



The National Association for Magnet and Theme-based Schools

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Every Child Achieves Act Builds on Success of Magnet Schools to Promote Choice, Equity, Diversity and Innovation in America’s Schools and Classrooms

Washington, DC, April 13, 2015 - Magnet Schools of America (MSA), representing more than 3,800 theme-based magnet schools and 2.6 million students nationwide, is encouraged that leaders of the U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee have reached a meaningful bipartisan agreement that will revise the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, currently known as the No Child Left Behind Act. The proposed legislation released by Chairman, Senator Lamar Alexander and Ranking Member, Senator Patty Murray, The Every Child Achieves Act (ECA), will take a profound step forward toward improving our nation’s public education system. It removes cumbersome restrictions placed on states and local school districts and strengthens support for magnet schools. We urge members of the Senate HELP Committee to swiftly pass this legislation.

Promotion of Socioeconomic Integration

The Every Child Achieves Act would reauthorize and make strategic changes to the Magnet Schools Assistance Program (MSAP). It expands the mission of the program to include the promotion of socioeconomic integration as a fundamental goal. This recognizes decades of research that shows that the socioeconomic composition of a school is the greatest factor affecting student achievement.¹ Expanding the scope of MSAP will also provide school districts with greater flexibility to determine how to voluntarily achieve diversity or avoid racial isolation in their schools in a manner consistent with principles articulated in Supreme Court opinions, to meet these compelling interests.²

Removal of School Transportation Prohibition

The ECA would eliminate the prohibition against using MSAP funds for transportation purposes. While we support the removal of this prohibition, the policy should only be implemented in a very limited scope to guarantee that a vast majority of MSAP funds continue to support core grant activities, including school wide curriculum enhancement, teacher professional development, the hiring of personnel, and to upgrade school materials, equipment, and technology. Our association strongly believes that funds should not be allowed to support daily transportation to schools. Based on past experiences of grantees, it has proven to be more effective to have school districts make an initial commitment to magnet school transportation to ensure that this service is not discontinued after grant funding has expired.

Timeliness and Extension of Grant

We are supportive that the ECA would improve the timeliness of the MSAP grant by instructing the U.S. Department of Education to disperse funds to awardees at the beginning of the summer. This will provide school districts with the necessary time to plan and launch their magnet programs. Typically, MSAP grants are awarded in late September after the start of the school year, which limits the ability of school districts to properly plan before first-year implementation. In addition, the ECA would reward effective grantees by extending the length of their grants by two years if they are showing progress towards reaching programmatic goals.

¹[Turnaround Schools That Work: Moving Beyond Separate but Equal](#), Richard D. Kahlenberg, The Century Foundation, 2009, Page 7.

²[Guidance on the Voluntary Use of Race to Achieve Diversity and Avoid Racial Isolation in Elementary and Secondary Schools](#), U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Justice, 2011.

MISSION STATEMENT

Providing leadership for high-quality innovative instructional programs that promote choice, equity, diversity, and academic excellence for all students.

Interdistrict Magnets and Program Funding Level

Furthermore, the ECA would invite school districts to work in coordination with each other to break down barriers that sustain racial and socioeconomic isolation in schools by creating interdistrict or regional magnet programs. This provision recognizes the reality that the greatest amount of school segregation now occurs between school districts, rather than at the neighborhood level.³ There is convincing evidence that regional or interdistrict magnet programs like those found in Hartford, Connecticut are extremely effective at promoting integrated and diverse learning environments. These regional magnets, created in response to the 1996 state supreme court ruling, *Sheff v. O'Neill*, have not only substantially reduced the share of students of color in high-poverty, segregated schools, they have increased the academic performance and graduation rates of all students.⁴

Finally, the ECA would remove the arbitrary appropriations authorization level for the Magnet Schools Assistance Program. This will give Congress the freedom to provide the necessary support to magnet programs based on demonstrated success and the needs of communities. It will enhance the ability of school districts to create innovative magnet programs that are designed specifically to alleviate the intransigent problems of school segregation and inequality within our educational system.

Accountability and Flexibility

In general, the Every Child Achieves Act ensures that student academic performance will continue to be closely monitored and analyzed so that parents, community members, and school leaders will have the means to understand the quality of instruction and services that are provided in their schools. This critical information is extremely useful for all stakeholders and generates a level of accountability and transparency in the public school system. The ECA also continues to provide additional resources to states and school districts to support low-performing schools, but with the appropriate flexibility to determine locally designed methods of improving these schools, such as creating magnet programs.

MSA is optimistic that by passing this legislation, America's schools will be able to move out of an era of high stakes testing and sanctioning, and into a more stable period where states will no longer have to wrangle with the unpredictability of applying for a waiver from a broken law ever few years. MSA urges Congress and the Administration to seriously consider the merits of this bipartisan proposal and to reach an agreement that will reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act this year.

About Magnet Schools of America

Magnet Schools of America (MSA) is a nonprofit educational association that was founded in 1986 and represents approximately 4,000 magnet schools. MSA supports and serves the leaders and teachers of magnet and theme-based schools, while promoting the development of new magnet programs and public schools of choice. It sponsors a national awards program, hosts professional development activities, and provides technical assistance through the National Institute for Magnet School Leadership (NIMSL). It also connects with other professional organizations and encourages partnerships to support our nation's magnet schools. MSA is the only association to develop national standards and criteria for certifying that magnet schools meet the pillars and standards of success that ensure all students receive an educational opportunity held to higher expectations than any other school choice option.

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³ School Choice Beyond District Borders, Jennifer Holme and Amy Stuart Wells, Page 149, The Century Foundation Press, 2008.

⁴ [The Abell Report](#), Years After a Landmark Court Decision, Connecticut's Solution to School Segregation Shows Promise: Can it Inform Action in Baltimore? Susan Eaton, June 2013, Page 5.

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