



May 15, 2007

Chairman Edward Kennedy
Committee on Health, Education,
Labor and Pensions
644 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Ranking Member Michael Enzi
Committee on Health, Education,
Labor and Pensions
835 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Chairman George Miller
Committee on Education and Labor
2181 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Ranking Member Howard McKeon
Committee on the Education and Labor
2101 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen Kennedy and Miller and Ranking Members Enzi and McKeon,

We are writing on behalf of the National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education (NCWGE), a nonprofit coalition of more than 50 organizations dedicated to improving educational opportunities for women and girls. We respectfully submit the following comments as you work towards reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act.

NCWGE believes it is possible and necessary to maintain a commitment to high standards and greater accountability in our nation's public schools. However, that pledge cannot be in principle only; it must be accompanied by the federal commitment and financial assistance to make it a reality.

We remain committed to eradicating barriers to equal educational opportunity for girls. As a result, this letter focuses on gender equity provisions that NCWGE urges Congress to include in its reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act.

Improve Opportunities for Girls in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math Education

NCWGE supports promoting and strengthening science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education, especially for girls and other underrepresented populations in these fields. Girls still lag far behind in STEM subjects. According to College Board research, high school girls represent only 16 percent of computer science AP test takers, and National Science Foundation research found that college-educated women earn only 29.1 percent of bachelor's degrees in mathematics and computer science (down from 39.3 percent in 1984) and 24.7 percent of doctorate degrees in mathematics and computer science. NCWGE supports the following efforts to improve girls' achievement in STEM subjects.

Fulfill the Need for More STEM Teachers: There is currently a shortage of highly-qualified teachers and an even larger shortage of highly-qualified math and science teachers. Therefore, NCWGE supported the passage of the 10,000 Teachers, 10 Million Minds Science and Math Scholarship Act (H.R. 362) and similar provisions in the America Competes Act (S. 761). This measure will have a great impact on teacher preparation by providing teachers with much-needed professional development and improve student achievement by strengthening math and science curriculum.

Give STEM Subjects and Activities Preference in After-School Programs: While math and science in after-school programs are authorized activities under Title IV, Section 4205, they are not a program preference. Including STEM subjects and activities in after-school programs allows students to explore the field in a supportive atmosphere and enhances student interest in STEM careers. Research suggests that hands-on experiences with science, math, and technology help girls develop a sustained interest in these fields. NCWGE supports making math and science activities in after-school programs a preferred activity under Section 4205.

Emphasize Math and Science in Early Education, Not Just High School: Studies show that students, especially girls, begin to lose interest in STEM subjects by junior high school. Teaching children about math and science in elementary and middle school is critical not only to improving competency but also to sparking and maintaining girls' interest in the field. NCWGE supports voluntary content standards such as those in the Standards to Provide Educational Achievement for Kids Act (SPEAK) Act (S. 224 and H.R. 325). These standards cover math and science for kindergarten through grade 12 and reflect the knowledge students need to enter college or the workforce and compete in the global economy. In order to build STEM subjects into all levels of curriculum, schools must have access to a qualified pool of teachers. NCWGE supports expanding innovative programs that improve teacher recruitment, training, and retention so that every child learns from a highly qualified teacher.

Measure Student Achievement in Science: NCWGE supports measuring student aptitude in science as well as reading and math. Therefore, NCWGE supports passing the Standards to Provide Educational Achievement for Kids Act (SPEAK) Act (S. 224 and H.R. 325) as a stand alone piece of legislation or incorporating this legislation into the reauthorization of NCLB. Measuring students' achievement in science will provide schools with necessary information on how well students are progressing and the improvements that still need to be made to enhance achievement. The data from such testing should continue to be disaggregated by sex, race, and socioeconomic status and publicly reported. Although testing is an important measure of success, high stakes testing should not be the sole indicator of student competency or a school's progress.

Include the High School Athletics Accountability Act

NCWGE supports the inclusion of the High School Information Collection Act (S. 518) and the High School Athletics Accountability Act (H.R. 901) in the reauthorization of NCLB. This legislation would require high schools to report basic data on the number of female and male students in their athletic programs and the expenditures made for their sports teams. Unlike colleges, high schools are not currently required to disclose data on equity in sports. This makes it difficult for high schools and their surrounding communities to assess their compliance with

Title IX and the status of girls' access to athletic opportunities. As a result, better information can help high schools enhance compliance with Title IX and aid in fostering the continued expansion of athletic opportunities. The need for this legislation is clear. According to the U.S. Census Bureau School Enrollment Data, while girls comprise 49 percent of the high school population, they receive only 41 percent of all athletic participation opportunities, or 1.25 million fewer participation opportunities than male high school athletes. Despite the gains women have made under Title IX, resources for women's sports have never risen to the level of resources allocated for men's sports.

Reauthorize the Women's Educational Equity Act and Fund Title IX Coordinators

NCWGE supports the reauthorization of the Women's Educational Equity Act (Title V, Section 5611-5618). This law was first enacted in 1974 in order to help education agencies and institutions meet the requirements of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. Title IX remains a vital tool in providing equal educational opportunities, and when WEEA is used properly it can provide critical technical assistance to schools as they work to comply with Title IX. In addition to reauthorizing WEEA, it is important that funding for it be greatly expanded. This additional support is needed as many gender inequities persist.

It is also critical to develop a strong national network, based on the provisions in the Title IX regulations for Title IX gender equity coordinators, of informed professionals who know about, and focus on, creating gender equitable education. Prior to 1996, many states had full time Title IX Equity Coordinators and vocational education Sex Equity Coordinators who provided training and assistance to district level Title IX Coordinators – who in turn assisted school level Title IX Coordinators. Today, however, no states have full time Title IX Equity Coordinators. The use of Title IX Coordinators should be re-established with increased rigor and effectiveness.

