

**Testimony of David A. Pickler, President**

**National School Boards Association**

**before the**

**Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related**

**Agencies, Committee on Appropriations**

**United States House of Representatives**

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Chairman Kingston, Ranking Member DeLauro, and Members of the Subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to share the National School Boards Association's (NSBA) perspective on federal investments in our nation's students and public school districts.

As President of the National School Boards Association, I speak with the collective voice of more than 90,000 local school board members who govern more than 13,000 school districts educating America's 50 million public school students. Working with and through our state school boards associations, NSBA advocates for equity and excellence in public education. Recently, we launched a campaign called "Stand Up 4 Public Schools," to further expand support for, and commitment to, public education. The intent of this public advocacy initiative is to create opportunities for the tens of millions of public education stakeholders and advocates to seize the bully pulpit, promoting efforts to help every child achieve world-class standards and a brighter future. Public education is the most important function of local government; and, local school districts are collectively America's largest employer with nearly 6.2 million employees.

Locally, I have served as a member of the Shelby County Board of Education in Memphis, Tennessee for the past 16 years, where we are committed to ensuring that every child is reading at grade level and is given the opportunity to succeed, regardless of their circumstances.

I am also the owner of four successful small businesses; and, I understand how important education is to our economy. There is no more important function for a community than to empower its children with a quality education, regardless of their zip code, race or religion.

Specifically, I would like to discuss federal investments in special education; the growth of competitive grant programs; the Administration's recent budget request; and, the effects of sequestration on our schools.

First, the *Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)* has helped address the special needs of millions of students. IDEA was envisioned as a federal-state partnership in which Congress would provide 40 percent of the funding and the states 60 percent. However, the federal share of this commitment has not been achieved yet. In our school districts, the impact of underfunding IDEA has caused reductions to other programs, particularly education reforms, at a time when more innovation is needed. NSBA applauds the bipartisan support in Congress to achieve a path toward full funding for special education and thanks the co-sponsors of the IDEA Full Funding Act (H.R. 4136). We urge your strong support for this legislation and also urge you to designate IDEA as a top priority in the Fiscal Year 2015 appropriations bill.

Secondly, the increase in competitive grants programs has prompted significant concern, in that new programs are being created while foundational programs with proven success--such as IDEA and Title

I grants for disadvantaged students--are at stagnant funding levels. Increasing the federal share of funding for these key programs is paramount. In briefings with school boards whose districts received competitive grant awards, I learned that a number of these districts is forced to devote more time towards reporting and compliance efforts, rather than the gains sought in academic achievement. Equally important, the very districts that have the greatest need for these competitive grant funds do not have the resources and capacity to apply for and leverage such funding. So when these grants are awarded, we could be creating an even greater divide between districts that have the wherewithal and those in underserved communities with fewer resources. Again, NSBA urges you to maximize investments in IDEA and Title I first.

Third, NSBA applauds the Administration's budget proposals to expand access to early education as well as technology resources in our classrooms. These priorities will help prepare students with the 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills and knowledge needed to thrive. However, the Administration's proposed funding levels for Title I, IDEA State Grants, Impact Aid, and Career & Technical Education do not meet the needs of our students and districts.

Fourth, many of our districts employed a range of options to address the loss of funding from sequestration, from staff reductions to curtailing extracurricular activities. Districts reduced professional development for teachers, increased class sizes, cut salaries, deferred maintenance, delayed purchases, reduced course offerings, and altered bus routes and transportation services. Furthermore, our districts that receive Impact Aid funding were affected significantly, and experienced immediate budget cuts. Impact Aid helps school districts that educate children whose parents are in the armed forces, as well as children who reside on Native American trust lands. For many of our Impact Aid districts, federal funding comprises as much as 30 percent or more of their budgets; and,

unlike other districts, they do not have property tax revenues to rely on, given the nontaxable federal lands and installations within their boundaries. Our school districts have weathered the storm; but, the storm cannot and must not continue. Looking to Fiscal Year 2016, we urge you to proactively develop a plan that will protect education investments as a critical asset for economic stability and American competitiveness.

In conclusion, I would like to share these points-of-information from NSBA's Center for Public Education regarding the return on investments in education. For each student who graduates from high school, the U.S. economy realizes an additional \$260,000 in earnings, taxes, and productivity over his or her working lifetime, compared to a student who does not graduate. Also, several studies indicate that for every dollar invested in our youngest students, society reaps at least \$3 in additional tax revenue, as well as significant savings from lower public assistance spending, as students who get a strong start are far more likely to graduate from high school and eventually college. Therefore, your work here is essential to the success of our students and nation.

Again, thank you for this opportunity. NSBA appreciates your leadership and looks forward to working closely with you during the appropriations process. I welcome your questions at the appropriate time.