

# **The National Coalition** **on** **School Diversity**

November 13, 2017

The Honorable Betsy DeVos  
Secretary, U.S. Department of Education  
400 Maryland Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20202

RE: Docket ID ED-2017-OS-0078

Dear Secretary DeVos,

On behalf of the National Coalition on School Diversity,<sup>1</sup> we are writing to provide feedback on the Department of Education’s proposed supplemental priorities for competitive grant programs, published in the Federal Register on October 13, 2017.<sup>2</sup>

We were surprised and dismayed to see the proposed elimination of supplemental priorities related to the promotion of racial and socioeconomic diversity in our nation’s public schools,<sup>3</sup> and we urge you to reinstate this crucial priority that would expand parents’ ability to choose integrated schools for their children. In an increasingly diverse nation that exhibits ever-sharper divisions along racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, social, and political lines, the decision to eliminate priorities that encourage school integration, intergroup contact, and the reduction of prejudice makes little sense.

For all the reasons discussed below, we strongly encourage the Department to reevaluate and amend “Proposed Priority 1 – Empowering Families to Choose a High-Quality Education that Meets Their Child’s Unique Needs” to ensure that these strategies promote public school diversity and do not exacerbate student isolation.

## Reinstate Priorities for Promoting School Diversity

While the demographics of America’s public schools continue to grow more racially and ethnically diverse, our students are increasingly educated in classrooms settings as segregated as they were in 1970.<sup>4</sup> Taking action to curb this disturbing trend is

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<sup>1</sup> The National Coalition on School Diversity (NCSD) is a network of civil rights organizations, university-based research centers, and state and local coalitions working to expand support for government policies that promote school diversity and reduce racial isolation. We also support the work of state and local school diversity practitioners. See [www.school-diversity.org](http://www.school-diversity.org).

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2017-10-12/pdf/2017-22127.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> See 79 Fed. Reg. 73426, 73452 (Dec. 10, 2014), available at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2014-12-10/pdf/2014-28911.pdf> (school diversity priority), 81 Fed. Reg. 63099 (Sept. 14, 2016), available at <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2016-09-14/pdf/2016-22104.pdf> (socioeconomic diversity priority).

<sup>4</sup> Gary Orfield and Erica Frankenberg, with Jongyeon Ee and John Kuscera, “Brown at 60: Great Progress, a Long Retreat and an Uncertain Future” (2014), available at <http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-education/integration-and-diversity/brown-at-60-great-progress-a-long-retreat-and-an-uncertain-future/Brown-at- 60-051814.pdf>.

imperative, as recent federal research from the Government Accountability Office indicates rates of student isolation continue to rise.<sup>5</sup> Segregated schools contribute to a number of negative academic and social outcomes, including an increased performance gap and depressed graduation rates for low-income students and student of color.<sup>6</sup> On the positive side, decades of research show that diverse, integrated educational environments support higher student achievement in math, science, and literacy, increased rates of high school graduation and college attendance, stronger critical thinking skills, and more positive school climate.<sup>7</sup>

Supporting locally driven school diversity programs would not be inconsistent with the Department's stated goals in the proposed priorities document, and in fact would contribute to meeting many of those goals. For instance, diverse schools would help the Department achieve goals set forth in Proposed Priority 2 (improved outcomes),<sup>8</sup> Proposed Priority 4 (fostering knowledge and promoting the development of skills that prepare students to be informed, thoughtful, and productive individuals and citizens),<sup>9</sup> Proposed Priority 6 (promoting STEM),<sup>10</sup> Proposed Priority 7 (promoting literacy),<sup>11</sup> Proposed Priority 9 (promoting economic opportunity),<sup>12</sup> and Proposed Priority 10

