

August 24, 2017

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chair, Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, HHS, Education & Related Agencies
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member, Appropriations Subcommittee
on Labor, HHS, Education & Related Agencies
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Cole
Chair, Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, HHS, Education & Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member, Appropriations Subcommittee
on Labor, HHS, Education & Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Blunt, Ranking Member Murray, Chairman Cole, and Ranking Member DeLauro:

As you continue to work on a Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 appropriations bill, we, the undersigned chief state school officers, urge you to fund the Comprehensive Centers program at no less than \$51.347 million to help ensure the support we need for effective implementation of evidence-based educational policies and practices, including those in the bipartisan Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

We are pleased that the new law provides an increased role for states in creating and implementing robust accountability and support systems that will accelerate progress for all students. However, as “State Responses to ESSA and Low-Performing Schools”—a recent 50-state survey of state education agencies demonstrates—we face significant challenges in ESSA implementation. For example, the study observes that, “Many responding SEA leaders said that they would need assistance with supporting the various requirements for the use of evidence under ESSA; for example, the largest percentage of SEA leaders (90%) agreed that their state would need help assisting districts with interventions for low-performing schools.”ⁱ

The Comprehensive Centers have played a critical role in helping us identify and implement evidence-based policies and practices that increase student achievement, improve teacher quality, and turn around low-performing schools. More than ever, we see them as our partners and an important support now that we are implementing ESSA.

Under the Comprehensive Centers program, there are fifteen Regional Centers that primarily assist State Educational Agencies (SEAs) by providing training and technical assistance in the effective implementation and administration of programs under the ESSA. In addition to the Regional Centers, seven Content Centers focus on issue areas such as building state capacity and productivity, college and career readiness and success, enhancing early learning outcomes, instruction, teacher quality, and innovation and improvement. The Content Centers provide research-based information and products for the Regional Centers to use in working with SEAs.

State agencies work closely with both Regional and Content Centers in ways that meet our needs including, for example, by:

- Providing support for the planning and implementation of ESSA at the state and local level by supporting activities such as stakeholder engagement in the design of State ESSA plans, researching and planning all aspects of ESSA plans and restructuring SEAs to deliver effective services to districts and schools.
- Forming partnerships to implement standards and assessments through the specialized content center on standards and assessment implementation to the on-the-ground work of the regional comprehensive centers.
- Helping to meet the needs of special populations including by addressing the learning needs of Native and English-learner students.
- Promoting teacher quality and equity by providing assistance to develop, refine, and finalize teacher development programs; analyzing state level data on highly qualified teachers; identifying equitable distributions of effective teachers across schools; and implementing strategies that ensure every student is taught by highly effective teacher.
- Improving Response to Intervention (RTI) strategies by building capacity at the state level to deliver tiered RTI services, and assisting states in providing a coordinated approach to differentiating and customizing classroom instruction for all students.

We are encouraged that the President's FY2018 budget proposal includes a focus on research, evaluation and technical assistance, including funding the Comprehensive Centers program at \$51.347 million. We believe that continued, strong support for the Centers will help improve outcomes for students and effectively leverage Federal resources. We urge your support for this program.

Sincerely,

Alaska Department of Education & Early Development
Dr. Michael Johnson, Commissioner

Arkansas Department of Education
Mr. Johnny Key, Commissioner of Education

Colorado Department of Education
Dr. Katy Anthes, Commissioner

Connecticut State Department of Education
Dr. Dianna Wentzell, Commissioner

Illinois State Board of Education

Dr. Tony Smith, State Superintendent of Education

Indiana Department of Education

Dr. Jennifer McCormick, State Superintendent of Public Instruction

Kansas State Department of Education

Dr. Randy Watson, Kansas Commissioner of Education

Michigan Department of Education

Mr. Brian Whiston, State Superintendent

Minnesota Department of Education

Dr. Brenda Cassellius, Commissioner of Education

Mississippi Department of Education

Dr. Carey M. Wright, State Superintendent of Education

Montana Office of Public Instruction

Ms. Elsie Arntzen, Superintendent

Nebraska Department of Education

Dr. Matthew L. Blomstedt, Commissioner

New Mexico Public Education Department

Mr. Christopher Ruszkowski, Public Education Secretary

North Dakota Department of Public Instruction

Ms. Kirsten Baesler, State Superintendent

Ohio Department of Education

Mr. Paolo DeMaria, Superintendent of Public Instruction

Oklahoma State Department of Education

Ms. Joy Hofmeister, State Superintendent of Public Instruction

Oregon Department of Education

Dr. Salam Noor, Deputy Superintendent of Public Instruction

South Dakota Department of Education

Dr. Melody Schopp, Secretary of Education

State of Vermont Agency of Education

Dr. Rebecca Holcombe, Secretary

Virgin Islands Department of Education
Dr. Sharon Ann McCollum, Commissioner

State of Washington Office of Public Instruction
Mr. Chris Reykdal, State Superintendent

ⁱ http://centeronschoolturnaround.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/CenteronSchoolTurnaround_First_Look_ESSA.pdf