

January 15, 2021

Recipient: Dr. Miguel Cardona, Nominee for Secretary of Education

RE: Teacher Professional Learning Policy

Dear Dr. Cardona,

On behalf of the 23 undersigned organizations and researchers, we write to congratulate you on your nomination as U.S. Secretary of Education. We are excited that President-elect Joe Biden has chosen to elevate an accomplished leader for racial equity at a consequential time, and we are confident the students and families furthest from opportunity will have a strong champion in you.

As organizations that partner with schools and school systems, we are uniquely positioned to see the work of teachers and leaders across thousands of K-12 school systems and we know that great challenges lie ahead. Our partner schools and school systems are eager for visionary leadership that not only overcomes the immediate threats to learning brought on by COVID-19 but that also supports them to eradicate racial disparities once and for all. We stand ready to work with you to advance lasting change through the transformative power of public education.

While there are many levers available to the Department, we have chosen to focus on teacher professional learning in this letter. We ask for the opportunity to meet with you and your team to inform your policy agenda. Specifically, we would like to discuss the following six concrete actions:

1. Advance Racial Equity Explicitly Across All Department of Education Priorities

WHY: Currently, [family zip code, race, and income determine student educational opportunities](#) and outcomes. COVID-19 has only increased gaps in access to excellent education and learning outcomes with [disparities in access to in-person learning](#). As a candidate, President-elect Biden outlined a bold plan to advance racial equity. Beyond addressing the funding gap between white and non-white schools, advancing racial equity in educational experiences will be key, particularly now that students of color are the majority of students in K-12 schools. This includes advancing a richer vision of teaching that affirms students' identities so that they can grow into successful and emotionally healthy adults.

HOW: States and local communities will play an essential role in defining how teaching should advance racial equity; however, the federal government can play a key role in signaling the importance of teaching in these efforts. This includes public statements that highlight the need to address long-standing racial inequities in our educational systems, as well as highlighting promising practices from states' ESSA equity plans. The Department should also create Title II guidance focused on culturally responsive teaching and supporting leaders in creating inclusive environments to encourage Title II investments in this work, as well as new grant programs that increase culturally responsive teaching and curriculum. The Department could also formally recognize initiatives that advance racial equity through new priorities in the Teacher and School Leader Incentive Program and other competitive grants.

2. Respond to COVID-19 by Meeting Student Needs While Building Educator Capacity

WHY: The pandemic has resulted in a once in a century crisis in education that has interrupted learning for millions of students – disproportionately impacting our most vulnerable students. [Three million students have not attended any form of schooling since March](#), with students of color, students with special needs, emergent bilingual students, and young students most impacted. As the administration plans relief efforts, such as large-scale tutoring efforts, classroom teachers should be included to ensure these efforts are sustained and successful. In addition, teachers will benefit from opportunities to develop new skills and leadership opportunities and earn more money for taking on challenging roles. These include supporting students with greater social and emotional needs and implementing researched-based interventions for students who have experienced gaps in learning.

HOW: As part of COVID-19 recovery funding, the administration should invest in dual-purpose programs that meet the immediate needs of students and simultaneously build professional educators' skills and increase access to teacher leadership opportunities. Examples of such programs include teacher residency programs, summer academies where professional educators have the opportunities to develop new skills while teaching students, and school-year programs that support educators in providing evidence-based scaffolds for students. [TNTP's Good to Great program](#) is a specific example of a model that provides coaching and development to experienced teachers while accelerating learning for students. Leading Educators, New Teacher Center, and Teaching Lab all lead teachers through cycles of inquiry during the school year that build educators' capacity and improve student learning. Beyond teacher learning, the Department can also invest in innovative new programs like linking paraprofessionals and tutors to teacher preparation opportunities, which would simultaneously provide much-needed tutoring opportunities to students and create a pipeline of new teachers.

3. Dramatically Expand Teacher Learning Opportunities for Educational Equity

WHY: As you know, [teachers improve their practice and impact on student learning](#) over the course of their careers. COVID-19-related budget cuts may result in school systems cutting resources and time for high-impact teacher professional learning opportunities right at the moment when teachers need them the most. Specifically, research suggests that teacher professional learning opportunities should be:

- [Content- and curriculum-specific](#), and support teachers in learning to use high-quality curriculum;
- Focused on deepening teachers' understanding and application of the science of learning and development in line with the [National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development](#) and [research reviews on the science of learning](#);

- Focused on addressing [teacher mindsets, including racial and gender biases](#), through practice-based coaching that reverses low expectations, lack of rigor, and more punitive discipline for students of color;
- Organized to include “[follow-up](#)” and are [never “one-and-done”](#), particularly [coaching for teachers](#) and cycles focused on continuous improvement; and
- Focused on [building strong teacher relationships](#) (i.e., social capital) and opportunities for teacher leadership and advancement.

HOW: Federal funding provided to states and school systems, including increases in Title I or Title II funds or through additional stimulus bills, should include funding earmarked explicitly for evidence-based teacher professional learning and leadership development opportunities. States should be incentivized to use funds aligned with what we know works, including allowing sufficient time for teacher learning, aligning teacher learning with content and high-quality curriculum, increasing access to teacher leadership opportunities, and focusing on improving culturally responsive teaching practices.

