



September 13, 2018

Dear FY2019 Labor, Health, and Human Services and Education Appropriations Conferees,

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, representing public school district leadership, school superintendents, educational service agencies, and school business officials, we write to say thank you for your work on the federal fiscal year 2019 (FY19) Labor Health Human Services Education and Other (LHHS) appropriations bill. The effort in FY19 continues a recent trend to return federal appropriations work to a more normal timeline. Our letter focuses on both the funding level of the bill and our absolute opposition to the use of federal education dollars to arm school personnel or provide arms training.

When it comes to the overall federal funding level in education, we strongly support your effort to increase investments in programs critical to supporting and growing public education, including Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Titles I and Title IV, as well as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), as well as rejecting proposals that would support privatization and vouchers. As our schools start the 2018-19 school year and draw down the final FY18 dollars, we remain very appreciative of the vote to raise the funding caps for both FY18 and FY19, and the role that the cap increases played in the final numbers you consider for FY19 today.

Authorizing and appropriations language go hand in hand though, meaning that federal investment is only as strong as the policy that allows it to be spent. At its core, ESSA, as a reauthorization to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), remains a federal cornerstone in the war on poverty and a policy aimed at equity and expanding equal access to a quality public education. There is nothing in the 53-year history of ESEA to indicate any scenario where federal education dollars should be used to put guns in schools. To that end, we have a zero-tolerance threshold for any language that would allow federal education dollars to be used to arm school personnel, or to provide arms training. Given recent concerns over whether ESSA Title IV dollars could be used in this manner, let us be especially clear:

We are strong supporters of the Student Support and Academic Enrichment (SSAE) program (ESSA Title IV) and the flexibility it affords state and local education leaders to spend federal dollars in areas related to academic offerings, total child programming and supports, and education technology. We remain committed to its intention to acknowledge that a child is more than a test score and that every child deserves a safe and healthy school climate. There is nothing more contrarian to federal policy focused on providing a safe and healthy school climate than letting those dollars be used to place guns in schools. There is no scenario in which using federal education dollars for guns yields a better return on investment than investing in student education. Our money—and the schools’ money—will always be on the kids. That’s our bet.

Congress delivered a clear and overwhelmingly bipartisan vote to support ESSA Title IV as an education program, and we call on both the House and Senate to ensure that the final FY19 LHHS bill not only invest in the programs at the levels proposed, but to also include language to prohibit the use of federal education funds to arm school personnel.

Sincerely,

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