



Feminist Majority Foundation
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August 2010

Chairman Tom Harkin
Senate Committee on Health, Education,
Labor and Pensions
615 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Ranking Member Michael Enzi
Senate Committee on Health, Education,
Labor and Pensions
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Chairman George Miller
House Committee on Education and Labor
2181 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Ranking Member John Kline
House Committee on Education and Labor
2181 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Harkin, Chairman Miller, Ranking Member Enzi and Ranking Member Kline:

We are writing to request that you include a more effective and better funded Women's Educational Equity Act (WEEA) in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). We represent over thirty national organizations that recognize the ongoing need to fully implement Title IX and advance gender equality, both in and through education. The groups signing this letter include organizations with local chapters as well as national coalitions.

In the spring of 2010 the Feminist Majority Foundation (FMF) and others wrote you requesting your attention to gender equity issues in ESEA. Congressional staff asked us to put our proposals for reauthorization of WEEA into draft legislative language. That draft is attached, along with a two page summary.

We have incorporated principles that are being used to guide the new ESEA, including: greater emphasis on learning about and sharing what works; assuring and measuring accountability for adherence to federal laws; extra attention to the most vulnerable girls and boys, women and men, who often face multiple types of discrimination; and widespread community support and involvement. We have also designed the updated WEEA to help states and school districts fulfill their federal Title IX responsibilities, which have often been neglected during budget cuts such as those facing most districts.

In the 38 years since passage of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, we have documented substantial progress in areas like athletics and in decreasing gender gaps in academic achievement. However there is an ongoing need for the federal government to carry out its unique role in ensuring civil rights. For example:

- There are also still many instances of sex discrimination in all areas ranging from athletics to sexual harassment, to inequities in classroom interactions, which can be prevented if educators and others are aware that they are detrimental to both boys and girls and that they are illegal. Unfortunately, some schools are relying on outdated gender stereotypes, as well as inadequate and even falsified data, to support inappropriate sex segregation in violation of Title IX.

- Few educators, and even fewer parents, understand that Title IX protections against sex discrimination extend beyond athletics. As a result, few schools and other organizations that receive federal financial assistance adhere to the Title IX regulations, especially those relating to Title IX coordinators and their responsibilities.
- Although the Office for Civil Rights in the Department of Education is increasing its enforcement of Title IX, we still need WEEA programs and other federal support for gender equity to work with schools to increase equal education for both girls and boys – thus helping educators avoid legal challenges and create a more equitable society.

The Feminist Majority Foundation, the National Organization for Women, and others who support these improvements have helped design the following new approaches for the reauthorized WEEA:

- Pilot grants to establish Local Title IX Action Networks where school districts, their schools, and gender equity partners in the community would work together to actively advance gender equity – and in the process, develop models that can be replicated across the nation.
- Creation of six national Gender Equity Collaboratives to develop and share programs that work to advance gender equity both in and through education. These Collaboratives would be led by NGOs with expertise in gender equity and work in cluster areas ranging from instruction on Title IX and related equity laws and policies, to increasing participation in fields non-traditional for one gender.
- Grants to states to allow Title IX coordinators to develop state-wide Title IX Action Networks of well-trained Title IX coordinators across their states. These networks would also be required to work closely with gender equity partners.
- An Office for Gender Equity in the U.S. Department of Education managed by an Assistant Secretary for Gender Equity, to administer the WEEA programs as well as to provide leadership and coordination for other equity-related programs.

We estimate that to do these functions well, WEEA would need \$70 million annually.

We appreciate the hard work that goes into the development of comprehensive legislation such as ESEA and urge your renewed attention to achieving equal educational opportunities for all of our children by incorporating our recommendations in the next ESEA.

We look forward to working with you. Please contact Kim Gandy, Vice President and General Counsel or Sue Klein, Education Equity Director, FMF (kgandy@feminist.org & sklein@feminist.org 703-522-2214) and Jan Erickson, Director of Foundation Programs, NOW (govtrel@now.org 202-628-8669 x122) with any questions.

Sincerely,
Feminist Majority Foundation and Feminist Majority, Eleanor Smeal, President

National Organization for Women, Terry O'Neill, President

“Godmother of Title IX”, Bernice Sandler, Senior Scholar, Women’s Research and Educational Institute