

Representative Virginia Foxx
2462 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Representative Bobby Scott
2328 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

February 16, 2023

Dear Chairwoman Foxx and Ranking Member Scott:

On behalf of the National Parent Teacher Association (National PTA), we thank Chairwoman Foxx, Ranking Member Scott and the U.S. House Committee on Education & the Workforce for holding the congressional hearing on Wednesday, February 8, 2023 to discuss the state of our nation's education system, and offer this letter for the record.

National PTA represents millions of families, students, teachers, administrators, and business and community leaders across all 50 states, Washington D.C., the U.S. Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico and DoDEA schools in Europe. For over 125 years, our association has been a powerful voice for all children, a reputable resource for families and communities, and a strong advocate for improving our nation's education system. As the nation's oldest and largest child advocacy association, National PTA has a rich history of making every child's potential a reality by engaging and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children.

Parent & Family Engagement

We were appreciative that during the hearing on February 8, Chairwoman Foxx, Representative Bonamici, and other Committee Members acknowledged the importance of parent and family engagement in their children's education. Decades of research shows that family engagement matters for student success—students whose families are engaged are more likely to attend school, avoid discipline problems, achieve at higher levels and graduate. Family engagement also helps schools—research suggests it is equally as important as school leadership and a rigorous curriculum in predicting school improvement.

We know that parents and families play an important role in education by acting as key partners in their children's educational success and providing important perspectives on decisions impacting their children and schools. However, far too often when policy is considered and legislation is crafted, family engagement is not directly called out as a critical strategy in achieving desired student outcomes. In 2015, the bipartisan Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was passed and signed into law, making critical

improvements to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, enabling greater transparency for parents in K-12 education and encouraging schools to invest in family engagement. While the law made critical improvements, many school districts still struggle to meaningfully connect with families in their community.

Federal lawmakers should support schools in their efforts to meaningfully share power with parents and caregivers, welcome and communicate effectively with all families, and collaborate with families and the community to support student success. Members of the 118th Congress can strengthen family-school partnerships and invest in meaningful family engagement by passing legislation that:

- Provides funding to incentivize and support family engagement initiatives in schools and communities across the country, including increasing funding for the federal Statewide Family Engagement Centers program;
- Increases awareness of effective family engagement strategies, including expanding research, technical assistance, and training for school personnel on transformative family engagement strategies; and
- Encourages greater transparency with families about decisions impacting their children. This includes proactive, timely and two-way communication in an understandable and accessible format and in a language families can understand.

While we appreciate legislation that seeks to foster greater transparency for families around issues like school curriculum and reading materials, our association believes that any legislation that receives consideration by Congress must not disproportionately impact or exclude certain students, especially LGBTQ+ students and other historically targeted or marginalized groups. Our association has passed several positions related to this concern, including positions on [inclusive curricula in K-12 education](#), [libraries and educational material](#), [institutional racism](#), and [LGBTQ+ students](#). We would welcome the opportunity to share more details about these positions, including the invaluable feedback we received on these issues from parents and caregivers across the country.

National PTA stands ready to assist Congress in these efforts to meaningfully engage families and more effectively uplift the family voice in education. For over 20 years, our [National Standards for Family-School Partnerships](#) have been setting the bar for how schools and parent organizations can most effectively work together to support student success. The Standards are based on the latest research and best practices on effective family engagement and provide guideposts that have been used by PTAs, schools, districts, state education agencies, and the U.S. Department of Education. As

the nation's oldest and largest child advocacy association, National PTA has a rich history of, and expertise in, strengthening family-school partnerships and investing in meaningful family engagement. We have new research and insight into parent priorities and concerns right now and are always happy to support legislative efforts in this area to the best of our ability, providing helpful feedback, engaging key constituencies, and sharing their on-the-ground experiences with your offices.

Family engagement has historically been a strong bipartisan issue. For example, leaders of recent congressional Dear Colleague letters supporting robust funding for the federal [Statewide Family Engagement Centers program](#) include Representative DeSaulnier (D-CA), Representative Thompson (R-PA), Senator Coons (D-DE), Senator Reed (D-RI), and Senator Tillis (R-NC). We look forward to working with Members of Congress on both sides of the aisle to increase funding for this critical program and build meaningful partnerships between our nation's schools, teachers, and families.

School Choice & Private Vouchers

It is during this challenging time that the federal government should focus on providing more resources to our public schools, which serve the vast majority of our nation's students, particularly students from under-resourced communities and students of color, rather than siphoning limited resources to private schools.

We know that private school choice systems have had detrimental effects on our public school systems. Moreover, many voucher programs have proven ineffective in improving students' academic achievement, lack accountability, deprive students of the rights and protections they would receive in public schools, and fail in providing adequate services for students most in need, including students with disabilities, low-income students, and students who are English learners.

It would be a devastating mistake for our nation's education system for Congress to divert public money into any private school choice proposal and/or voucher system, including the District of Columbia private school voucher program. This includes tax credits and deductions for elementary and secondary school tuition and other education-related expenses for public and nonpublic school students. Instead, Congress must not abandon public education and should focus on the improvement of public education for all children. Public dollars *must* remain invested in public schools for the benefit of all students and for the future of our nation.

