparation and establishing dual enrollment programs, increasing institutional need-based aid for low-income students, reforming remedial education, redesigning high enrollment courses, and providing wraparound academic and student support services to improve completion can help improve student outcomes, especially for Pell Grant recipients. This program would provide minority serving institutions (MSIs) the resources to implement these strategies, offering better supports to their students and helping ensure more graduate. As such, we recommend the Subcommittees include \$75 million within the FIPSE account for the College Success Grants.

State Higher Education Performance (SHEP) Fund and College Opportunity and Graduation Bonus (COG-B)

Although these two programs are proposed as mandatory funding, we want to highlight them briefly because they could incentivize more targeted funding for higher education by states. COG-B is a performance-based complement to the Pell Grant program that would provide funding based on the percent of Pell Grant recipients among an institution's graduates *as well as* its overall graduation rate and student loan default rates. SHEP is a dollar-for-dollar matching program that would support states in developing and implementing performance-based funding programs for institutions that improve access for low-income students and students of color, lower tuition costs, and increase graduation rates. As such, both programs could help move the needle on college completion.

We thank the Subcommittees for your leadership in ensuring that essential programs are able to continue helping all students—but especially low-income students, students of color, English learners, and students with disabilities—thrive in education. Thank you for your consideration of these requests.

Sincerely,



Kati Haycock
President