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January 6, 2009

Mr. Arne Duncan
Chief Executive Officer
Chicago Public Schools
125 South Clark Street, 5th Floor
Chicago, IL 60603

Dear Mr. Duncan:

The Coalition of Urban Serving Universities (USU), representing a nationwide network of public urban research universities, extends to you our sincere congratulations upon your nomination as the U.S. Secretary of Education. We applaud your work with the Chicago Public School system and your commitment to improving urban schools.

USU is a network of public urban research universities that represents every region of our country. University presidents created USU to leverage the intellectual capital and economic power of urban universities, thereby improving urban life and America's competitiveness in the global economy. To this end, USU is focused on three major issues -- creating a competitive workforce, building strong communities, and improving the health of a diverse population.

As anchors for our nation's cities, public urban research universities are uniquely positioned and prepared to play a constructive role in working to address the critical talent issues our nation currently faces. Our universities are an essential part of the education pipeline, enrolling large numbers of students from local school districts and specifically training them to be educators in urban areas.

For example, USU is piloting a nation wide-adaptation of a "birth through career" community initiative from Cincinnati in five additional major U.S. cities. Using the convening power of urban university presidents, the project seeks to create P-20 access and success partnerships amongst community stakeholders to ensure that all students graduate from high school prepared for college and successful careers. Living Cities Inc., which is supporting funding for the project, believes USU has an extraordinary model. Increasingly, local and national foundations are investing in the power of

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urban universities and we welcome an opportunity to share our work in replicating our model programs with you.

In the coming year, USU will undertake an aggressive education legislative agenda, which is attached. You will note our federal agenda complements priorities for the new administration, such as teacher residency. This agenda reflects USU's mission that calls upon public urban research universities to escalate urban university engagement and to do so with the clarity of purpose that has characterized large-scale efforts within higher education in the past. The cornerstone of this agenda will be pursuing enactment of a comprehensive legislative package, "The Urban University Renaissance Act of the 21st Century," which encompasses many of USU's education priorities.

Again, USU greatly appreciates your vision and leadership on urban education issues. We look forward to working with you, by offering our policy ideas and access to our many experts, in the years ahead.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nancy L. Zimpher". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "N" and "Z".

Nancy L. Zimpher
Chair, Coalition of Urban Serving Universities
President, University of Cincinnati

Attachment

Cc: Seth Harris, Education & Labor Team Lead
Judith A. Winston, Department of Education Review Team Lead



USU Education Agenda for the 111th Congress

Our nation's cities play an important role in America's national prosperity, driving innovation and economic growth by employing many highly-skilled workers and containing clusters of related firms and industries. However, urban areas face many challenges unique to cities. Their secondary schools experience a higher drop-out rate than the national average and their elementary and secondary students typically score below state and national averages on performance exams. Urban schools often encounter teacher shortages in high-need subject areas such as mathematics and science.

As anchors for our nation's cities, public urban research universities are uniquely positioned with a broad range of skills and resources – intellectual, human, technological, and social – to engage in these urban challenges. They are an essential part of the education pipeline, enrolling large numbers of students from local school districts and specifically training them to be educators in urban areas. Public urban research universities often act as conveners of the various stakeholder groups from their local communities as well as the greater metropolitan areas. Community engagement by public urban research universities not only provides a valuable service to the cities, but also enables these institutions to improve their own core knowledge and expertise that leads to further theories, discoveries, and advances for our nation.

The Coalition of the Urban Serving Universities' (USU) education agenda for the 111th Congress recommends the following:

- Establish a competitive grant program to support the work of local P-20 councils and improve the overall effectiveness of community strategies and reform efforts.
- Establish programs specifically for urban teachers.
 - Create a pilot program for urban school districts and urban universities to design and implement programs to improve teacher effectiveness specifically in urban schools and communities.
 - Create a national clearinghouse for urban teachers to assist with collecting, analyzing, and disseminating information on improving teacher effectiveness in urban schools and communities.
- Expand eligibility and funding opportunities targeted at urban teachers in Title II of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

- Fund the America COMPETES Act’s “Alignment of Education Programs” for states to align their secondary school graduation requirements with postsecondary education and workforce expectations as well as improve their P-20 education data systems.
- Re-establish an urban program under the Higher Education Act.
- Fund the following specific new programs, enacted under the Higher Education Opportunity Act, that are vital to urban universities and their communities:
Partnership Grants for the Establishment of Teaching Residency Programs,
Augustus F. Hawkins Centers of Excellence, Adjunct Teacher Corps, Graduate Fellowships to Prepare Faculty in High-Need Areas at Colleges of Education,
Business Workforce Partnerships for Job Skill Training in High-Growth Occupations or Industries, Capacity for Nursing Students and Faculty, Centers of Excellence for Veteran Student Success, and University Sustainability Programs.