



April 30, 2019

U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202

RE: *Opportunities and Responsibilities for State and Local Report Cards under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as Amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act*

Dear Sir or Madam:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on behalf of Virginia PTA on the non-regulatory information document, *Opportunities and Responsibilities for State and Local Report Cards under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as Amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act*, which the U.S. Department of Education (ED) released in draft form on March 28

The Virginia PTA's twenty-one districts support 240,000 members at local PTAs in 1,025 schools across the Commonwealth. Local PTAs play a crucial role in building strong partnerships between parents and administrators and creating a vibrant community of engaged parents which contributes to the educational success, health, and well-being of our children and communities.

We appreciate the US Education Department recognizing that parents are the most important audience for state and local report cards. Student data provides teachers with a complete picture of strengths and weaknesses of student performance and empowers families so that they can support learning at home and make informed decisions about schools and programs. School data can also help identify school wide needs and broader student population trends to help school divisions make informed decisions about professional development for teachers and staff. Strong data reporting and policies fosters strong communication and deep family to school relationships that support the academic success of our students and builds strong school communities.

Virginia school report cards are robust and easy to read with charts and embedded definitions. However, we feel it's important to mention that many parents can not easily access school report on-line cards due to lack of broadband services. There are an estimated 660,000 Virginians who don't have access to broadband and almost 50% of rural Virginians lack access to high speed internet with 29% not having internet service at all. Income directly correlates with access to technology within a household, which means that many of our families in Title 1 schools or rural locations are likely to be unable to access the report cards. We urge federal investment in broadband infrastructure.

To foster strong communication (and accommodate for potential lack of access), we support principals directly sending the school's report card to families with a required comment on their findings and the school's plans for sustaining performance or driving change. Information regarding unique educational programs, personalized learning or school-wide project based learning should also be included on the school report card.

Due to shifting demographics in Virginia and a renewed focus on addressing systemic inequities across the Commonwealth, Virginia PTA encourages required translation of the school and student report cards into multiple languages and the inclusion of culturally relevant data such as; Ethnic diversity of teachers, Languages spoken by teachers, and Teacher and Staff completion of annual cultural sensitivity professional development courses.

The safety of our students and fostering a positive and mentally supportive school climate is critically important and school report cards should include data about the safety of the school. We urge inclusion of data related to the number of threat assessments conducted, use of restraint and seclusion, use of trauma informed care and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support and clear identification of the parent groups (PTA/PTO/Booster) that support the school climate.

Data transparency and its use is critical to ensuring an ongoing focus on equity and to strengthen the focus on continuous improvement in our nation's education system. Education data such as the information presented in report cards is essential for parents. This data helps parents make important decisions related to their child's education, gives parents the tools they need to advocate on behalf of their children and helps start important conversations on the school, district and state level around education equity. We are pleased that the department recognizes parents as the primary consumers of report cards.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important guidance to SEAs and LEAs.

Sincerely,

Jenna Alexander

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Donna Colombo

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