

BUSINESS COALITION
FOR
STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

March 19, 2009

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

Dear Secretary Duncan:

On behalf of the Business Coalition for Student Achievement (BCSA), representing business leaders from every sector of the economy, we are writing to congratulate you on your leadership in helping to secure a historic investment in our nation's education system as part of the recently enacted American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA).

The ARRA contains a number of provisions which demonstrate that the Obama Administration is serious about education reform. In particular, the BCSA supports provisions in the bill to: reform teacher compensation systems through the Teacher Incentive Fund; work with states on a fund to reward excellence and provide incentives to turn around low-performing schools; improve school technology; increase the use of data by educators to measure and improve education in the classroom; and work with schools, districts and philanthropies to "race to the top" as part of a new innovation fund.

We are encouraged that the Department of Education has included assurances that will help the states bring about reform at the state and local level. Of special importance, we note that the State Stabilization Fund, by far the largest source of education funding in the stimulus bill, directs Governors to make several "assurances" about how they plan to use these funds to improve education in their states. These assurances focus on issues of key importance to the BCSA including: improving teacher effectiveness; establishing statewide longitudinal P-16 data systems; ensuring compliance with corrective actions required for low-performing schools; enhancing the quality of academic assessments required under ESEA, including children with disabilities and Limited English Proficient students; and improving academic content and achievement standards to meet the needs of the 21st century.

The early signs about implementation are encouraging – clearly the Department is on a path to implement the stimulus in rapid and a positive way. However, we would like to raise a concern with guidance released by the Department on March 6, 2009. We are concerned that the Administration appears to be soliciting requests to waive the required set-aside of Title I funds for public school choice and for supplemental educational services (SES). We hope this is not the case.

Currently, over half a million students nationwide receive free tutoring through the SES program, a number that has continued to increase every year. These are children predominately from low-income, diverse backgrounds in underachieving schools. Progress is being made. Indeed some districts are being creative in their outreach through such means as offering open enrollment and offering tutoring during the summer. Yet this is only a small fraction of the total number of eligible students. New funding under the ARRA would permit even more students to receive free tutoring services from among a wide choice of providers - providers who we believe must be high quality based upon real results in improving student achievement.

We urge you to ensure districts use the additional Title I funds under the ARRA consistent with the requirements under the law, including the set-aside of funds for free tutoring.

We commend your leadership in securing a major investment for education as part of the ARRA and are excited about the many possibilities this funding holds for leveraging serious education reform in this nation. To that end, we look forward to working with you and stand ready to help you in this effort.

Sincerely,



Arthur J. Rothkopf

Senior Vice-President and Counselor to the President
U.S. Chamber of Commerce



Susan Traiman

Director, Education, Innovation and Workforce Policy
Business Roundtable

The Business Coalition for Student Achievement – representing business leaders from every sector of the economy – is committed to supporting policies that improve the performance of the K-12 education system in the United States. The Coalition is co-chaired by Craig R. Barrett, Chairman of Intel and Edward B. Rust Jr., Chairman and CEO of State Farm. The Coalition is coordinated by Business Roundtable and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

WWW.BIZ4ACHIEVEMENT.ORG

Co-Chairs: Craig Barrett, Intel; Edward B. Rust Jr., State Farm

Contacts: Susan Traiman, straiman@businessroundtable.org, 202.496.3267; Arthur Rothkopf, ajrothkopf@USChamber.com, 202-463-5938