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Agency of Education

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Agency of Education
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Dear School Boards and Educators:

This week the President released his proposed K-12 education appropriations priorities for the federal Fiscal Year 2018 appropriations cycle. These proposals would affect your FY19 budget process. If enacted, this budget would result in reductions in federal funds to school districts – most acutely in school districts with high numbers of students living in poverty--in the FY19 school year. We are forward funded for the FY18 school year.

The President's proposed budget is an opportunity for him to signal about his priorities. It is not the budget that will be approved. Many of the programs that the President proposes to cut are programs that received broad bipartisan support during the reauthorization of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was passed with strong bipartisan support only two years ago, by many of the same members who now will be working on the federal budget. At the time ESSA passed, Congress affirmed its commitment to funding the provisions of this long overdue and much improved version of ESEA. On the basis of that commitment, the Vermont Agency of Education spent the last year engaging stakeholders across the state and developing a state ESSA plan (recently submitted) that was true to the language of the statute. The proposed cuts now threaten our ability to effectively implement the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) as written by diverting resources to new, ill-defined purposes with a weak research base at the expense of our most vulnerable children. We assume that the same bipartisan coalition in Congress that worked so hard on ESSA will want to maintain and support the law as intended.

The Vermont Agency of Education will be working hard with our congressional delegation to advocate for the state of Vermont and in particular, our most vulnerable students. Governor Scott is committed to investments that grow the economy and make Vermont more affordable, but is equally committed to making sure that progress doesn't come at the expense of our most vulnerable, and in particular, our most vulnerable children. The Governor and the Vermont



Agency of Education will be working concurrently with other Governors to fully articulate the potential adverse impacts of the President's budget on Vermont's schools.

The current well-being of our children is essential to the future economic strength of Vermont and the nation. We know many of our school districts depend on federal dollars to give our most vulnerable students the essential support they need to take advantage of the great education opportunities we offer. We see every day the differences these resources can make in preparing students who face adversity. We know that in our highest poverty districts in some of our districts with federal forest lands, federal dollars represent up to 35% of what you spend on education. We also know that many of you, particularly in our small districts, braid federal dollars with state dollars, so losing the federal portion could eliminate entire programs, if you can't make up the difference. We will make the case to Congress that these dollars are a powerful antipoverty tool in our context.

We are a small state that does big things with comparatively little. We do not receive large amounts of federal dollars compared to other states. However, federal support is a critical and integrated component in promoting educational equity. Our historically disadvantaged children are our greatest investment opportunity. A little extra support and attention to their well-being is what enables our children to realize the value of the great education opportunities our state offers.

The budget request proposes \$58.9 billion in discretionary spending for Education, which is a decrease of \$9.2 billion, or 13.6 percent, from the FY2017 funding level recently approved by Congress. Of this amount, \$22.4 billion is designated to fund the Pell Grant program, with a maximum grant of \$5,920 for the 2017-2018 award year. This latter proposed change would affect the affordability of college for our graduates.

We have asked our congressional delegation to do the following:

(1) Adequately fund ESEA Title I, Part A

Vermont has embraced the state flexibility allowed under ESSA to address and reduce the achievement gaps present across the nation; we were among the first in the nation to submit our ESSA plan for consideration and we planned based on current appropriations. These funds provide critical support to our most disadvantaged students.

(2) Provide authorized funding for ESEA Title II, Part A

In Vermont, we use Title II, Part A funding for many purposes. About 50% of our funding supports educators in providing coaching, mentoring and curriculum support to other educators so as to improve the educational experiences of our most vulnerable children. Particularly in our small, isolated rural schools, where overhead is higher, this professional collaboration is an essential improvement tool. In addition, the very small and rural nature of many of our schools makes the impact of the loss of these funds acute. This funding is typically braided with other sources- state and federal- to create full time work.



(3) Adequately Fund ESEA Title IV, Part B, 21st Century Community Learning Centers

In Vermont, our 21st Century Community Learning Centers are critical partners in supporting our most vulnerable students to achieve extraordinary results. There are currently programs in 108 schools, supporting 13,246 students across the state. Over 35% of Vermont's public schools are 21C funded and 59% of regular attendees are low-income students. In a state that struggles with the challenges of affordability and finding enough workers to drive economic growth, in which over 70% of families with children have all available parents in the workforce, losing access to this care will adversely affect the economic goals of the state. We trust that Congress is as committed to maintaining a full commitment to this important program.

(4) Adequately fund ESEA Title IV, Part A, the Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grant

These funds are critical for supporting communities where poverty impedes access to the kinds of "extras" that give learning meaning- whether it be the arts, civic engagement, work-based learning or other educational opportunities that some families are fortunate enough to take for granted. Eliminating these funds perpetuates inequalities that ESSA seeks to end.

(5) Adequately fund the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act

More than 5,500 students participate in our 17 Career and Technical Education centers. CTE is a cornerstone of our flexible pathways to graduation work and a critical component of how we prepare Vermonters for careers after high school. In Vermont, our CTEs are a vital tool for moving students to postsecondary credentials, and play a central role in ensuring our graduates have the skills they need to contribute to the Vermont economy.

We are fortunate that Senator Leahy serves on the Appropriations Committee and that Senator Sanders serves on the Education Committee and will work to protect our most vulnerable children. They will be involved in negotiating any final budget, and both offices are already closely engaged in these conversations. Similarly, Representative Welch has been a strong voice for children and equity in the House.

One of Governor Scott's three main priorities is protecting our vulnerable populations, and in particular, our vulnerable children. With the Governor, I give you my commitment that we will do all we can to be strong advocates for the children who most need our support.

Sincerely,



Rebecca Holcombe, Ed.D.
Secretary of Education

