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Raul Yzaguirre, President
September 28, 2004

The Honorable Rod Paige
Secretary
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary Paige:

As you prepare the Department of Education’s budget and policy priorities for fiscal year (FY) 2006, the National Council of La Raza (NCLR) would like to make you aware of several opportunities you have to improve the educational attainment and achievement of the nearly eight million Hispanic students attending our nation’s public schools, as well as the millions of limited-English-proficient adults seeking to enhance their earnings potential by learning English. NCLR believes that modest increases in the programs listed below will strengthen the nation’s education system for all Americans.

Over the past four years, the Latino community has seen few, if any, of its education priorities addressed by the Department of Education. For example, NCLR supported passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) because it has the potential to significantly increase the educational achievement and attainment of Latino and English language learner (ELL) students. We have communicated to the Latino community that NCLB includes opportunities for greater parental and community involvement in schools, as well as accountability for improving academic outcomes for Latino students. Unfortunately, the Department’s previous three budgets have undermined effective implementation of NCLB by requesting inadequate funding of NCLB programs.

In addition, we are deeply disappointed that you have failed to voice support for the “DREAM Act” and the “Student Adjustment Act,” legislation that would help immigrant students attend college and pursue a path toward U.S. citizenship. Your silence on this issue, and that of President Bush, has effectively denied tens of thousands of students access to college and employment.

NCLR believes that, provided with the opportunity, Latino students are capable of achieving at the highest levels, completing high school, and pursuing postsecondary education. However, as the Department of Education, Congress, and the American public have embraced accountability for results as a guiding principle for enhancing educational opportunities for all students, including Latinos, we must also ensure that the nation’s budget priorities also reflect this value. As such, we believe the following steps represent a strategic approach to helping Latino students



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meet the ambitious but attainable goals delineated in the NCLB, and attend and complete college. Specifically, NCLR recommends that the Department of Education's FY 2006 budget request:

- **Increase funding for bilingual education reforms.** NCLR believes that making NCLB work means making sure it effectively serves the needs of the nation's large and growing population of ELLs. During the 2000-2001 school year, there were a reported 4.7 million ELL students enrolled in public schools, representing 9.8% of the total K-12 public school enrollment. This represents 95% in growth since the 1991-92 academic year. Unfortunately, these children often lag behind their English-proficient peers in reading, math, and science. Title III of NCLB can help close this achievement gap. The bilingual education reforms in Title III of NCLB set clear English-language acquisition and academic achievement benchmarks for ELL students. In addition, Title III of NCLB changes the way programs for ELLs are funded from competitive-based to a state formula. This modification was designed to ensure that federal bilingual education funds reach all 4.7 million ELLs in our public schools. However, unless the program is adequately funded, this policy shift could end up spreading federal monies too thinly, hampering states' efforts to improve schooling for ELLs. Education experts estimate that \$361 per child is necessary to develop and implement programs for ELLs. *NCLR recommends providing \$900 million for Language Assistance State Grants for FY 2006. These additional funds would amount to \$200 for each ELL child in U.S. schools, giving states a downpayment toward adequate funding to implement Title III of NCLB.*
- **Fund Parent Assistance programs.** The NCLB authorizes Local Family Information Centers (LFICs) under Title V, "Providing Informed Parental Choice and Innovative Programs." Operated by local community-based organizations, LFICs would ensure that Hispanic parents are in a position to hold schools accountable for helping their children meet the rigorous academic benchmarks delineated in the NCLB. LFICs would help parents understand the school system, including how standards and assessments can be used to help improve student achievement. In addition, LFICs can provide information about important educational options, including English language learner programs and charter schools. *For FY 2006, NCLR recommends \$100 million for Parent Assistance programs, including \$25 million for LFICs.*
- **Adequately fund GEAR UP.** NCLR fully supports the Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP). Distinct from other federal education programs, GEAR UP supports early college awareness for low-income youth starting in middle school and helps them complete high school. Also unique to GEAR UP, the program identifies entire cohorts of students, rather than individual students, and helps them finish high school and get into college. This program is critical for Latino students, who are more likely than other students to drop out of high school and consequently are less likely than others to attend and complete college. Currently, over one-third of the students served in GEAR UP are Latino. *For FY 2006, NCLR recommends \$425 million for GEAR UP.*
- **Provide increased funds for Adult English-as-a-Second-Language programs.** Enrollment in Adult English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) has increased 105% over the past

