

# ***The National Coalition*** ***on*** ***School Diversity***

## **VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL AND U.S. MAIL**

March 9, 2017

The Honorable Betsy DeVos  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Education  
400 Maryland Ave, SW  
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Secretary DeVos:

On behalf of the [National Coalition on School Diversity](#) (NCSD),<sup>1</sup> we write to express our support for the Opening Doors, Expanding Opportunities program<sup>2</sup> (“Opening Doors”), and urge you to make the awards under this program as expeditiously as possible. As evidenced by the large number of districts from all over the country that expressed their intent to apply for the program, there is tremendous interest in this program and what it seeks to do—namely to use school choice to achieve diversity and increase equity in our nation’s public schools. This program gives parents more options, and will help to expand innovation and educational opportunity.

We were excited to hear your recent comments regarding the importance of diversity in American schools. During the Magnet Schools of America 2017 National Policy Training Conference, you eloquently spoke of the “the vital role [magnet schools] played to improve the lives of ... students, combat segregation, and provide a quality option to parents and kids alike.” Opening Doors seeks to advance the same goal: combating segregation in our nation’s public schools, for the benefit of our children and future generations. Furthermore, during your confirmation process, you wrote in response to a question by Senator Murray (D-WA), stating: “I believe government policies should not be established to intentionally create racial isolation, especially in our elementary and secondary schools.”

Opening Doors will help combat the rising resegregation we are seeing take hold in many public schools across the country. As the Government Accountability Office noted last year, while schools serving primarily Black and/or Hispanic students represented only 16 percent of all K-12 public schools, they

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<sup>1</sup> NCSD is a network of national civil rights organizations, university-based research centers, and state and local coalitions working to expand support for government policies that promote school diversity and reduce racial and economic isolation in elementary and secondary schools. We also support the work of state and local school diversity practitioners.

<sup>2</sup> The notice for funding is available at <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2016-12-14/pdf/2016-29936.pdf>.

accounted for the majority (61 percent) of high-poverty schools in 2013-14.<sup>3</sup> Diversity is beneficial to all students, regardless of socioeconomic background or race. As you likely know, research shows that students attending socioeconomically and racially diverse schools have better test scores and higher college attendance rates than peers in more economically and racially segregated settings.<sup>4</sup>

For these reasons, we urge you to award the Opening Doors grants to qualified applicants as soon as possible. Doing so will provide school districts with locally-developed tools that will foster diversity, which will benefit all students and our society as a whole. If any questions arise about this letter, please contact Phillip Tegeler at [ptegeler@prrac.org](mailto:ptegeler@prrac.org) or (202) 360-3906.

Sincerely,

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<sup>3</sup> K-12 Education: Better Use of Information Could Help Agencies Identify Disparities and Address Racial Discrimination (GAO-16-345), <http://www.gao.gov/assets/680/676745.pdf>, p. 10

<sup>4</sup> National Coalition on School Diversity Research Brief 2, "How the Racial and Socioeconomic Composition of Schools and Classrooms Contributes to Literacy, Behavioral Climate, Instructional Organization and High School Graduation Rates," National Coalition on School Diversity (October 2010), <http://school-diversity.org/pdf/DiversityResearchBriefNo2.pdf>

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