Improving Graduation Rate Data

Although much of the focus on the need for improved graduation rates has been on boys, its also important for girls. Far too few girls – indeed only 70 percent – graduate with a regular high school diploma in four years. And girls of color have particularly low graduation rates. Over 40 percent of African-American girls and approximately half of Hispanic girls and Native American girls fail to complete high school on time. The individual and societal consequences of these low graduation rates are staggering and the economic consequences are particularly severe for girls. For example, high school dropouts are less likely to be employed and more likely to be dependent upon public support programs. Moreover, female high school drop outs earn approximately \$24,600 less than females with a high school diploma. To address this current crisis in graduation rates, NCWGE recommends the following changes to NCLB:

Promote A System of Uniform Graduation Rates: Although graduation rates are critical measures of a successful school and educational accountability is a central component of NCLB, states currently are not required to track graduation rates through a consistent and transparent system that enables inter-state comparisons. As a result, there are wide gaps between state and local estimates of graduation rates and those verified by independent sources. And even among independent researchers, there is disagreement over the most accurate method for calculating

graduation rates. Fortunately, educators and policymakers have recognized that a reliable and consistent system is necessary; at the state level, the National Governors' Association has made progress in getting all 50 states to agree to a common definition for calculating graduation rates.

NCLB should provide incentives for states to build on their current data systems to allow for systematic, reliable collection, and publication of uniform information on graduation and dropout rates. An important step is to encourage and fund the development of longitudinal data systems that can track student-level data over time, whether students drop out of high school and re-enter at a later date, enroll in GED programs, enter alternative schools, or are placed in juvenile detention centers.

Increase Graduation Rate Accountability: To avoid creating incentives for school districts and schools to meet their Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) targets by forcing low-performing students out of high school early, NCLB requires high schools to meet graduation rate goals as a part of AYP. However, NCLB does not set a standard goal for graduation rates and does not require states to make meaningful and measurable progress. If this problem is not addressed in the reauthorization, it stands to undermine the entire intent of the law and could have the unintended effect of giving schools incentives to “push out” low-performing students whose test scores threaten to lower school averages. Accordingly, NCLB should be modified to ensure that it fulfills the promise of graduation rate accountability by including a reasonable graduation rate floor, with a rigorous standard for exceptions.

Require That Graduation Rate and AYP Data Be Disaggregated and Cross-tabulated by Subgroup: NCLB requires that graduation rates be disaggregated by a number of subgroups, including by race, disability, limited English proficiency, and economically disadvantaged Status. Although most states initially did not disaggregate this information – and some even failed to report graduation rates at all – NCWGE recommends that requirements for disaggregated data reporting be reinforced and expanded in the reauthorization.

First, NCLB should enhance the requirement that graduation rates be disaggregated by subgroup. Currently, schools and school districts that have received waivers from the disaggregation requirement can make AYP regardless of how low the graduation rates of a given minority group may be. This loophole in graduation rate accountability reinforces the exact incentive Congress was attempting to avoid – school districts now may be tempted to ignore racial or other disparities in graduation rates and to continue to “push out” low achieving students.

Second, one subgroup that is currently ignored under NCLB is pregnant and parenting students. Yet research has shown that at least one-third of female students and one-fifth of male students report leaving school without a diploma because of issues related to their pregnant and/or parenting status. To fully address the alarming dropout rates, NCLB should separately track graduation rates of pregnant and parenting students to determine the extent of the problem.

Third, NCLB should require that all disaggregated data be maintained and reported in a format that may be fully cross-tabulated. Cross-tabulation offers valuable insight into whether educational systems are adequately serving subgroups of students and how their situations may be improved. It will enable schools to report and analyze disparities by smaller, more revealing subgroups. For example, cross-tabulation of graduation data will track the number of Hispanic

girls to ascertain their graduation rate and to compare that rate to the graduation rates of Hispanic boys or non-Hispanic girls. And although we have not gone in detail here about ways in which the AYP reporting systems may be improved, we recommend that all reported data that is disaggregated also be cross-tabulated.

Additional Recommendations

Physical Education: NCWGE believes Title V, Section 5501-5507 (the Carol White Physical Education Program) should be amended to ensure adequate physical education classes and gender equity in school facilities and equipment access and usage. Over the past 25 years, the percentage of overweight girls has more than doubled. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 16 percent of girls ages 6 to 19 are overweight, up from 6 percent in 1974, and minority and low income girls have even higher rates of childhood obesity.

Bullying and Harassment: In order to ensure a safe learning environment, NCWGE encourages the committee to amend Title IV, Section 4112 to implement strong policies to deter bullying and harassment. Congress should also provide funding for the identification and use of effective programs for all age levels to combat sexual harassment and bullying. The American Association of University Women's research revealed that 83 percent of girls and 79 percent of boys reported having experienced sexual harassment, and over one in four students stated that harassment happens "often." In addition, although large groups of both boys and girls report experiencing sexual harassment, girls are more likely to report being negatively affected by it. A recent National School Boards' Association study found that half of those surveyed reported that they see other students being bullied at least once a month. More disturbing is that almost half of students surveyed stated that they doubted teachers could stop the behavior.

NCWGE would like to thank you for your attention to these issues as members of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions and the House Committee on Education and Labor work towards reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act. We look forward to working with members of the committees to incorporate additional provisions that guarantee that no child is left behind in American schools. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Lisa Maatz at 202-785-7720 or Jocelyn Samuels at 202-588-5180.

Sincerely,



Lisa M. Maatz
Chair, NCWGE
American Association of University Women
202-785-7720



Jocelyn Samuels
Vice-Chair, NCWGE
National Women's Law Center
202-588-5180

cc: Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
cc: House Committee on Education and Labor