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House Committee on Education and Labor
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the 3 million members of the National Education Association, who teach and support students in 14,000 communities across America, thank you for holding this hearing, “Examining the Policies and Priorities of the U.S. Department of Education.” We submit these comments for the record.

We all value an education that instills in students a love of learning, sparks creativity and curiosity, and offers the tools for success. As we mourn the loss of life at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, TX following Tuesday’s massacre, we are reminded of how much our students are depending on us to educate, nurture, and *protect* them. At a minimum, students and educators need to feel safe to engage in the hard work of learning and development. Unless and until we can provide this security, we are failing students across America.

NEA members believe that our foremost responsibility is safeguarding students in schools. They also know that many families are still reeling from a pandemic that has upended our lives—and in this climate, it is important that schools, always vital hubs, continue to be community resources. To strengthen schools, provide educators with what they need to do their jobs well, and offer all students the best public education possible, NEA members believe the Department of Education must prioritize:

- **Full funding of Title I:** Title I provides our most vulnerable students and most high-need schools with important resources. Full funding would help achieve our nation’s promise of equal opportunity for all students.
- **Full funding of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA):** Public schools provide special education services to more than 7 million students with disabilities, about 14 percent of all public-school students. Yet, the federal commitment to pay 40 percent of the additional costs of educating students with disabilities has never been fulfilled. Keeping this promise should be a priority.
- **Full-service community schools:** These schools recognize that many families are coping with serious issues that affect students’ ability to learn and thrive in the classroom. Beyond academics, they strive to offer a full suite of support services, such as health and nutrition services, to meet the full breadth of students’ needs, with broad input from their communities. Full-service community schools need more support to serve all the students that could benefit from them.

In addition, we appreciate the Department of Education’s efforts to hold corporate-run charter schools to the same standards of excellence, equity, and transparency that public schools must follow. This is a

welcome departure from 28 years of weak regulation and four years of Betsy DeVos. The draft regulations for corporate charter schools would force greater accountability and prohibit corporations from taking public dollars to create charter schools run by for-profit companies.

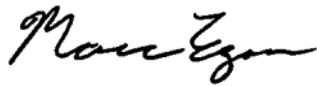
The growth of these corporate charters has undermined local public schools and communities—taking taxpayer money with no oversight or any overall increase in student learning and growth. We are heartened to see the Department of Education taking these very real issues seriously, applaud this effort, and look forward to seeing the final regulations on this matter.

Additionally, we commend the Biden administration and the Department of Education for their tremendous efforts to reform the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program. For years, the PSLF program has languished, failing to deliver on its promise of loan forgiveness to public service workers who meet its requirements. Through the temporary waiver enacted by the Education Department last fall, [113,000 public-service workers have received \\$6.8 billion in loan forgiveness](#). However, the waiver expires at the end of October.

We believe that while the administration and Education Secretary Miguel Cardona should continue working to improve the PSLF program, cancellation of at least \$50,000 in student debt for all borrowers is critical to the financial health of families and our nation. Cancellation of at least this amount of debt per borrower would fully lift the debt from more than half of the educators who currently hold debt and substantially reduce it for the remainder. Today's astronomically high student loan debts, after all, are not the result of financial irresponsibility, but rather of policy choices that reduced funding for higher education institutions and shifted costs to students.

These priorities are important to creating the brighter future that every student deserves and building the kind of society that we can take pride in. We look forward to working with you to achieve these goals.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marc Egan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Marc" being more prominent than the last name "Egan".

Marc Egan
Director of Government Relations
National Education Association