4. Build the Evidence Base of What Works in Teaching by Incentivizing Innovation

WHY: The Department of Education plays a critical role in building the evidence base of the field, and importantly, getting evidence into practice. Previous Department initiatives such as i3/EIR, SEED, and ESSA have played a critical role in increasing the quality of evidence by providing the strongest funding to programs and researchers with the most robust evidence of impact.

HOW: The Institute of Education Sciences (IES) can launch a new grant program called “Invest in Students through Teachers.” Grants should be provided to teams innovating programs that connect specific teacher improvements to student outcomes that matter. Programs should also demonstrate how they are employing evidence for what we already know works to improve teacher practice and student learning. Innovative programs that generate an impact should then receive support to scale to more school systems, especially ones showing disparities in student outcomes. Beyond funding, the Department can play a key role in convening educators and researchers, facilitating research-practice partnerships, and enlisting educators to serve as ambassadors for getting new evidence into practice. Finally, the Department could fund programs such as [an Advanced Research Projects Agency for Education \(ARPA-ED\)](#) to dramatically increase innovation in education.

5. Reimagine and Invest in School Leadership as Distributed Leadership Across Principals and Teachers

WHY: More than a decade of research shows that well-prepared, well-supported principals have a huge influence on teacher practice and student success. To truly ensure that schools are places of learning for students and adults, greater distributed leadership across school leaders and teachers is also necessary. [Distributed leadership supports strong job-embedded professional learning](#) to occur and [builds strong teacher relationships](#). In addition, it creates a genuine pathway for teacher leadership and advancement, increasing

teacher retention at a time of critical teacher shortages. It also breaks down long-standing silos between administrators and teachers and fosters a shared sense of ownership, necessary to take on the challenges of this current era.

HOW: The Department should convene educators, researchers, and partner organizations to articulate a coherent vision of school leadership that includes an understanding of both the role of the principal and of school-based leaders, including teacher leaders. For example, [Relay Graduate School of Education's Leadership Programs](#) provide high-quality, aligned learning experiences for system leaders, school leaders, and teacher leaders that promote student learning. Additionally, the Department should reimagine and restore funding to the School Leader Recruitment and Support Program, the only federal program with an exclusive focus on evidence-based school leadership interventions.

6. Embrace the Department's Role as a Convener to Accelerate Learning by Connecting Policy Leaders, Educators, Partners, and Philanthropy

WHY: The Department has the opportunity to leverage proof points of success and replicate successful models across states.

HOW: The Department can convene public-private partnerships that sponsor learning across states. For example, CCSSO's Instructional Materials and Professional Development (IMPD) Collaborative has supported a group of 10 states to learn from each other and from Louisiana's model of high-quality curriculum and aligned professional learning. Their convenings shine a light on bright spots across states, such as [Mississippi's success](#) in ensuring all teachers have access to professional learning focused on the science of reading, resulting in dramatically improved literacy across the state, and [Louisiana's efforts](#) to ensure that all students have access to rigorous curriculum and aligned professional learning. Additionally, several states have identified replicable systems for both supporting new teacher effectiveness and [promoting teacher leadership](#) and career advancement. The Department could issue reports summarizing each state's professional learning efforts and work with IES to produce practice guides that support states in replicating effective models.

Now, more than ever, our country requires this foundational and sustained investment in the teaching profession.

Thank you for your consideration of this letter.

Sincerely,

Organizations:

[Achievement Network \(ANet\)](#) | Mora Segal, CEO

[Aspen Institute Education & Society Program](#) | Ross Wiener, Executive Director

[CPRL](#) | Elizabeth Chu, Executive Director

[Education First](#) | Jenn Vranek, Founding Partner

[Education Resource Strategies](#) | Dr. Karen Hawley Miles, Chief Executive Officer

[Instruction Partners](#) | Emily Freitag, CEO

Leading Educators | Chong-Hao Fu, Chief Executive Officer
Learning Forward | Denise Glyn Borders, President/CEO
New Teacher Center | Desmond K. Blackburn, Ph.D, Chief Executive Officer
New Leaders | Jean Desravines, Chief Executive Officer
Relay Graduate School of Education | Mayme Hostetter, President
Student Achievement Partners | Amy Briggs, President
Teaching Lab | Sarah Johnson, Chief Executive Officer
The Leadership Academy | Dr. Nancy B. Gutiérrez, President & CEO
TNTP | Daniel Weisberg, CEO
University of Washington Center for Educational Leadership | Max Silverman, Executive Director
WestEd | Robert Sheffield, Director, Quality Schools & Districts

Researchers:

Brown University | Heather Hill, Jerome T. Murphy Professor in Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and Faculty Affiliate at the Annenberg Institute for School Reform
Brown University | John P. Papay, Associate Professor of Education and Economics and Director of the Center for the Study of Educators at the Annenberg Institute
Brown University | Matthew Kraft, Associate Professor of Education and Economics
Brown University | Nate Schwartz, Professor of Practice, Annenberg Institute for School Reform
Brown University | Susanna Loeb, Professor and Director of the Annenberg Institute for School Reform
University of Virginia | Robert Q. Berry, III, Ph.D., Samuel Braley Gray Professor of Mathematics Education and Associate Dean of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion