

May 25, 2007

Senator Jeff Bingaman
703 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Richard Burr
217 Russell Senator Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Edward Kennedy
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Bingaman, Burr, and Kennedy,

Thank you for your leadership in introducing the *Graduation Promise Act (GPA)* to address the needs of America's high schools and ensure that every student graduates prepared for the 21st century.

An increasingly global, technologically-based economy is demanding ever higher levels of knowledge and skills from its workers. In a world in which a meaningful high school diploma has become the *minimum* qualification necessary to support a good job and family well-being, far too many American students are being allowed to fall off the path to prosperity. These problems have escalated to crisis proportions in thousands of the nation's high schools and are hampering the opportunities of millions of students.

Only about a third of the students who enter ninth grade each fall graduate four years later prepared for college or the contemporary workplace. Another third will leave high school with a diploma but without the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in college or the contemporary workplace. Another third will not graduate from high school within four years, if at all. For minority and low income students, the situation is even worse.

The cost of educational failure is borne by individual students, the rest of society, and the American economy. There is a well-documented earnings gap between high school graduates and dropouts, and a growing challenge for individuals with only a high school diploma to find stable, well-paying jobs. Individuals with less education are less healthy, die earlier, are more likely to become parents when very young, become embroiled in the criminal justice system, or take advantage of social welfare assistance from government and other agencies. And just as it has become clear that we must be able to compete even more aggressively abroad, there is mounting evidence that the nation's graduates and workforce are less and less prepared for the challenges and competition they face in the global economy.

To address the needs of the six million students most at-risk of dropping out; the 2,000 high schools known as dropout factories because they produce more dropouts than graduates; and the systemic needs of the American high school system, Senators Bingaman, Burr, and Kennedy have introduced the Graduation Promise Act (GPA). The GPA, based on research and best practice, is designed to fulfill an appropriate federal role as part of a systemic approach to improving America's high schools.

The time is right for federal action. The educational reforms of the past decades have primarily focused on preparing children to learn through early childhood education programs and in providing intensive, targeted supports for students in the early elementary grades. The needs of the nation's secondary schools – and particularly of its high schools – have been ignored for far too long.

The civil rights interest in closing achievement gaps and improving academic outcomes for poor and minority students has converged with the business interest in keeping America's graduates and workers economically competitive. By appropriately extending its education focus to include the needs of students in middle and high schools, this legislation can help move the nation from "no child left behind" to "every child a graduate."

Sincerely,

Afterschool Alliance
Alliance for Excellent Education
American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education
American Association of University Women
America's Promise – The Alliance for Youth
American School Counselor Association (ASCA)
American Counseling Association
ASPIRA Association, Inc.
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
Center for American Progress
The College Board
First Focus
The Freshman Transition Initiative at The George Washington University
Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities
Jobs for the Future
Knowledge Alliance
League of United Latin American Citizens
Learning Disabilities Association of America
Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund
Migrant Legal Action Program
National Association for College Admission Counseling
National Association of School Psychologists
National Center on Education and the Economy
National Council of La Raza
National Education Association
National HEP CAMP Association
National Middle School Association
National PTA
National Puerto Rican Coalition, Inc.
National Writing Project
Project GRAD USA
Sar Levitan Center, Johns Hopkins University, Institute for Policy Studies
School Social Work Association of America
School Redesign Network
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center
The Senior High Alliance of Parents, Principals and Educators of Washington DC
Talent Development Program, CSOS, Johns Hopkins University