

Chiefs^{FOR} CHANGE

April 14, 2014

The Honorable John Kline
Chairman
Committee on Education and the Workforce
2181 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable George Miller
Senior Democrat
Committee on Education and the Workforce
2101 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Kline and Senior Democrat Miller:

Chiefs for Change is pleased to support H.R. the Success and Opportunity through Quality Charter Schools Act which will expand the number of high-quality charter schools and help to increase educational opportunities for all students by supporting innovation in our public education system.

Chiefs for Change is a bipartisan coalition of current and former state education chiefs who believe that American public education can be dramatically improved and share an urgency to achieve that goal. Together, we provide a strong voice for bold reform at the federal, state and local levels.

Chiefs for Change offers a network of state education leaders with experience in successful reform who continue to advance proven policies for the betterment of education. The coalition formed by five state education chiefs in November 2010, today represents a number of ethnically- and geographically-diverse states. By placing the interests of children above the well-being of its members, Chiefs for Change has taken on the entrenched practices that have long held back our education system – practices that have favored adults, instead of students.

As part of our guiding principles, Chiefs for Change believes that there should be viable educational options, including public charter schools, for all students. We support policies that provide all students with the opportunity to attend an excellent school and believe funding should follow the student and allow for parents to decide what is best for their child.

Public charter schools are the fastest growing sector of America's public education system. The movement began in 1992 with a single charter school enrolling just a few hundred students. Today, there are more than 6,400 public charter schools enrolling over 2.5 million students in forty-two states and the District of Columbia. And, according to a 2013 study conducted by Stanford University's Center for Research on Educational Outcomes (CREDO), charter school students are outperforming their peers in traditional public schools and closing the achievement gap. As a result, charter school waiting lists are long and growing longer, signifying the hunger for more educational options by families around the nation.

The federal government has played a crucial role in jumpstarting – and then growing – the charter school movement. The federal Charter Schools Program (CSP) provides the start-up capital needed to

design a school, hire a school leader, recruit students and staff, prepare curricula and programs, and make initial purchases of materials and equipment, until regular state and local funding is available. In fact, CSP has become indispensable to the development and growth of public charter schools because – unlike traditional schools – charter schools do not have access to district or state funds to plan and implement their educational programs.

Chiefs for Change is, therefore, pleased that the Success and Opportunity through Quality Charter Schools Act would reauthorize the CSP to improve federal support for the start-up, replication, and expansion of high-quality charter schools. In particular, Chiefs for Change is pleased that the legislation would encourage greater expansion and replication of proven, high-quality charter school models at the state level, broaden uses of funds to include activities related to “opening and preparing to operate” charter schools, and also focus on charter school authorizer quality. Chiefs for Change also supports the formal creation of a federal program for charter management organizations (CMOs). CMOs play an important role in the replication and expansion of high-quality charter schools, but Chiefs for Change believes that states should make most of the decisions about how to distribute CSP funds to maximize educational opportunities within their boundaries.

We are pleased that the bill was reported by the Committee on Education and the Workforce by a strong bipartisan vote. We look forward to working with you on the bill as it moves through the legislative process. We believe that a strong focus on the CSP program at the federal level will help to provide all students with high-quality educational options that will prepare them for college, for productive citizenship, and for life.

Sincerely,

Members of Chiefs for Change

Janet Barresi, Oklahoma State Superintendent of Public Instruction

Deborah A. Gist, Rhode Island Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education

Kevin Huffman, Tennessee Commissioner of Education

Tom Luna, Idaho State Superintendent of Public Instruction

Mark Murphy, Delaware Secretary of Education

Hanna Skandera, New Mexico Public Education Department Secretary-Designate

John White, Louisiana State Superintendent of Education