

February x, 2010

The Honorable Tom Harkin, Chairman
Senate Committee on Health, Education,
Labor, and Pensions
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Michael Enzi, Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Health, Education,
Labor, and Pensions
835 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Enzi:

We, the undersigned organizations, urge you to ensure that authorizing language for Parental Information and Resource Centers (PIRCs) remains in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and to oppose consolidation under Expanding Educational Options budget authority, as proposed under the President's FY11 Budget.

The PIRC program is the *sole* federal program dedicated to engaging families in their children's education. We cannot hope to achieve the President's goal of having the highest proportion of students in the world graduating from college by 2020 without partnering with families. Research demonstrates that family engagement improves student achievement, attendance, and behavior regardless of parents' education level, ethnicity, or socioeconomic background. Teachers have also identified parent involvement as one of the most critical and effective components for improving public education. Annually, PIRCs serve over 16 million parents in all 50 states; almost three quarters of these parents are low-income and over half are parents with children who are limited English proficient.

Schools, districts and states rely on PIRCs for technical assistance and capacity to implement research-based approaches to engage families, such as conducting parent leadership academies, leading professional development for educators on partnering with parents, and placing trained family engagement coordinators in schools. PIRCs set aside almost one third of their funds for evidence-based early education programs that support children and families. Consolidation and proposed elimination would direct funding away from proven and innovative strategies that engage parents and raise student achievement across a child's lifespan and in all learning settings.

Moreover, the consolidation of this program will prevent PIRCs from serving *all* families with children in public schools. The PIRCs do not share the same focus as charter schools and public school choice programs, the programs under which they are consolidated. In fact, 1 out of 5 states lack charter school legislation, which means that without PIRCs, public schools and districts will not have statewide support and capacity to engage parents. As of January 2010, charter school enrollment accounted for only 2.5% of all public school students. The impact of this consolidation would be particularly devastating in rural communities, where there are fewer options for charters and school choice. It is critical that *all* schools and communities have a vehicle for engaging parents to close the achievement gap and drive school reform.

We urge you to safeguard this critical program and support teachers and students through meaningful partnerships between parents and schools. Thank you for your commitment to our nation's children and families.

Sincerely,

National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education

National Parent Teacher Association

Public Education Network

United Way Worldwide

National Council for La Raza

Parents as Teachers

Parents for Public Schools

Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium, Inc