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<sup>5</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office, "K-12 Education: Better Use of Information Could Help Agencies Identify Disparities and Address Racial Discrimination," (April 2016), *available at* <http://www.gao.gov/assets/680/676745.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Sarah Sparks, "How Segregation Impedes Graduation: New Research to Know" (Education Week, 2017), *available at* [http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/inside-school-research/2017/10/segregated\\_schools\\_hurt\\_graduation\\_rates.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/inside-school-research/2017/10/segregated_schools_hurt_graduation_rates.html); Sean Reardon, "School Segregation and Racial Academic Achievement Gaps," (Center for Education and Policy Analysis Working Paper No. 15-12, 2015), *available at* <https://cepa.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/wp15-12v201510.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> For a summary of this research, see Susan Eaton, "School Racial and Economic Composition & Math and Science Achievement," (National Coalition on School Diversity, 2011), *available at* <http://www.schooldiversity.org/pdf/DiversityResearchBriefNo1.pdf>; Susan Eaton, "How the Racial and Socioeconomic Composition of Schools and Classrooms Contributes to Literacy, Behavioral Climate, Instructional Organization and High School Graduation Rates," (National Coalition on School Diversity, 2011), *available at* <http://school-diversity.org/pdf/DiversityResearchBriefNo2.pdf>; Philip Tegeler, Roslyn Mickelson, and Martha Bottia, "What We Know about School Integration, College Attendance, and the Reduction of Poverty," (National Coalition on School Diversity, 2011), *available at* <http://school-diversity.org/pdf/DiversityResearchBriefNo4.pdf>; Roslyn Mickelson, "School Integration and K-12 Educational Outcomes: A Quick Synthesis of Social Science Evidence," (National Coalition on School Diversity, 2015), *available at* <http://www.school-diversity.org/pdf/DiversityResearchBriefNo5.pdf>; Genevieve Siegel-Hawley, "How Non-Minority Students Also Benefit from Racially Diverse Schools," (National Coalition on School Diversity, 2012), *available at* <http://schooldiversity.org/pdf/DiversityResearchBriefNo8.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> For a summary of this research, see Roslyn Mickelson, "School Integration and K-12 Educational Outcomes: A Quick Synthesis of Social Science Evidence," (National Coalition on School Diversity, 2015), *available at* <http://www.school-diversity.org/pdf/DiversityResearchBriefNo5.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> For a summary of this research, see Susan Eaton and Gina Chirichigno, "The Impact of Racially Diverse Schools in a Democratic Society," (National Coalition on School Diversity, 2011), *available at* <http://www.school-diversity.org/pdf/DiversityResearchBriefNo3.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> For a summary of this research, see Susan Eaton, "School Racial and Economic Composition & Math and Science Achievement," (National Coalition on School Diversity, 2011), *available at* <http://www.schooldiversity.org/pdf/DiversityResearchBriefNo1.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> For a summary of this research, see Susan Eaton, "How the Racial and Socioeconomic Composition of Schools and Classrooms Contributes to Literacy, Behavioral Climate, Instructional Organization and High School Graduation Rates," (National Coalition on School Diversity, 2011), *available at* <http://school-diversity.org/pdf/DiversityResearchBriefNo2.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> For a summary of this research, see Philip Tegeler, Roslyn Mickelson, and Martha Bottia, "What We Know about School Integration, College Attendance, and the Reduction of Poverty," (National Coalition on School Diversity, 2011), *available at* <http://school-diversity.org/pdf/DiversityResearchBriefNo4.pdf>.

(improved school climate and safety).<sup>13</sup> Explicit recognition by the Department of the value of voluntary school integration as a competitive grant priority would serve to ensure the success of these other named priorities.

### Include Civil Rights Safeguards for the School Choice Priority

The Secretary's proposed priorities place significant emphasis on support for school choice initiatives. While no research demonstrates a consistent improvement in student outcomes related to participation in school choice programs,<sup>14</sup> evidence does demonstrate that unstructured, free-market school choice programs do result in greater socioeconomic and racial isolation of students.<sup>15</sup>

We urge the Department to re-evaluate the need for special emphasis on school choice programs in the proposed priorities for competitive grant programs. However, if the Department continues to include this priority, we urge recognition of the significant body of research that indicates many programs of school choice, including both charter schools and private school vouchers, can have a segregative impact on students.<sup>16</sup> In light of the potential for school choice programs to exacerbate segregation and poverty concentration, we urge the Department of Education to ensure all existing and new school choice grant programs receiving federal dollars include safeguards to prevent further

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<sup>13</sup> *Supra* note 9.