At the same time, we know that no one educational program is best for all children. Our association works every day with public school personnel and parents to address the

different ways that children learn and how public school systems can provide the best education for all children. We also acknowledge public charter schools as one of many avenues to improving student achievement and support public charter schools, provided the authorizing bodies and schools reflect the positions and principles of National PTA in charters granted and implemented.

For more policy recommendations in the area of school choice, please see our association's [Position Statement Opposing Vouchers, Tuition Tax Credits and Deductions as Systems of Education Aids](#), [Position Statement on Public School Choice](#), and [Position Statement on Public Charter Schools](#).

Postsecondary, Career, & Technical Education

Every student should be afforded every opportunity to graduate from high school while being adequately prepared for and encouraged to pursue postsecondary education, which includes vocational education. We know that postsecondary education substantially increases one's long-term earnings potential, lowers incarceration rates, and benefits society as a whole through lessening the burden on social safety net programs. However, the cost of a postsecondary education is often prohibitive for many, and the availability of non-loan student aid has not kept pace with the need in the face of increased enrollment and tuition, fees, and expenses.

National PTA supports legislation and programs intended to increase postsecondary participation through assisting students' secondary school completion and postsecondary enrollment by providing academic (which includes fine arts) services, parent and student counseling services, and college preparatory services, particularly those programs that will assist students with different learning styles, low-income students, and disadvantaged youth. Our association also supports legislation and programs that foster an economically, culturally, and ethnically diverse student population by increasing federal grants to students and other forms of financial aid, simplifying the application process for applying for all forms of aid, improving and increasing access to information on financial assistance for postsecondary education, and expanding access to in-state tuition levels. Because every student that has graduated from a U.S. high school should have the right, regardless of their learning styles or financial means, to attend a postsecondary institution, providing an economically, culturally, and ethnically diverse student population and a richer education experience for all students.

Our association also understands that Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs provide a career pathway through education for students at all levels of academic

achievement who wish to gain hands-on experience in an ever-widening array of occupations, many in emerging industries that will dominate the job market in the years to come. We know that evidence indicates significant return on investment and economic benefits for state economies and federal funding can cover most, if not all, student expenses related to CTE. Our association supports increased funding for CTE programs, including registered apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs, as well as providing appropriate market-driven compensation for CTE instructors and promoting flexibility in the expansion of career education pathways. We also recommend an investment in educating the public regarding recent changes in the scope and nature of CTE programs and strongly advocate for the recruitment of a diverse population of CTE program enrollees so that all individuals have the opportunity to access, fully participate in and contribute to the national and state economic prosperity.

For more policy recommendations in the area of postsecondary education and career readiness, please see our association's [Position Statement on Career and Technical Education](#) and [Resolution on High School Graduation, College Preparation, and Access](#).

Conclusion

There is much work to be done at the local, state, and federal level to improve our nation's education system. But no single solution will suffice.

Congress must strengthen family-school partnerships and invest in meaningful family engagement, including encouraging greater transparency and communication with families and providing funding to incentivize and support family engagement initiatives in schools and communities across the country.

Congress must enhance school and community safety and prioritize the protection of children and youth, including addressing the ongoing gun violence epidemic and youth access to deadly firearms.

Congress must help schools create welcoming, supportive, and inclusive learning environments for all students, including encouraging the development of inclusive, historically accurate, age and developmentally appropriate materials and supporting every student's mental health.

Congress must promote a safe and positive online experience for children and youth and expand access to technology that fosters learning and well-being.

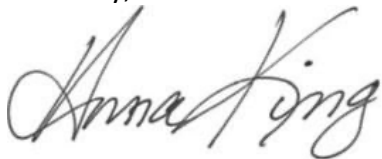
Congress must support successful strategies for academic recovery, including new and innovative approaches such as summer learning and after-school enrichment programs.

And finally, Congress must increase federal investment in public education to ensure all children have access to adequately funded public schools that improve their overall well-being and allow students to reach their full potential.

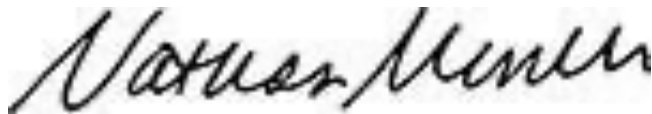
For a deeper discussion of these recommendations, please see [National PTA's 2023-2025 Public Policy Priorities](#).

Again, we would like to thank Chairwoman Foxx, Ranking Member Scott, and the House Committee on Education & the Workforce for holding the congressional hearing on Wednesday, February 8, 2023 to discuss the state of our nation's education system, and are grateful for the opportunity to offer this letter for the record. Please feel free to contact our Director of Government Affairs, Kate Clabaugh, at kclabaugh@pta.org if you have any questions or would like to discuss any of these recommendations further. We look forward to working with Chairwoman Foxx, Ranking Member Scott, and other Members of this Committee to make every child's potential a reality through meaningful federal policy change during the 118th Congress.

Sincerely,



Anna King
President
National PTA



Nathan R. Monell, CAE
Executive Director
National PTA