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April 7, 2014

The Honorable John Kline
Chairman
The Honorable George Miller
Ranking Members
U.S. House Committee on Education and the Workforce
2181 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Kline and Ranking Member Miller:

On behalf of Breakthrough Schools (Breakthrough), we write to express our strong support for the "Success and Opportunity through Quality Charter Schools Act." It was an honor to testify before the Committee's hearing "Raising the Bar: The Role of Charter Schools in K-12 Education." The bipartisan recognition that charter schools are an integral part of public education is testament to the impact charter schools have had on children's lives across the country. We appreciate your efforts to shine the spotlight on charter schools and your leadership on this important bill.

Breakthrough is a nonprofit charter management organization (CMO) in Cleveland, Ohio operating 9 K-8 schools with over 2,500 students, growing to serve almost 7,000 students by 2020. For the 2nd year in a row, Breakthrough is the highest-rated public charter school network in the state of Ohio. Breakthrough schools are currently the only charter schools in the city sponsored by the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. We value our relationship with the District and our city has been recognized nationally for our forward-thinking approach to working together. In Cleveland, there is broad consensus across all stakeholders that it's the quality of education that matters, not the type of school that provides it.

Breakthrough became a CMO in 2010 with four flagship schools, seeking to open sixteen more by 2020. In 2011, Breakthrough was awarded a *Charter Schools Program (CSP) Grant for the Replication and Expansion of High-Quality Schools*. By the end of the grant period in 2017, federal funding will have supported the planning and start-up of nine Breakthrough schools that will ultimately serve more than 3,300 students, more than 84% of these students are low-income. That is 3,300 low-income, minority students who will receive a high-quality, college preparatory education that will set them on the path to excel in life.

As a high-performing CMO and a current recipient of the *CSP Grant for the Replication and Expansion of High-Quality Schools*, Breakthrough strongly supports the provision that allows high-performing CMOs to compete directly for funding. This competition was pivotal in enabling Breakthrough to open more schools, schools that were sorely needed in underserved neighborhoods in Cleveland. Since 2010, this particular competition has allowed for rapid growth of proven educational models across the country. We are grateful for its inclusion in this bill which will only increase the impact and growth of some of the nation's best educational models.

We are very supportive of the bill's provision to allow students to remain in within their current family of charter schools from elementary to middle school without having to enter a lottery. This continuity is essential for our students to ensure that the academic progress and opportunity for success is not taken away by chance. Some

of our proudest moments have been watching our students grow and develop in our network and successfully transition from one of our elementary schools to one of our middle schools. We appreciate that the bill includes this important element.

There is strong evidence that the flexibility and innovation fostered by the CSP program can drive increases in student achievement. As the bill progresses, on behalf of our students, teachers, and support staff, we would respectfully request that additional consideration be given to the overall authorization level of the Charter Schools Program, currently capped at \$300 million. A larger authorization would provide more funding flexibility as the economy improves.

As our children face the challenges of the 21st century, we hope that Congress will see fit to invest significantly in what works. Charter schools began as a path to innovation in education. We now have hundreds of proven school models that are consistently achieving strong academic results for economically disadvantaged children. We would, therefore, specifically request additional funding for the *CSP Grants for the Replication and Expansion of High-Quality Schools*.

As currently drafted, this bill would provide only \$18.6 million at the current appropriations level and just \$22.5 million at the maximum authorization level. Even under the best-case scenario, this funding level is significantly less than what was appropriated in the FY 2014 Omnibus Appropriations bill, which ensured that no less than \$45 million would be targeted for this specific purpose. Additionally, we would appreciate the opportunity to work with you to ensure that Congressional intent includes more flexible uses of these grant funds. Within the entire CSP program, there will be no higher return on investment than the dollars committed to replicating proven schools that work. It is these networks that have the demonstrated ability to assure educational success for hundreds of thousands more children.

Thank you for your efforts in support of our students and our schools. We look forward to partnering with you to further refine this bill as it moves forward in the House of Representatives.

Sincerely,



Alan Rosskamm
Chief Executive Officer, Breakthrough Schools



John Zitzner
President, Friends of Breakthrough Schools