<sup>14</sup> See Mark Dynarski, Ning Rui, Ann Webber, Babette Gutmann, and Meredith Bachman. "Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program Impacts After One Year," (Institute of Education Sciences, 2017) available at <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20174022/pdf/20174022.pdf> (noting the District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarship Program had a significant negative impact the mathematics achievement of students offered or using a scholarship, did not result in an increase in parental satisfaction); David Figlio and Krzysztof Karbownik, "Evaluation of Ohio's EdChoice Scholarship Program: Selection, Competition, and Performance Effects," (Fordham Institute, 2016), available at [https://edex.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/publication/pdfs/FORDHAM%20Ed%20Choice%20Evaluation%20Report\\_online%20edition.pdf](https://edex.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/publication/pdfs/FORDHAM%20Ed%20Choice%20Evaluation%20Report_online%20edition.pdf) (finding that "students who use vouchers to attend private schools have fared worse academically compared to their closely matched peers attending public schools. The study finds negative effects that are greater in math than in English language arts. Such impacts also appear to persist over time, suggesting that the results are not driven simply by the setbacks that typically accompany any change of school"); Atila Abdulkadiroglu, Parag Pathak, and Christopher Walters, "Free to Choose: Can School Choice Reduce Student Achievement?," (The National Bureau of Economic Research, 2016), available at <http://www.nber.org/papers/w21839> (finding that participation in the Louisiana Scholarship Program "substantially reduces academic achievement: attendance at an LSP-eligible private school lowers math scores by 0.4 standard deviations and increases the likelihood of a failing math score by 50 percent. Voucher effects for reading, science and social studies are also negative and large").

<sup>15</sup> See Halley Potter, "Do Private School Vouchers Pose a Threat to Integration?" (The Century Foundation, 2017), available at <https://tcf.org/content/report/private-school-vouchers-pose-threat-integration/>; Erica Frankenberg, Genevieve Siegel-Hawley, and Jia Wang, "Choice Without Equity: Charter School Segregation and the Need for Civil Rights Standards," (The Civil Rights Project at UCLA, 2010), available at <https://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-education/integration-and-diversity/choicewithout-equity-2009-report/frankenberg-choices-without-equity-2010.pdf>. See also Chang-Tai Hsieh and Miguel Urquiola, "The effects of generalized school choice on achievement and stratification: Evidence from Chile's voucher program," 90 Journal of Public Economics, 2006, available at [http://www.columbia.edu/~msu2101/Hsieh-Urquiola\(2006\).pdf](http://www.columbia.edu/~msu2101/Hsieh-Urquiola(2006).pdf) ("Using panel data for about 150 municipalities, we find no evidence that choice improved average educational outcomes as measured by test scores, repetition rates, and years of schooling. However, we find evidence that the voucher program led to increased sorting, as the best public school students left for the private sector").

<sup>16</sup> Roslyn Arlin Mickelson, Martha Bottia, and Stephanie Southworth, "School Choice and Segregation by Race, Class, and Achievement," (Education Policy Research Unit, Education and the Public Interest Center, 2008), available at <http://nepc.colorado.edu/files/CHOICE-08-Mickelson-FINAL-EG043008.pdf>.

isolation of our most vulnerable students, including district-wide impacts in “sending” districts, and to adopt measures ensuring grant proposals that have a positive effect on student integration will receive preference in funding.

Specifically, we recommend the following guidelines for existing and new federal grant competitions as a method of ensuring federal funds do not exacerbate segregation of students by race, socioeconomic background, language ability, or disability status.

- Existing and new grant competitions for school choice programs should place a priority on applicants that propose to increase integration along the lines of race, disability status, socioeconomic background, and language ability.
- Existing and new grant competitions for school choice programs should include additional funding for tracking and reporting the impacts of federally funded interventions on both sending and receiving schools or districts with regard to student demographics, including but not limited to race, disability status, socioeconomic background, and language ability.
- In analyzing impacts on “sending” schools and districts, the comparison to be made is between the demographics of students leaving, and students remaining in the school or district across each subgroup; for example, if the proportion of children with special needs is lower among moving children, the analysis would indicate that the transfers are having a concentrating or segregating effect on the sending school or district.
- Grantees that cannot demonstrate an integrative or neutral impact on student demographics in sending and receiving schools or districts as a result of their school choice program, following a set period of time, will have an opportunity to assess and address shortcomings in their federally funded program. If grantees cannot demonstrate an integrative or neutral impact on the next review of their intervention, further federal funding should be withheld.

The NCSD would support the Department’s efforts to ensure that its competitive grant programs support diverse educational environments, improved student outcomes, and avoid further isolation our nation’s most at-risk students.

If you have any questions regarding the above suggestions please do not hesitate to contact us at [school-diversity@prrac.org](mailto:school-diversity@prrac.org).

Sincerely,



Philip Tegeler  
Michael Hilton  
Poverty & Race Research Action Council  
on behalf of the National Coalition on School Diversity  
Washington, DC  
202-360-3906