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September, 2009

Dear State Policy Leader:

On behalf of the National Summer Learning Association (NSLA), I write to urge your consideration of summer learning programs as a component of your state's strategy to turn around low-performing schools through your Race to the Top application and other American Recovery and Reinvestment (ARRA) funds such as Title I school improvement grants.

Summer learning programs have unprecedented support from the Obama administration and Secretary Duncan, who has urged states and districts to invest ARRA funds in summer learning programs. NSLA is confident that the inclusion of summer learning in your strategy to turn around low-performing schools will both help close the achievement gap and boost chances of a successful Race to the Top application.

As you may know, extensive research confirms the concept of "summer slide", where students lose up to two months of grade level equivalency in reading and math over the summer vacation. The summer slide has particularly harmful consequences for low-income students, who lose ground in reading while their higher-income counterparts make gains. In fact, recent research from Johns Hopkins University shows that **two-thirds of the achievement gap in reading is directly related to unequal summer learning opportunities**. High-quality summer learning programs have been proven to eliminate the summer slide and many successful programs result in **gains** of two to five months in reading and math for low-income students.

While NSLA knows summer learning programs are an excellent investment for states and districts interested in closing the achievement gap and turning around low-performing schools, we are thrilled that both President Obama and Secretary Duncan share this belief and have actively encouraged states and districts to invest ARRA funds in summer learning programs. Following are recent comments from both of these leaders:

- During a recent interview, Secretary Duncan was asked if states and districts could invest ARRA funds in summer learning programs. His response was “**Not only can states and districts use recovery money to do this, we are asking them to think very, very seriously about doing this. We think this is one of the best investments they could make.**” (*Education News Parents Can Use, June 16, 2009*)
- During the same interview, Secretary Duncan stated that summer learning loss was well documented, “**devastating**” and that “**...we don’t need more research, we need to do something about it.**” (*Education News Parents Can Use, June 16, 2009*)
- When speaking about the Race to the Top assurance regarding school turnarounds, Secretary Duncan stated that schools “**...must increase learning time for kids during afternoons, weekends, and in the summer ...**”. (*Speech to National Alliance of Public Charter Schools, June 22, 2009*)
- Finally, President Obama, who sponsored summer learning legislation while in the Senate, recently issued a Presidential proclamation celebrating the importance of summer learning, stating, “**I encourage students, parents, educators, and the non-profit community to engage in summer learning activities so that youth return to school poised for academic advancement**”. (*Presidential Proclamation 8935, July 6, 2009*)

As the only national organization focused on the issue of summer learning in high-poverty communities, NSLA, which recently transitioned from the National Center for Summer Learning at Johns Hopkins University, is eager to serve as a resource to states and districts as they determine how to utilize ARRA funds to turn around low-performing schools, including Race to the Top and Title I. NSLA currently works with a number of states, districts, and non-profit organizations focused on the development and improvement of high-quality summer learning programs. Additionally, our staff has extensive state-level policy experience and have worked for organizations such as the Council of Chief State School Officers and Pennsylvania Department of Education, and can assist states in all phases of policy development and capacity building.

Our team would be pleased to further discuss this issue with you and your staff at your convenience. If interested, please contact Jeff Smink at jsmink@summerlearning.org or 443-986-1151. I’ve also provided some additional information on summer learning and ARRA, including two papers written by the Education Commission of the States and our New Vision for Summer School, an initiative recently launched by NSLA.

Thanks for your time and we look forward to working with you to incorporate summer learning into your school improvement strategy.

Sincerely,



Ron Fairchild
Chief Executive Officer

