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July 8, 2016

Honorable John B. King, Jr.  
Secretary of Education  
U.S. Department of Education  
400 Maryland Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20202

*Via e-rulemaking portal*

Re: Proposed Supplemental Priority for Discretionary Grant Programs  
Docket ID ED-2016-OS-0002

Dear Secretary King:

The National Education Association is pleased to submit these comments on the proposed supplemental priority for discretionary grant programs, *increasing socioeconomic diversity in schools*, published June 8, 2016, at 81 FR 36833.

NEA's three million members work at every level of education. We believe that every student in America, regardless of family income or place of residence, deserves a quality education. Attending a school that is diverse affords critically important opportunities and preparation that all young people need to thrive as citizens and workers in the increasingly diverse communities, country, and world they will live in. We view socioeconomic diversity strategies as a promising approach to raising student achievement, closing achievement gaps, and promoting racial and ethnic diversity.

NEA therefore continues to support the promotion, encouragement, and facilitation of voluntary locally or regionally generated initiatives to increase socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic diversity in school enrollments.

NEA supports this proposal by the Department of Education (ED), and believes it is an important supplement to existing priorities and guidance related to racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity.

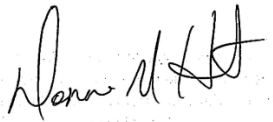
To realize their intended benefits, efforts to increase diversity in school enrollments need to be accompanied by deliberate efforts to foster and maintain positive, demanding yet encouraging and supportive school climates favorable to the well-being, development, and achievement of all students. We welcome non-regulatory guidance, other technical assistance, and programmatic activity by ED aimed at assisting schools with the opportunities and challenges diverse student

enrollments create, regardless of whether their districts are deliberately seeking to increase school diversity or not.

NEA also welcomes ED's attention, reflected in this proposal and in its June 8, 2016, diversity listening session co-hosted with the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Department of Transportation, to the importance of approaching holistically the complex policy challenges posed by diversity efforts. We view encouraging grant applicant and grantee efforts to pursue inter-agency, cross-cutting policy sector cooperation and coordination to facilitate achievement of desired diversity goals, reflected in the proposal, as a positive step in this regard. We also urge ED to encourage attention to the importance of ongoing dialogue between grant applicants and grantees and their impacted local communities to inform project development, implementation, and ongoing monitoring and corrective actions. The use of reasonable and realistic incentives, along with issuance of non-regulatory guidance or other forms of technical assistance to support these types of collaboration in ways which will not discourage or create unnecessary barriers for potential grant applicants, is an option ED may wish to consider.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this proposed priority. Please do not hesitate to contact Bob Tate, senior policy analyst in the NEA Education Policy and Practice Department, at [btate@nea.org](mailto:btate@nea.org) should you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Donna M. Harris-Aikens". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Donna M. Harris-Aikens  
Director, Education Policy and Practice