

The National Coalition on School Diversity

THREE WAYS TO SUPPORT NCSD'S 2016 LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY CAMPAIGN TO EXPAND FEDERAL FUNDING FOR SCHOOL INTEGRATION

President Obama is proposing a new school integration program in his fiscal year 2017 budget, called “Stronger Together.” The attached two-pager provides details on this proposed initiative as well as the Magnet School Assistance Program, for which President Obama is also seeking increased funding. Since Stronger Together is just an idea at this point, we need to educate Members of Congress about it—and about why diversity is important generally—so that they’ll fund it. Likewise, Members of Congress need to hear why increased funding for magnet schools is a good investment.

We need you to get involved! Here's how:

1. **Connect us with people!** Please let us know if you have any connections to your legislators in the [House](#) or [Senate](#) (or their staff members). Additionally, please share any examples of school districts in your state that have successful socioeconomic and/or racial diversity plans and put us in touch with people leading these efforts.
2. **Lend your voice as a constituent.** Your specific ask is to provide full funding (\$120 million) for the Stronger Together program and for the President's proposed increase to the Magnet Schools Assistance Program (an \$18 million increase for a total of \$115 million). Be prepared to make your ask quickly and concisely. Use the attached two-pager to explain the President’s proposed Stronger Together program and the MSAP and why they are important. Our document provides some points you may want to highlight, but please also include your own experience.
 - Let us know if you’re interested in attending meetings with your legislators and/or their staff in DC. We’ll contact you if and when we schedule these meetings, and invite you to join us.
 - Contact your legislator's District Office to request an in-office meeting when she/he is in town. The Member’s scheduler will typically process the request.
 - The next Congressional recess is from Monday, May 2 to Friday, May 6.
 - If the scheduler says the Member is unavailable, ask to meet with the District Director or a Field Deputy who handles education or appropriations.
 - If you are unable to secure an in-office meeting, find out if your legislators will be having public meetings (such as town halls) while in the District, so that you can attend and ask her/his position on these two proposals. Of course, you can always share your thoughts by calling or emailing your legislator.

ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS: If possible, identify other constituents from the Member’s district who can speak to the importance of diversity and ask them to join you at the meeting (it is usually easier to get an in person meeting with a small group rather than one on one). Be prepared to explain the impact of school diversity on the Member’s constituents/district. *Tell the Member how her/his*

constituents/districts currently benefit from integration programs. Describe the need for these programs, and explain how future funding might enhance current efforts, or support the creation of new ones. When thinking of constituents to attend the meeting with you, you should think broadly. For instance, religious and business leaders and fair housing advocates could provide a valuable perspective, in addition to parents, students, and educators.

3. **Help us build public awareness about these proposals.** There are still plenty of ways to get involved even if you're not able to speak with your legislators. We've listed some ideas below. (And remember: it's okay to offer constructive feedback, like we did in our letters to the [House](#) and [Senate](#) appropriations committees!)
 - Submit an op-ed or article to your local newspaper or another publication.
 - Gina Chirichigno and Philip Tegeler, "[Obama Administration Commits to School Diversity with 'Stronger Together' Initiative](#)" in Milwaukee Community Journal (Feb. 17, 2016)
 - Richard Kahlenberg, "[School Integration's Comeback](#)" in The Atlantic (Feb. 10, 2016)
 - Share information about these proposals with integration supporters in your community.
 - Post on your social media or blog. You can find NCSD on Twitter [@diverse_schools](#).
 - If you are hosting any events about education in the near future, consider inviting someone from the NCSD to participate in the dialogue.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

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The Vital Importance of Programs Promoting Diversity in our Public Schools in the FY 2017 Budget

Description of Stronger Together and Magnet School Assistance Programs

Stronger Together Program

The Administration's FY 2017 budget request includes \$120 million for a "Stronger Together" grant program that we support and that will promote socioeconomic diversity within our schools.

- The program is completely voluntary, and diversity plans would be locally developed.
- Applicants for funds would have to demonstrate strong family and community involvement in plan development.
- Grants are available for both planning and implementation.
- \$2.5 million would be available for National Activities, which would include technical assistance and evaluation.

Magnet School Assistance Program

The Administration is requesting \$115 million for the Magnet School Assistance Program ("MSAP"). This is an increase of \$18.4 million over the FY 2016 level. MSAP is a long-standing program that was recently reauthorized by the Every Student Succeeds Act.

- MSAP uses school choice to promote the elimination, reduction, or prevention of minority group isolation and supports innovative methods to promote diversity.¹
- The increased funding would be used for a new competition giving priority to applicants proposing to make socioeconomic diversity a central factor in their efforts to increase racial integration.²
- The activities under MSAP complement the proposed Stronger Together grant program.

