INSERT SCHOOL/DISTRICT LOGO

*The goal of this template letter is to provide you with suggested language to include in your own letters to state and local leaders. Please customize, edit, expand or reduce based on your needs.*

ENTER DATE

ENTER STATE LEADER NAME
ENTER ADDRESS
ENTER CITY, STATE, ZIP

Dear ENTER STATE EDUCATION LEADER:

INSERT OWN BOILER PLATE <<Magnet Schools of America (MSA), representing approximately 3,800 magnet schools and more than 2.6 million students nationwide>>, believes that school integration by race and socioeconomic status is an important goal that our state should strive to achieve while implementing the new Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). We/I encourage the ENTER STATE Department of Education to seriously consider including progress toward racial and socioeconomic integration in its statewide school accountability system. We further recommend supporting voluntary public school choice programs that feature nationally certified magnet schools as a comprehensive Title I school improvement strategy. Finally, we request that the state utilize new Title IV Student Support and Academic Achievement State Grants to support theme-based magnet programs.

Magnet schools have pioneered efforts to promote racial and socioeconomic diversity in the classroom since the landmark Supreme Court decision of *Brown vs. Board Education*. Based on innovative and theme-based curricula, magnet schools break down traditional school attendance boundaries by allowing families to choose schools that appeal most to their children’s academic interests and talents. There is strong evidence that students who attend magnet schools have higher rates of academic achievement and graduation rates than those in non-magnet schools, these students are also more likely to have higher levels of critical thinking skills, an ability to adopt multiple perspectives, a diminished likelihood for acceptance of stereotypes, and develop more cross-racial friendships.[[1]](#footnote-1)

**Improving Low Performing Title I Schools by Utilizing MSA Standards of Excellence**

Under the Every Student Succeeds Act, states are required to identify schools in need of comprehensive support and improvement. MSA recommends that states and local school districts utilize the Magnet Schools of America [Standards of Excellence](http://www.magnet.edu/files/documents/standards-of-excellence-web.pdf)[[2]](#footnote-2) to promote school diversity and student academic achievement in its lowest performing schools. These standards are based on the [five pillars](http://www.magnet.edu/about/our-mission-and-beliefs) of magnet schools and define the essential elements and characteristics of high-quality magnet programs. They provide the necessary benchmarks for schools and districts to aspire to when developing or working to improve their magnet schools. By embracing these five pillars and standards of excellence as a comprehensive turnaround strategy, states and local school districts will be able to systematically change the learning environments of their lowest performing schools.

**Racial and Socioeconomic Integration as a Factor in Statewide Accountability Systems**

A significant body of evidence indicates that racial segregation and poverty concentration are systematically linked to unequal educational opportunities, and are “strongly related to an array of factors that limit educational opportunities and outcomes….[including] less experienced and less qualified teachers, high levels of teacher turnover, less successful peer groups and inadequate facilities and learning materials.”[[3]](#footnote-3) Due to the clear and significant negative impact racial and poverty concentration have on student outcomes, the State of ENTER STATE should focus on reducing student isolation and factor progress toward integration and student diversity into its statewide accountability system.

For example, the National Coalition on School Diversity[[4]](#footnote-4) recommends that states measure the extent to which individual schools, entire districts, and districts across regions are improving or declining in the racial and socioeconomic isolation and segregation of students over time. Since schools already collect information on the race and ethnicity of students, and have access to socioeconomic data through the National School Lunch Program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, and other sources, reporting on the year-over-year change in these numbers would require minimum effort.

Furthermore, state can use these metrics and trends to reward districts and schools for becoming more diverse and improving regional equity through a special designation or waiver from other aspects of the accountability system. In addition, the inclusion of this information will provide a great benefit to the general public in determining whether schools and districts are making progress toward improved diversity and reduced isolation for students, or if there is a trend toward greater segregation and isolation in the state.

This type of school diversity accountability system is not unprecedented. Last year, New York City passed the School Diversity Accountability Act, which requires the NYC Department of Education to publish an annual report that measures student demographics and the department’s efforts to encourage diversity within its schools. The city law specifically requires the Department of Education to report the actions it has taken to promote school diversity including; strategic site selection of new schools and special programs, considering demographics of neighborhoods when drawing attendance zones, and targeted outreach and recruitment efforts.[[5]](#footnote-5)

**Proving a Well-Rounded Education by Supporting Theme-Based Magnet Programs**
Under Title IV, Part A of ESSA, funding is authorized to (1) provide all students with access to a well-rounded education, (2) improve school conditions for student learning, and (3) improve the use of educational technology in order to improve the academic achievement and digital literacy of all students. As the state begins to develop strategies to achieve these goals, I/we request that the Student Support and Academic Achievement State Grants be used to support theme-based magnet programs in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), Visual and Performing Arts, Foreign Languages, Career & Technical Education, and other innovative programs to promote a well-rounded education for all students.

The Every Student Succeeds Act includes the requirement that state education agencies engage in timely and meaningful consultation with a variety of stakeholders. As a magnet school leader concerned about equity and access to high-quality public education, I request that these recommendations be included in the state’s final ESSA implementation plan. Moving forward, I/we are prepared to provide any technical assistance and/or guidance that is necessary to implement these policy recommendations.

Sincerely,

INSERT NAME
INSERT TITLE

1. *Magnet School Student Outcomes: What the Research Says,* Genevieve Siegel-Hawley and Erica Frankenberg, National Coalition on School Diversity, 2012. <http://www.magnet.edu/files/policy-conference/diversityresearchbriefno6.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Learn about the Magnet Schools of America Standards of Excellence at <http://www.magnet.edu/membership/standards-of-excellence-certification> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Gary Orfield et al., *E Pluribus… Separation: Deepening Double Segregation for More Students* (Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles, 2012) available at <https://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-education/integration-and-diversity/mlk-national/e-pluribus...separation-deepening-double-segregation-for-more-students> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *National Coalition on School Diversity comments on Implementing Programs under Title I of the Every Student Succeeds Act*. Submitted to the U.S. Department of Education - January 21, 2016. <http://school-diversity.org/pdf/NCSD_Comments_for_ESSA_Title_I_implementation_1-21-16.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See the *NYC School Diversity Accountability Act* <http://legistar.council.nyc.gov/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=1946653&GUID=7329D54A-4E94-443D-9411-BCF5CC0C65D8&Options=ID%7CText%7C&Search=511> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)