



The National Association of Magnet and Theme-Based Schools

April 25, 2016

Mr. Britt Jung  
U.S. Department of Education  
400 Maryland Avenue SW., Room 3E231  
Washington, DC 20202-6135

Dear Mr. Jung:

Magnet Schools of America (MSA), representing more than 3,800 magnet and theme-based schools and 2.6 million students nationwide, would like to express its strong opposition to the Secretary's proposal to reduce the number of Equity Assistance Centers (EACs) by 60% from 10 to 4. EACs are the only entities created under the Civil Rights Act of 1964, to primarily combat school segregation at the local, state and national level. Their expertise and services have been an invaluable tool and resource to school districts and magnet schools that are committed to identifying and addressing patterns and issues of inequities around race, sex, and national origin.

In the wake of the *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School Dist. No. 1* Supreme Court decision, the demand for the services provided by the EACs has grown exponentially. While this case affirmed that school districts have compelling interests both in achieving diversity and in avoiding racial isolation, it added a new level of legal uncertainty for school districts trying to achieve these goals. The EACs are responsible for providing direct technical assistance on civil rights concerns to school districts and are the only centers that specialize in school desegregation work. They are uniquely qualified to help school districts address school segregation in a manner consistent with the *Parents Involved* case and subsequent guidance released by the U.S. Department of Education and Justice in 2012.

The necessity for the Equity Centers is clearly evident. As the department has stated publicly, "many schools and communities continue to suffer the effects of racial segregation, and that many of our nation's largest school districts remain starkly segregated along racial and economic lines." A report released by the UCLA Civil Rights Project confirms this unfortunate reality, that a majority of African-American and Latino students now attend schools that are predominately low-income and non-white, leading to what researchers define as "double segregation."<sup>1</sup> Even more disheartening is evidence that suggests that schools that once had successful integration programs, especially in the South, are becoming segregated once again.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> E PLURIBUS...SEPARATION Deepening Double Segregation for More Students. Gary Orfield, John Kucsera and Genevieve Siegel-Hawley September 2012. UCLA Civil Rights Project. [https://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-education/integration-and-diversity/mlk-national/e-pluribus...separation-deepening-double-segregation-for-more-students/orfield\\_epluribus\\_revised\\_complete\\_2012.pdf](https://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-education/integration-and-diversity/mlk-national/e-pluribus...separation-deepening-double-segregation-for-more-students/orfield_epluribus_revised_complete_2012.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Southern Slippage: Growing School Segregation in the Most Desegregated Region of the Country, Genevieve Siegel-Hawley and Erica Frankenberg, UCLA Civil Rights Project, 2012. <http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-education/integration-and-diversity/mlk-national/southern-slippage-growing-school-segregation-in-the-most-desegregated-region-of-the-country/hawley-MLK-South-2012.pdf>

As school districts grapple with the intransigent problem of racial and socioeconomic segregation, the EACs must continue to play a critical role in providing direct civil rights support to school districts to ensure equitable practices and outcomes for children. The department's proposal to decrease the number of EACs by 60% will dilute services for underserved students and disrupt the established relationships and trust that has been built at the local level by the EACs over more than 50 years. School segregation is a complex societal problem that is influenced by many local factors. These problems require in-person meetings, collaborative planning, training, capacity building, and relationship development to address their root causes. Therefore, it is imperative that the technical assistance services provided by EACs continue to be within close proximity to the communities they serve.

The action proposed by the Secretary to reduce accessibility to the EACs by moving away from a regional structure is counterintuitive to the pressures that are placed on states and local school districts. According to the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, there are 300 open school desegregation orders in place across the nation. As the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights takes on this large workload, conducts investigations, and reaches agreements, it is crucial that they are buttressed by the resources, expertise, and support provided by the EACs.

Our association appreciates the administration's recent actions to raise school diversity and integration to the top of its policy agenda through the Stronger Together Initiative, the Magnet Schools Assistance Program, the School Improvement Grant program, and the Investing in Innovation (i3) fund, however we are perplexed by the proposal to reduce access to the EACs, which are designed to help states and local school districts effectively utilize this federal support in a targeted manner consistent with the goal of school diversity.

Given the alarming problem of racial tension and unrest in our communities, that in many ways is caused by the harmful effects of school segregation, our nation must address this issue in a manner comparable in scope with the problem. By reducing access to the services provided by EACs we stand the chance of exacerbating the very issue we are trying to address. As the department moves forward, we hope that it will seriously reconsider this proposed action.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Todd Mann". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "T" and "M".

Todd Mann  
Executive Director