The Need for Programs Promoting Diversity is Significant

Policymakers should be preparing all students to excel academically and should be cultivating students' capacity to engage and interact with all Americans. By fostering bonds among students from different backgrounds, schools prepare them to succeed in a country that will be majority-minority by the middle of this century. The research on the benefits of diversity are clear:

- Students attending socioeconomically and racially diverse schools have better test scores and higher college attendance rates than peers in more economically and racially segregated schools.³
- Racial diversity in schools also carries long-term benefits. These include subsequent reduced segregation in neighborhoods, colleges and workplaces, higher levels of social cohesion, and a reduced likelihood of racial prejudice.⁴

Despite these benefits, 25% of public school students attend schools in which more than 75% of students are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch; and in urban areas, nearly half of all students attend high-poverty schools.⁵

¹ Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as reauthorized by the Every Student Succeeds Act, Section 4401(b).

² FY 2017 Department of Education Justifications of Appropriation Estimates to the Congress, F-81, <http://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/budget/budget17/justifications/f-ii.pdf>

³ 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>

⁴ National Coalition on School Diversity Research Brief 3, "The Impact of Racially Diverse Schools in a Democratic Society," *National Coalition on School Diversity* (October 2010), <http://school-diversity.org/pdf/DiversityResearchBriefNo3.pdf>

⁵ FY 2017 Department of Education Justifications of Appropriation Estimates to the Congress, F-86, <http://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/budget/budget17/justifications/f-ii.pdf>

Educators across the country have recognized these benefits and are taking proactive steps to foster diversity.

- In 1996, only two school districts consciously employed a plan using socioeconomic factors to pursue integration.⁶
- Today, 91 districts and charter school chains, educating over 4 million students, use socioeconomic status in school-assignments plans.⁷ This represents approximately 8 percent of all public school students, living in 32 states. Many of these districts are pursuing both racial and socioeconomic integration. Other districts have plans that primarily seek to achieve racial integration consistent with constitutional guidelines, but that also have the effect of creating socioeconomic integration.

Recommendation for Improving the Stronger Together Program

The FY 2017 proposed “Stronger Together” program is a significant step forward in addressing the socio-economic segregation of our schools. It is important, however, to permit the use of funds for the pursuit of racial diversity as well because policies aimed at socio-economic diversity, without any explicit focus on racial diversity, will not achieve the maximum benefits for society.⁸ Such plans can be developed by communities in accordance with the law as outlined by the Supreme Court. As stated by Justice Anthony Kennedy in his concurring opinion in *Parents Involved In Community Schools v. Seattle School Dist. No. 1*: “This Nation has a moral and ethical obligation to fulfill its historic commitment to creating an integrated society that ensures equal opportunity for all of its children. A compelling interest exists in avoiding racial isolation, an interest that a school district, in its discretion and expertise, may choose to pursue. Likewise, a district may consider it a compelling interest to achieve a diverse student population.”⁹ Another risk of limiting the Stronger Together program to “socioeconomic” integration alone is that excellent programs that include racial diversity as a goal would be unfairly excluded from consideration.

We also recognize that, in many parts of the country, segregation and accompanying resource disparities across district lines are the most compelling school integration challenges. It is therefore important to include state education agencies (SEAs) in any discussion of interdistrict solutions. For this reason, we recommend including SEAs in the final bill language.

To maximize the likelihood of success for this program, we suggest the following changes to the proposed authorizing statute with our additions underlined:

“Provided further, That \$120,000,000, to remain until expended, shall be for competitive grants to local and state educational agencies to develop and implement comprehensive strategies to improve socioeconomic and racial integration in early childhood education programs and elementary and secondary schools, of which up to \$2,500,000 may be used for national activities including technical assistance, evaluation, and dissemination.”

This modest investment will enable hundreds of schools across the country to take meaningful steps to pursue diversity. It is good for the schools, good for the students, and good for the nation.

For further information, please contact Sunil Mansukhani at The Raben Group, at smansukhani@rabengroup.com or (202) 587-2864.

Visit the National Coalition for School Diversity website here: <http://school-diversity.org/>

⁶ Halley Potter, Kimberly Quick, and Elizabeth Davies, “A New Wave of School Integration: Districts and Charters Pursuing Socioeconomic Diversity,” *Century Foundation* (February 9, 2016), <http://apps.tcf.org/a-new-wave-of-school-integration>

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ See, e.g., Johnathan D. Glater and Alan Finder, “School Diversity Based on Income Segregates Some,” *New York Times* (July 15, 2007), http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/15/education/15integrate.html?_r=0

⁹ *Parents Involved In Community Schools v. Seattle School Dist. No. 1*, 551 U.S. 701, 797-98 (2007) (Kennedy concurring), <http://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/boundvolumes/551bv.pdf>