ten years, yet there is a lack of programs and funding to ensure that all who desire to learn English have access to appropriate services. Community-based organizations must generally piece together programs with volunteer labor and facilities, while the demand for English-language instruction far outweighs supply. The current \$70 million in funding is insufficient to meet the enormous need for ESL services. As the labor market continues to demand English-proficient labor, investing in ESL programs will strengthen the labor pool and create a more versatile and productive workforce. *To further enhance Hispanic parents' ability to participate in their children's education and the labor force, we urge you to increase funding in FY 2006 to \$100 million for the English Language and Civics Education Initiative and to include language to provide program funds directly to community-based organizations on the front lines of providing ESL services.*

- **Increase funding for the Migrant Education Program.** – The Migrant Education Program is a critical component of NCLB because it provides states the resources to educate migrant students. Under NCLB, schools are held accountable for improving the academic outcomes of migrant students. *For FY 2006, NCLR recommends \$500 million for MEP.*
- **Increase funding for the High School Equivalency Program (HEP) and the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP)** – HEP and CAMP programs provide services to migrant children to help them complete high school and attend and graduate from college. These programs are modestly funded, but they have a track record of success and have a significant impact in migrant communities. *For FY 2006, NCLR recommends \$25 million for HEP and \$20 million for CAMP.*
- **Increase funding for charter schools facilities acquisition.** As you are aware, charter schools are now a significant part of the education landscape. Throughout the nation, more than 500,000 students attend charter schools, and thousands of these students are Hispanic. Obtaining adequate facilities continues to be a challenge for charter school operators. The Credit Enhancement for Charter Schools Facilities Financing program has successfully leveraged federal and local dollars to help charter school operators acquire and upgrade facilities. *NCLR urges you to request \$100 million for FY 2006 for the Credit Enhancement for Charter Schools Facilities Financing program.*
- **Support passage of the DREAM Act and the Student Adjustment Act.** Every year, our nation's high schools graduate thousands of talented immigrant students, many of whom have grown up in the U.S., attended the same elementary and secondary schools as native-born students, and excelled at the same academic requirements as their classmates. Like their U.S.-born classmates, these students share the same dream of pursuing a higher education. Unfortunately, they lack access to the state and federal financial assistance and in-state tuition rates available to their U.S.-born peers, making it virtually impossible for these students to afford a college education. In effect, through no act of their own, they are denied the opportunity to share in the "American Dream."

In response, bipartisan bills were introduced during the 107th and 108th Congress. In the Senate, Senators Orrin Hatch (R-UT) and Richard Durbin (D-IL) have sponsored S. 1545, the "Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act." In the House of

Representatives, Representatives Chris Cannon (R-UT), Howard Berman (D-CA), and Lucille Roybal-Allard (D-CA) introduced the “Student Adjustment Act,” H.R. 1684. If enacted, both bills would facilitate college access for Hispanics and other students in the United States who currently face barriers in financing a college education. They would also allow hardworking immigrant youth who have long resided in the U.S. the chance to adjust their status, enabling them to contribute fully to our society. *NCLR urges you to support immediate enactment of the “DREAM Act” and the “Student Adjustment Act.”*

NCLR serves as a voice for the Latino community, and has relayed their concerns and policy priorities to you consistently. Our policy proposals have been modest in scope, but the potential impact of these proposals is great for Latinos and the nation as whole. You have stated often over the past four years that your Department and the Administration believe Hispanic students can meet the most challenging academic standards. We hope that your FY 2006 budget reflects this belief and provides Hispanic students with the tools necessary to succeed in school, attend and complete college, and pursue meaningful employment. It is clear that ensuring a well-prepared Hispanic workforce is in the best interest of the nation as a whole, and that carrying out these proposals will achieve that. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or Raul González of my staff at (202) 776-1760.

Sincerely,



Raul Yzaguirre
President & CEO

cc:

- Maria Ferrier, Director,
Office of English Language Acquisition
- Nina Rees, Deputy Under Secretary,
Office of Innovation and Improvement
- Hans Meeder, Deputy Assistant Secretary,
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