

August 4, 2017

Joe Conaty
Delegated the functions and duties of the Deputy Secretary
Co-Chair, Agency Reform Taskforce
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20202-4537

RE: Executive Order on a Comprehensive Plan for Reorganizing the Executive Branch

Dear Mr. Conaty:

On behalf of National PTA and our 4 million PTA members, we appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback to the U.S. Department of Education (ED) Reform Taskforce for the Executive Order on a Comprehensive Plan for Reorganizing the Executive Branch. National PTA is the oldest and largest volunteer child advocacy association in the United States with congresses in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, U.S. Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico and Europe. Since 1897, National PTA has been a strong advocate and a reputable resource for empowering all families to actively engage in their child's education.

Over 40 years of research shows that students with engaged families attend school more regularly, earn better grades, enroll in more advanced-level programs and have higher graduation rates—regardless of family income or socioeconomic background.¹ Therefore, our association recommends that ED offers best practices or guidance on parent and family engagement plans for local educational agencies (20 U.S.C. 6318) to help school districts systematically embed family engagement policies and practices in their education plans via consultation with a diverse group of parents and family members.

The Statewide Family Engagement Centers (SFECs) competitive grant program, which was reauthorized in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), would complement and help improve local parent and family engagement plans. SFECs would provide direct family engagement services teaching parents how to work effectively with their child's school and offering professional development for educators and school leaders to strengthen family-school partnerships and parent-teacher relationships. An important way for ED to show its commitment to meeting the needs of all students and families is by proposing \$10 million for SFECs and a greater investment in Title I funding in the fiscal year 2019 budget and beyond.

¹ Henderson, A. T., & Mapp, K. L. (2002). A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement. Annual Synthesis 2002. National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools. Retrieved from <https://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/evidence.pdf>.

Many parent advocates work full time jobs—while raising their children—and though they want what is best for their child to succeed in school and in life, they do not have the time or ability to read a long document with technical terms outlining recommendations for their child’s education. Therefore, when ED releases best practices, guidance or new resources, National PTA recommends they be concise (5-10 pages), use parent-friendly language and be presented in a uniform format. National PTA has 120 years of experience working with parents and families to ensure every child reaches their full potential and would welcome the opportunity to be a resource for ED in developing parent-friendly materials.

ED should also consider forming a committee made up of public school parents and family members who have a demonstrated history of parental involvement and family engagement in schools to assist ED in serving all students and families. National PTA recommends these committee members represent multiple geographic areas and be guardians to a diversity of students, such as the categories of students required to be disaggregated under ESSA. This advisory committee would be a valuable resource to the Secretary, provide critical information to Congress on parental involvement and family engagement in education and offer direction for state and local education authorities to improve family engagement in schools.

Finally, it is ED’s responsibility to protect, enforce and promote the civil rights of all students. This was emphasized in the first enactment of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), which aimed to protect and serve our most vulnerable children. These vulnerable students include, but are not limited to: LGBTQ, immigrant, low-income, homeless youth, students from military families, students of color, students who are members of an Indian tribe or tribal organization, English language learners and students with disabilities. National PTA strongly urges the Taskforce to maintain the personnel, resources and regulations associated with protecting these students when discussing ways to improve the efficiency, effectiveness and accountability of ED.

National PTA values our strong and long-standing relationship with ED and we look forward to continuing to collaborate to make every child’s potential a reality. Please do not hesitate to contact Jacki Ball, Director of Government Affairs, at jball@PTA.org or (703) 518-1243 to answer any questions or provide further input as needed.

Sincerely,



James L. Accomando
President
National PTA



Nathan R. Monell, CAE
Executive Director
National PTA