

July 7, 2014

Dear Chief State School Officers:

Equality of opportunity is a core American value. Equal educational opportunity means ensuring schools have the resources they need to provide real and meaningful opportunities for all students to succeed, regardless of family income or race. To accomplish this goal, students must have access to a safe and healthy place to learn, quality instructional materials and supports, rigorous expectations and course work, and, most critically, excellent educators to guide learning. Yet family income and race still too often predict how likely a child is to attend a school staffed by great educators. This inequity is unacceptable, and the time is now for us to work together to ensure all children have access to the high-quality education they deserve, and that all educators (including teachers, staff, principals, and superintendents) have the resources and support necessary to provide that education.

Over the past several months, the U.S. Department of Education (Department) has conducted outreach to Chief State School Officers, school districts, civil rights groups, teachers, principals, and other stakeholders to explore ways to tackle and resolve the disparities in access to great teachers that we know continue to exist. Through this outreach, we heard that there is no single solution to this problem; we need a broad and systemic focus on supporting and improving teaching and learning, especially in our highest-need schools and for our highest-need students, including students with disabilities and English learners. We heard that the best efforts will not only include recruiting, developing, and retaining great educators with the skills to teach all students, but will also build strong school leaders, create supportive working conditions, and address inequities in resources and supports for teachers.

Many of you have told me that you are ready for a renewed and deeper commitment to ensuring every student in every public school has equal access to great educators who set and maintain high expectations for every student.

To move us closer to this goal, the Department is embarking on a multifaceted strategy:

- New State Educator Equity Plans: The Department will ask that, in April 2015, each State educational agency (SEA) submit to the Department a new State Educator Equity Plan in accordance with the requirements of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). As required by ESEA, in its plan, each SEA must, among other things, describe the steps it will take to ensure that “poor and minority children are not taught at higher rates than other children by inexperienced, unqualified, or out-of-field teachers.” To prepare a strong plan, each SEA will analyze what its stakeholders and data have to say about the root causes of inequities and will craft its own solutions.

The Department will issue guidance this fall to support SEAs in plan development and implementation. I look forward to working with you to ensure that these plans translate to meaningful and comprehensive change for students.

- Educator Equity Support Network: The Department will fund a new technical assistance network to support SEAs and districts as they develop and implement their new State Educator Equity Plans. The network will work with national and local experts, analysts and practitioners, including teachers, principals, and professionals knowledgeable about students with disabilities and English learners, to understand and address each SEA's individual needs, share promising strategies, and identify areas of opportunity for additional support. Launching in the fall of 2014 by cataloging effective practices in analyzing and addressing problems of inequitable access, the network will provide information, tools, and supports to all SEAs as they develop and implement new State Educator Equity Plans.
- Data Release and State Profiles: Recognizing that all high-quality State Educator Equity Plans start with a data-driven analysis of existing conditions, this fall the Department will facilitate State and local analysis and planning by (1) sending each SEA a copy of its State's complete data file from the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), which includes comprehensive school and district level data reported directly by districts to the Department on metrics such as teacher experience; teacher absenteeism; teacher certification; access to preschool and rigorous course work, including science, mathematics, and Advanced Placement courses; and school expenditures; and (2) releasing State-specific teacher equity profiles, which will be available to the public on the Department's Web site. These profiles will use data that the Department has previously collected from districts and States via the CRDC and *EDFacts* to illustrate existing gaps in key metrics of teacher equity between high- and low-poverty schools and schools with high and low populations of minority students. An SEA will then be able to consider these data and profiles, as well as the SEA's analysis of its own additional data, as it prepares its State Educator Equity Plan and determines how best to support its educators.

This is not the first time that states, districts, and the federal government have tried to grapple with the complex challenge of ensuring equitable access to excellent educators, but previous efforts have not fully addressed the challenge. Our continued collective failure to ensure that *all* students have access to great teachers and school leaders is squarely at odds with the commitment we all share to equal educational opportunity. I thank you for your ongoing and tireless work on behalf of America's schoolchildren, and I look forward to working collaboratively and supporting SEAs and districts as part of a nationwide effort to close this unacceptable opportunity gap.

Sincerely,

Arne Duncan