August 26, 2013

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman
Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Alexander,

Together, the members of the organizations listed below represent tens of thousands of educators across the country. We write in strong support of the language in the Strengthening America’s Schools Act (S.1094), which supports a well-rounded education. College, career, and citizenship readiness is not limited to proficiency in English language arts and math, but also includes comprehensive knowledge and skills in all disciplines required of students after high school graduation. Each student must receive equal access to a complete education that includes instruction in reading, math, science, arts, history, civics, finance, foreign languages, geography, health education, and physical education. A complete education ensures success in the modern workforce and is worthy of being a national priority to support global economic competitiveness.

Learning in each of these disciplines is essential for any graduate to be considered ready for college, career, and citizenship. Delivery of a comprehensive education must be reflected in standards, assessments, and accountability systems. Moreover, meaningful public reporting and accountability requirements regarding student achievement in each of these disciplines should be established at the school, district, and state levels. This would help ensure a strong commitment to providing all students with access to a well-rounded education. Of course, schools, local districts, and communities must also have the flexibility to customize education to meet their unique circumstances.

Each of the “covered subjects” listed in the definitions section—Sec. 4302 of S.1094, Supporting Successful, Well-Rounded Students—is crucial to a student’s learning in its own right, and no one subject should be considered more important than another. The relationship between disciplines enhances learning and understanding for each student. Thus, we propose that your committee report contains language that emphasizes this concept and encourages states and districts to closely examine the need to support each discipline.

We also urge you to include language in the committee’s report to ensure that those who review the well-rounded grant applications at the U.S. Department of Education be experts in the subjects or disciplines for the grants they review. Subject area expertise is crucial to the decision-making process.

We urge you to work together to continue the legislative progress toward a reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act that will help to provide the necessary stability and long-term vision for our nation’s education system. Our members are committed to the success of each learner, and we look forward to
continuing to work with you and your staff to ensure that federal education policy supports a comprehensive education for all of our students so that they are prepared for college, careers, and active citizenship.

CC: Members of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

Alternate ROOTS
American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance
American Composers Forum
American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages
American School Counselors Association
American School Health Association
American String Teachers Association
Americans for the Arts
ASCD
Asia Society
Association of Performing Arts Presenters
Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools
Chamber Music America
Chorus America
Dance/USA
Directors of Health Promotion and Education
Educational Theatre Association
Educators for Social Responsibility
Fractured Atlas
HealthCorps
Joint National Committee on Languages
League of American Orchestras
National Alliance for Musical Theatre
National Art Education Association
National Association for Music Education
National Association of Latino Arts and Culture
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Coalition for History
National Council for the Social Studies
National Dance Education Organization
National Performance Network
Network of Ensemble Theaters
New Music USA
Opera America
Pennsylvania State Multiple Languages Association
Performing Arts Alliance
Save the Children U.S. Programs
Society of Public Health Education
SPARK
Theatre Communications Group