December 8, 2009

The Honorable Julia Brownley
Chair, Assembly Education Committee
California State Assemblymember
State Capitol, Room 6011
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Race to the Top Legislation

Dear Assemblymember Brownley,

The Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce applauds both the Senate and the Assembly for their focused efforts in ensuring California’s eligibility for the Race to the Top funds. While the Senate and the Assembly have proposed separate bills, the legislature must move quickly to create a bill or package that is passed by both houses and signed by the Governor. California will be judged on its proposal of bold reforms that the Obama administration believes are necessary to dramatically improve the performance of public schools in California. The L.A. Area Chamber supports elements of both SB X5 1 and AB X5 8 and encourages the legislature to work collaboratively in developing a comprehensive package that makes California competitive. Race to the Top is not about incremental change; it is intended to dramatically upset the status quo. Anything short of bold action to reform our schools will be tossed in the trash can in Washington D.C.

Therefore the Chamber believes the following key aspects should be included in the bill or bill package:

Chart Schools:

- Language to remove the cap on charter schools. (SB 1, pg. 12) (AB 8)
- Improved approval process provisions and oversight and for new and existing charters. (SB 1, pg.13)
- New regulation mechanisms for approval and oversight of charters that are not overly burdensome. (SB 1, pg. 13)
- An affirmative responsibility of charters to serve students reflective of the community in which they serve, such as students with special needs, English learners, racial diversity etc. (AB 8, pg. 14)

Standards, Assessments and Data:

- Embrace and adopt the national common core standards to the greatest extent possible.
- Develop a linkage between preK-12, higher education systems and workforce data. (SB 1, pg. 10)
- Re-engineer the state assessment and accountability system which should link the following:
  1. Multiple measures and authentic assessments. (AB 8, pg. 54)
  2. A strong evaluation system with real consequences and incentives between student and educator performance data. (SB 1) (AB 8, pg. 55)
  3. An evaluation system designed that includes multiple measures of student and school performance. (AB, 8, pg. 58)
  4. A plan to eventually align our state assessment systems such as the CAHSEE, which has student consequences, and with the STAR test which has educator, school and school district consequences.
School Turnaround:
- Strategies to incentivize school leaders, teachers and other staff will help create quality learning environments for our students. (AB 8, pg. 52)
- A state commitment that the highest need schools will have quality teachers regardless of seniority. (AB 8, pg. 52)
- Collaboration of higher education institutions to align high school exit criteria and college entrance requirements with the new standards and assessments. (AB 8, pg. 63)

Design of Reform and use of Funds
- An expectation and invitation to local school districts to put forth strong plans for meaningful reform and maximum flexibility of education code and use of the Race to the Top funding for these districts. (SB 1)
- The definition of low achieving schools should be broadly defined to include federal criteria, yet allow for additional state criteria as well. (SB 1)
- Improvement of state performance in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) education. (SB 1, pg. 11)

The success of the California legislature in passing Race to the Top legislation cannot be determined by whether the special interests that are lobbying like or dislike the proposed legislation. It will be judged on whether it includes the kind of bold reforms that the Obama administration believes are necessary to dramatically improve the performance of public schools in California. Finally, it will be judged by the citizens of California based on whether the schools their children attend are significantly better because of the reforms initiated through this legislation.

This is a once in a lifetime opportunity. Generations of Californians will be impacted by the decisions made during the Race to the Top debate in Sacramento. Do not be afraid to be bold.

We urge all members of the Assembly to take a crucial step forward in improving the future prospects of our students, our businesses and our economy.

Sincerely,

Gary L. Toebben
President
Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce

cc: Assembly Speaker Karen Bass
Assemblymember Brian Nestande - Vice Chair
Assemblymember Tom Ammiano
Assemblymember Juan Arambula
Assemblymember Joan Buchanan
Assemblymember Wilmer Amina Carter
Assemblymember Mike Eng
Assemblymember Martin Garrick
Assemblymember Jeff Miller
Assemblymember Jose Solorio
Assemblymember Tom Torlakson
Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger
Senate Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg
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