



The National Association of Magnet and Theme-Based Schools

Strengthening America's Schools Act Would Increase Role of Magnet Schools in Nation's Efforts to Turnaround Low-Performing Schools and Reduce Racial and Socioeconomic Segregation

Washington, DC, June 10, 2013 - Magnet Schools of America, representing more than 4,000 magnet and theme-based schools nationwide, is pleased that Congress has restarted the process of reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). We are hopeful that with bipartisan cooperation this legislation can be enacted before the end of the 113th Congress. Our organization and its members are grateful for the key components of the *Strengthening America's Schools Act* released by Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA), Chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee. This legislation would reauthorize the Magnet Schools Assistance Program (MSAP), and add magnet schools as a viable restart strategy for low-performing schools.

As we approach the 60th anniversary of the landmark Supreme Court decision of *Brown vs. Board Education*, magnet programs have demonstrated their ability to lead the nation's efforts in promoting racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity in the classroom. Based on innovative and theme-based curricula, magnet schools break down traditional school attendance boundaries by allowing families to choose schools that appeal most to their children's academic interests and talents. There is not only strong evidence that students who attend magnet schools have higher rates of academic achievement and graduation rates than those in non-magnet schools, these students are also more likely to have higher levels of critical thinking skills, an ability to adopt multiple perspectives, a diminished likelihood for acceptance of stereotypes, and develop more cross-racial friendships.¹

Despite the evidence demonstrating the benefits of attending racially diverse magnet schools, our nation's educational system remains largely segregated by both race and class. A [report](#) released by the *UCLA Civil Rights Project* last year found 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." Even more disheartening is new evidence that suggests that schools that once had successful integration programs, especially in the South, are becoming segregated once again.²

The Magnet Schools Assistance Program provides grants to local school districts to establish, expand, and improve magnet programs. It is the only federal education program designed specifically to reduce racial and socioeconomic isolation, as well as promote diversity in the classroom. MSAP grants are awarded every three years to 30-50 school districts. During the 2010-2013 grant cycle 38 school districts received approximately \$100 million in MSAP funding. These vital resources were used to help improve teacher professional development, purchase equipment and technology, and offer unique curricula or teaching methods previously not available.

This competitive program has been instrumental in helping establish magnet schools since 1976 and has substantially influenced the characteristics and development of these programs. A [survey](#) of previously funded MSAP school districts found that nearly three-quarters of federally supported magnet schools were oversubscribed, demonstrating the high demand and popularity of these schools. The study also found that student achievement increased in these programs and the schools were able to flourish and sustain themselves after the duration of grant funding, demonstrating a valuable return on investment of these federal dollars.

Creating diverse magnet schools that feature innovative curricula and highly trained teachers and principals is an effective method of turning around low performing schools. For example, Winston/Salem Forsyth County Schools has grown the number of their magnet schools from seven to seventeen in seven years. During this period, all the low performing schools at the outset of magnet implementation have since moved out of low performing status. In recent years, over 90% of those magnets have reached their academic growth targets.

Given the success of magnet schools in providing high quality educational programs that promote academic achievement and cross-cultural awareness, as well as their proven track record in serving as a successful turnaround strategy for underperforming schools, we look forward to working with Congress in the coming months to ensure magnet schools are a key component of the ESEA reauthorization process.

¹ Magnet School Student Outcomes: What the Research Says, Genevieve Siegel-Hawley and Erica Frankenberg, *National Coalition on School Diversity*, 2012. <http://www.magnet.edu/files/policy-conference/diversityresearchbriefno6.pdf>

² 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>