



September 23, 2009

The Hon. Tom Harkin, Chairman
Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
731 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Hon. Michael Enzi, Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
379 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Harkin and Senator Enzi:

On behalf of the Hispanic Education Coalition (HEC), which unites 26 national organizations dedicated to improving educational opportunities for the more than 47 million Hispanics living in the United States, we write to share recommendations on the Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act (H.R. 3221).

We commend the House Committee on Education and Labor for passing a comprehensive bill that included important benefits for Latino students, such as supports for science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) programs for Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs) and supports to states for enhancing their early learning systems through the Early Learning Challenge Fund. We believe these are important and critical components of the bill that help foster success for Hispanic students across the country. We urge the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee to maintain funding for STEM programs through HSIs to ensure greater participation in STEM fields for Latino students. Moreover, we urge the HELP Committee to strengthen the Early Learning Challenge Fund to ensure that Latino children, particularly English language learners (ELLs), enter school ready to learn.

The HEC recommends that the HELP Committee:

1. **Maintain funding for minority-serving institutions' STEM programs.** Hispanics remain severely underrepresented in every field from teaching, law, and medicine to mathematics, science, and technology, due to low enrollment and low graduation rates. For example, the July 2007 *Digest of Educational Statistics* reports that Hispanic graduation rates in key STEM areas are exceedingly low. For academic year 2005–2006, Hispanics represented only 2.2% of the Ph.D. graduates in physical sciences and science technologies, 1.4% in engineering, and 2.2% in mathematics and statistics. At the master's degree level, Hispanics represented 3.3% of graduates in physical sciences and science technologies, 3.2% in engineering, and 3.1% in mathematics and statistics.

Given the growth of the Latino population, support for initiatives that encourage Hispanic participation in STEM fields is essential. Specifically, the HELP Committee should:

- **The HELP Committee should maintain the \$2.5 billion over 10 years to Minority Serving Institutions.** Funding for Hispanic-Serving Institutions should be distributed as done under Title V of the Higher Education Act, funding should be distributed among the institutions in a competitive manner and for uses under Title V with priority given to applicants who will increase the number of low-income students obtaining degrees in STEM fields and who demonstrate model transfer articulation agreements. Funding includes \$10 million for community partnerships to help low-income students pursue STEM-related careers.

2. **Strengthen the Early Learning Challenge Fund for ELL children and families.**

Latino children are the fastest-growing segment of the child population, yet they have the least access to early care and education (ECE) programs. Fewer than half, or 43%, of Hispanic children under the age of three attend a childcare center's ECE program, compared to 66% of Black children and 59% of White children. Limited access to high-quality programs for children under the age of five means that Latino children start kindergarten well behind their peers. Specifically, the HELP Committee should:

- **Require states to disaggregate data on children by age, race, and limited English proficiency (LEP) status.** Disaggregation of this data will more clearly identify disparities in access to programs and will help states document the progress made in improving access to early learning programs.
- **Require states to develop early learning guidelines that take into account the learning needs of LEP children, specifically benchmarks related to English language development.** Very few states have developed early learning standards that take into account the learning needs of LEP children. Legislation should challenge states to develop comprehensive, inclusive early learning standards that will, in turn, create a demand for intentional and effective instructional methods and professional development strategies that help all teachers understand how to monitor progress for young LEP children.
- **Require that states create pathways for culturally and linguistically diverse providers to obtain credentials and certification in early learning as part of their professional development plan.** In many states and communities across the country, the ECE workforce is more diverse than the K–12 workforce. However, this diversity is not reflected at all levels of ECE providers. For example, data collected by the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment demonstrated that although Latinas are represented in each of the ECE workforce categories, they are also the least likely to have obtained higher levels of education. Rates of bachelor's degree attainment are highest for White, non-Hispanic, center-based teachers and lowest for Latina licensed providers and center-based ECE educators. The Early Learning Challenge Fund presents a unique opportunity to challenge states to develop career pathways for providers who reflect the diversity in the classroom.

- **Require that the National Commission, established in Section 405 of H.R. 3221, include experts who can provide recommendations to enhance the development of early learning standards for ELLs.** Despite the emerging presence of ELL children across the country, very few state early learning guidelines spell out developmental outcomes specifically for children acquiring a second language. States have taken a variety of different angles in addressing the needs of ELLs; however, instructional and developmental considerations for ELL children are frequently ignored and, by consequence, ELLs are expected to perform no different than native English speakers. The HELP Committee should ensure that the National Commission, established in Section 405 of the bill, will include experts who can provide recommendations to enhance the development of early learning standards for ELLs.

We appreciate the opportunity to share our recommendations with the Senate HELP Committee, and we would be happy to provide additional information. Please feel free to contact us if we can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,



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cc: Members of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee