

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 27, 2017

The Honorable Betsy DeVos
Secretary
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Secretary DeVos:

As chairs of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC), the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), and the Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC), also known as the Congressional Tri-Caucus, we write to express the importance of the biennial Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) by the Department of Education (“Department”). On December 27, 2016, the Department released a notice for comment regarding a revision of the CRDC published in the Federal Register with ID: ED-2016-ICCD-0147. We believe the CRDC is essential in examining compliance with federal laws that prohibit discrimination based on race, ethnicity, sex, disability, and age. The CRDC provides transparency of school practices allowing all stakeholders to examine the inequities present in their school as they relate to educational opportunities.

In particular, we strongly support the variables related to school quality, climate, and safety measures. These elements are critical to maintain in order to ensure all students have access to a high-quality education free of discriminatory practices. The information gathered by the CRDC has highlighted issues of disproportionate discipline practices that directly impact minority students and students with disabilities. Analyses utilizing the CRDC demonstrate that these students are systematically excluded from educational opportunities through the use of suspension, expulsion, seclusion, and restraint. Without the CRDC, researchers, parents, and policymakers would be unable to hold schools accountable and reduce discriminatory practices. Further, stakeholders must have timely access to the de-identified data. Recently, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) conducted a report using the CRDC to review exclusionary discipline practices. Without timely access to this data, the inequities highlighted in the report would go unnoticed. The de-identified data must remain freely accessible to ensure equitable access to the information by all stakeholders.

The notice provided by the Department on a revision of the CRDC includes new data elements regarding computer science classes and school internet bandwidth. The Department provides justification that the new elements develop a baseline of information about access to computer science and internet as technology becomes increasingly important in education curricula. These new elements will provide insight into the accessibility of high-speed internet in

all schools across the nation and highlight inequities between and among schools, districts, and states.

Thank you for your work to ensure equitable access to a high-quality education for all our Nation's students.

Sincerely,



Judy Chu
Chair, Congressional
Asian Pacific American
Caucus (CAPAC)



Cedric Richmond
Chair, Congressional
Black Caucus (CBC)



Michelle Lujan Grisham
Chair, Congressional
Hispanic Caucus (CHC)