

June 30, 2011

The Honorable Kay Hagan  
U.S. Senate  
521 Senate Dirksen Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Hagan:

We write in strong support of the Secondary School Reform Act of 2011, legislation that would provide school districts and their partners with funding to implement innovative and research-based secondary school reform models.

Nationally, over a million high school students, or a quarter of the nation's high school students, fail to graduate on time every year. The graduation rate for minority students is even worse with about 54 percent of American Indian students, 58 percent of Latino students, and 57 percent of African American students graduating on time. A key factor in these disparate outcomes is the fact that many students of color and Native students are concentrated in some of our nation's lowest-performing high schools. For example, students of color or Native students are six times more likely than their white peers to attend a "dropout factory," one of the nearly 2,000 high schools that produce half the nation's dropouts. In addition, nearly 75 percent of the high schools identified as the lowest performing in each state as part of the federal School Improvement Grant program are ones in which students of color and Native students make up the majority of the student population.

Improving the nation's graduation rate is not only a moral imperative, but also an economic imperative. According to the Alliance for Excellent Education, if the country were to cut in half the number of each state's high school dropouts for the Class of 2010, this nation would see tremendous economic benefits. For example, this single class of new graduates would likely earn as much as \$7.6 billion more in an average year and these increased wages and higher levels of spending would likely grow state tax revenues by as much as \$713 million in an average year.

Furthermore in this changing economy, while increasing the high school graduation rate leads to tremendous benefits for individuals and their communities, simply improving the graduation rate is no longer sufficient. Our country also needs to improve the quality of the high school diplomas students are receiving to ensure they are prepared for success in postsecondary education and the workplace. Projections show that, by 2018, two-thirds of the nation's jobs will require postsecondary education, and the United States will be 3 million degrees short unless significant improvements are made to the nation's education system.

Your legislation, the Secondary School Reform Act, would help to improve high school graduation rates and college and career readiness by providing competitive grant funding to local school districts and their partners to implement district-wide and school based reforms in low performing high schools and their feeder middle schools. The legislation is rightly targeted to schools in need – high schools that have a graduation rates below 75 percent and their feeder middle schools, and do not receive funds from the School Improvement Grant program. The bill also includes an evaluation component designed to ensure that the reform strategies implemented

are carefully examined and that best practices developed as a result of these grant funds are shared with other schools and school districts.

It is especially important that the bill addresses not only low performing high schools but their feeder middle schools as well. The specific academic and social needs of middle school students must be addressed so they are academically and socially prepared for high school and do not fall behind once they begin their high school careers.

In this rapidly evolving economy, successful high school completion is no longer an option, it is a requirement. This legislation provides a competitive source of funding to support the success of the nation's middle and high school students. We thank you for your leadership on this issue and look forward to working with you to advance this legislation.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Excellent Education

American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education

America's Promise Alliance

Civic Enterprises

College Summit

Everyone Graduates Center

First Focus Campaign for Children

Jobs For The Future

National Association of Secondary School Principals

National Association of State Directors of Special Education

National Council of La Raza

National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform

National Indian Education Organization

National PTA

Public Education Network