



December 9, 2016

Mr. Robert T. Goad
Trump–Pence Transition Team
1717 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20006

Dear Mr. Goad:

We are writing as the leaders of the Association of California School Administrator’s (ACSA) and the California School Board Association’s (CSBA) to encourage you to support the Every Student Succeeds Act’s (ESSA) successful implementation, including honoring the bipartisan law’s focus on state and local autonomy, local leadership, and educational equity. Now, more than ever, preparing all students for success after graduation will require an unwavering agreement by those engaged at all levels of the system to strengthen public education, including working together to maximize ESSA’s impact for students.

California’s public school leaders proudly serve over six million elementary, middle, and high school students and their communities. The state’s diverse array of school districts feature some of the nation’s largest and most educationally complex school systems, such as the Los Angeles Unified School District (639,000 students), and smallest districts, including remote and less populous districts like the Alpine County Office of Education (15 students). Although distinct in size and nature, our districts share a steadfast commitment to helping all students graduate prepared for academic, workplace, and life success and are excited by the local leadership opportunities restored by ESSA.

The ESSA implementation process remains only an emerging effort in most jurisdictions, but California leaders will make significant progress in the next few months. The California Department of Education is working closely with district administrators and other stakeholders to develop the state’s consolidated ESSA plan, consistent with the state’s Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), which was implemented during the 2013-14 school year. Although significant work remains before California begins full ESSA implementation during the next school year, the state is exploring exciting new ways to use the law, in conjunction with the LCCF, as a basis for turning around low performing schools and promoting statewide continuous improvement. In light of this critically important state and local decision-making, we urge the administration to honor Congress’s bipartisan work on ESSA and keep the law’s implementation on a steady “track,” including considering the following specific recommendations related to the law.

Support ESSA's Consensus Funding Formulas and Programs

ESSA's most significant policy changes - particularly improvements related to accountability determinations, school improvement strategies, and educator effectiveness – are vitally important, but we also urge you to recognize the law's crucial financial supports for states and districts that serve the nation's lowest income students and their families. Responding to the profession and communities, Congress maintained ESSA's historic focus on promoting equity; placed greater emphasis on the law's formula programs; and appropriately de-emphasized competitive grants. Although a small relative share of overall education spending nationally, federal investments in public education make a meaningful difference for students and families that need the most help. Educators and school leaders rely on additional supports for low-income students, English learners, struggling readers, family engagement, professional development, and more. As such, we strongly request that you prioritize education investments when you work with Congress to complete the fiscal year 2017 and 2018 budget cycles. Achieving the president-elect's economic fairness vision necessarily must include a strong commitment to public education, including continued and new investments in the high quality preschool opportunities required for promoting kindergarten readiness.

Fully Leverage ESSA's Existing Choice Provisions

The new administration should help states and school districts take advantage of ESSA's bipartisan school choice provisions before considering any new strategies. The law encourages districts to provide public school choice for students attending the lowest-performing schools identified by the state accountability system, including prioritizing options for the lowest achieving students from the lowest income families. Furthermore, districts may use a portion of their Title I funding to provide transportation to the students that take advantage of the law's school choice options.

Additionally, ESSA's charter school program (Title IV) provides significant dedicated funding for the replication and expansion of high performing charter schools in addition to other funding available to charters through the law's major formula programs. Notably, among other permissible uses, ESSA's charter provisions encourage expanding families' access to high quality preschool opportunities. California's 1,222 charter schools serve over half-a-million students and ACSA and CSBA supported Congress's decision to continue and strengthen ESSA's charter schools program. The bipartisan initiative, authorized at over \$300 million annually, provides a ready-made foundation for achieving the president-elect's school choice proposals. Any significant increased funding for ESSA's charter program, however, should come from amounts above and beyond the current discretionary spending allocated to the Department of Education. Federal leaders should not depart from ESSA's consensus authorization levels or cannibalize other education programs for choice initiatives, including decreasing Title I or reconfiguring it into a voucher program.

Strongly Support the Nation's Current and Future Teachers

Research shows that teacher quality is the greatest factor in K-12 student learning. Ensuring that all learners have access to effective teachers begins with strong preparation and induction and continues with high quality ongoing professional development focused on the specific skills

and capacities teachers need to serve an incredible array of students, beginning with preschoolers. Congress correctly used ESSA to replace the No Child Left Behind Act's highly effective teacher requirements with a more appropriate focus on educator capacity building. We encourage you to help states and districts fully benefit from ESSA's central investment in professional development (Title II-A) and the law's other available resources for supporting teachers and school leaders, such as Title III's focus on capacity building for supporting English learners, and the new Title IV block grant's focus on professional development associated with student enrichment, wellness, and effective technology use. The new administration can support these areas by highlighting best practice, working with Congress to fully fund educator capacity building accounts, and promoting state and district collaboration and improvement.

Continue Supporting the Education of Undocumented Youth

California's school districts, educators and school leaders work hard to support all children, regardless of national origin or immigration status, so that they can achieve educational and economic success. As affirmed by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Plyler v. Doe* (457 U.S. 202 (1982)), all students have a constitutional right to equal access to education regardless of their immigration status. This right – absent constitutional amendment – is irrevocable. Our public schools make a big difference for undocumented youth. They, in turn, are a vibrant part of schools and communities. We strongly encourage you work with your peers in the Department of Homeland Security to continue the vitally important Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals initiative and support the work of states and school districts to help these students prepare for life after high school graduation. Helping these young students, and their families, strengthens both our state and our nation.

Thank you for carefully considering these ideas. On behalf of ACSA's more than 17,000 school leader members and the more than 5,000+ locally elected school board members represented by CSBA, we encourage you to explore and understand the important elementary and secondary education innovations underway in California. We also look forward to working with the new administration and 115th Congress and would be pleased to answer any questions you may have about these recommendations.

Sincerely,



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