

October 4, 2013

Secretary Arne Duncan
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202

Re: Comments on Department of Education Draft Strategic Plan

Dear Secretary Duncan,

We are writing as members of the National Coalition on School Diversity to express our concerns about the exclusion of school diversity and the reduction of racial isolation as central priorities in the Department's proposed Strategic Plan. This omission is inconsistent with the Department's stated commitment to evidence-based policies. It is also inconsistent with the Department's recognition in its 2011 "Guidance on the Voluntary Use of Race to Achieve Diversity and Avoid Racial Isolation in Elementary and Secondary Schools" that economic and racial integration in schools benefits all students, both in educational outcomes and in a reduction of racial tension and stereotypes.

Indeed, as we set forth in an earlier letter to you, dated January 27, 2012, providing comments on the 2011-2014 Strategic Plan, school integration is among the most powerful education reform strategies available to enhance outcomes for low income children in our country.

Surprisingly and unfortunately, the only mention of school diversity and reduction of racial isolation in the Strategic Plan is in the context of civil rights enforcement, in the section on the Office of Civil Rights. The failure to include these issues as a central priority – limiting this important educational reform solely to the enforcement context – does a disservice to children and serves to marginalize what should be a fundamental element of American schooling. We recommend that the goals of increasing school diversity and reducing racial and economic isolation in public schools be included as central goals of the Elementary and Secondary Education section of the Strategic Plan. We also urge the Department to incorporate school diversity into the Early Education goal. Children in kindergarten and pre-k are among the most segregated in our nation, and school integration in this age group has been shown to deliver important educational benefits.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important civil rights and education priority.

Sincerely,

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