



November 11, 2015

Senator Thad Cochran  
Chairman  
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Room S-128, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Barbara Mikulski  
Vice Chairwoman  
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Room S-128, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Cochran and Ranking Member Mikulski:

As members of the National Coalition on School Diversity ([www.school-diversity.org](http://www.school-diversity.org)), we urge you to restore funding to the Magnet Schools Assistance Program in the FY 2016 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill. As our increasingly diverse nation continues to grapple with disparities in educational opportunity and outcomes along racial and class lines, we cannot afford to abandon the goals that magnet schools seek to promote; including achievement, diversity, innovation, engagement, choice, and equity.

Magnets are theme-based public schools of choice that strive to attract a racially diverse student population. They “became popular during the mid-1970s as a way to infuse school desegregation strategies with more parental choice.”<sup>1</sup> Today’s magnets are also home to some of our nation’s most exciting and inspiring educational innovations. Meanwhile, they continue to serve as a powerful tool to promote voluntary racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic integration.

Our request for continued funding of the Magnet Schools Assistance Program is informed by the following context:

- **Magnet schools are one of the most effective tools available to school districts that are seeking to promote racial integration.** Why does this matter? Studies consistently show that racially, culturally, and economically diverse schools are strongly associated with a range of short and long term benefits for all racial groups.<sup>2</sup> This includes gains in math, science, reading, and critical thinking skills and improvements in graduation rates. Over the long-term, students who attend diverse schools are more likely than students from homogeneous schools to choose diverse colleges, neighborhoods, and workplaces later in life. They possess better critical thinking skills and analytical ability and are more

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<sup>1</sup> Genevieve Siegel-Hawley and Erica Frankenberg, Civil Rights Project. Reviving Magnet Schools: Strengthening a Successful Choice Option at 7 (2012), available at <http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-education/integration-and-diversity/reviving-magnet-schools-strengthening-a-successful-choice-option/MSAPbrief-02-02-12.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> See generally National Coalition on School Diversity Research Brief 5, School Integration and K-12 Educational Outcomes: A Quick Synthesis of Social Science Evidence, available at <http://www.school-diversity.org/pdf/DiversityResearchBriefNo5.pdf>. See also Rucker Johnson, Long-run impacts of school desegregation & school quality on adult attainments, National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper 16664 (2011), available at <http://www.nber.org/papers/w16664>.

likely to form cross-racial friendships. Over the course of their lives, Black students attending integrated schools also tend to have higher paying jobs and better health outcomes.

- **Through promoting choice and diversity, magnet schools can also help reduce poverty concentration in schools.**<sup>3</sup> We know that living in poverty affects the wellbeing of our nation’s children, “at home, in school, and in their neighborhoods and communities.”<sup>4</sup> While research also demonstrates that diverse schools are better equipped than high-poverty schools to counteract the challenges associated with poverty, our most disadvantaged students are often forced to attend the lowest performing, often most racially and economically isolated, schools. Magnets can help reverse this trend.
- **The current demand for magnet school programs is not being met.** For example, respondents to a recent Civil Rights Project/Magnet Schools of America survey reported that 72.5% of the MSAP-funded magnet schools received more applications for admission than there was space available.<sup>5</sup>
- **Magnet schools are an important vehicle to help school districts comply with their legal obligations.** There are currently over 300 school districts under court order to desegregate, yet there are only 28 school districts funded by the Magnet Schools Assistance Program.
- **Students attending well-implemented magnets are receiving a high-quality education.** The Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) recently announced that 55% of its magnet students met or exceeded state standards in Math and English compared to 39% in charters, 44% in California’s public schools, and 33% in LAUSD district schools.<sup>6</sup>

The Magnet Schools Assistance Program provides crucial resources and technical support to enable educators to successfully implement magnet programs. Rather than cut magnet funding, Congress should consider restoring magnet funding to the pre-sequester level of \$100 million. Doing so will help meet demand and place magnet school funding on a path toward equity with other school choice programs.

Justice Thurgood Marshall once said, “Unless our children begin to learn together, there is little hope that our people will ever learn to live together.” Recent developments in cities across the United States have illuminated the need to focus on bridging racial and class divides, and prioritizing educational equity (among other things), in our multiracial society. Magnet schools

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<sup>3</sup> See generally National Coalition on School Diversity Research Brief 6, Magnet School Student Outcomes: What the Research Says, available at <http://www.school-diversity.org/pdf/DiversityResearchBriefNo6.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> American Psychological Association, “Effects of Poverty, Hunger, and Homelessness on Children and Youth,” available at <http://www.apa.org/pi/families/poverty.aspx>. (“Poverty is linked with negative conditions such as substandard housing, homelessness, inadequate nutrition and food insecurity, inadequate child care, lack of access to health care, unsafe neighborhoods, and under-resourced schools which adversely impact our nation’s children.”)

<sup>5</sup> Siegel-Hawley and Frankenberg, *Reviving Magnet Schools* at 13 (“Approximately 27% of survey participants who responded to the question reported that fewer than 500 students failed to obtain admission to their program(s), while another 16% reported that demand exceeded capacity by roughly 500-1500 students. Finally, 24% of respondents reported that between 1500 and 7500 students applied for a seat in a magnet program but weren’t admitted.”)

<sup>6</sup> See Inter-Office Correspondence Los Angeles Unified School District Office of Data and Accountability, Charter and Magnet School Smarter Balanced Assessment Results, Spring 2015. Retrieved from: <https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/2430323/sba-informative-laUSD-charters-magnets.pdf>

already play an integral role in this work. Please do not eliminate funding for this important program, which is helping educators close the achievement gap, improve racial harmony, and make a lasting, positive impact on the lives of our nation's children.

Sincerely,

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