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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-5401

March 16, 2010

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

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Thank you for testifying before the House Committee on Education and Labor on March 3, 2010. I appreciated having the opportunity to learn more about the President's fiscal year 2011 budget for the Department of Education.

I particularly enjoyed speaking with you after the hearing about the Department's plans for administering competitive and formula grants. As I mentioned, not all school districts possess the resources and expertise to compete effectively for competitive grants. I encourage you to consider ways to ensure that districts with high poverty and limited resources are able to compete with wealthier, more affluent districts, such as by creating "tiers" of applicants based on socio-economic indicators.

I was also heartened to hear that any plan to condition a jurisdiction's receipt of formula grants on the achievement of performance goals will take into account the progress that the jurisdiction has made from its initial starting position. Many districts, including Puerto Rico, are striving to increase achievement but will have great difficulty obtaining the same overall level of achievement as a jurisdiction that begins from a position of higher performance.

Because we had only a few moments after the hearing to speak, I want to convey by this letter my concern that the amount of funding allocated to the program authorized under Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) may be inadequate to meet the needs of English language learners. As you know, the Title III program awards formula grants to jurisdictions to provide language instruction to this population of students. The President's budget requests \$800 million for this program for fiscal year 2011. This amount represents a \$50 million increase over 2010 levels, and I understand that this additional funding would be dedicated to competitive grants.

While I support using a certain amount of Title III funding for innovative competitive grant programs, I am concerned that the amount of funding budgeted for formula grants—\$750

million—would leave most school districts with the same amount of money to educate an increasing number of English learners. Not all districts with a significant population of English learners will receive competitive grant funding. If the budget allocates the same amount of money to formula grants in 2011 as was appropriated in 2010, then districts that do not receive competitive grant awards will likely experience a *decrease* in funding per English learner.

For English learners—which are the fastest growing segment of the nation’s school-age population—obtaining fluency in English is the key to future success. Addressing the needs of this group should be a top priority of the Administration and this Congress, both in the 2011 budget and in the upcoming ESEA reauthorization.

Thank you for your attention to these issues. I look forward to working with you during the ESEA reauthorization to improve the education of all of our nation’s students, including English learners.

Sincerely,



Pedro R. Pierluisi
Member of Congress