March 3, 2015

California Congressional Delegation

U.S. House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

Dear California Member:

On behalf of the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA), a statewide association representing all California county superintendents of schools, I am writing to urge Congress to adopt a Budget Resolution that prioritizes formula-based grant programs that support core local education services. Our primary concern is that the Budget Resolution will allow funding for ESEA, IDEA, Perkins, and Secure Rural Schools (SRS) to be maintained and increased. CCSESA also believes preschool and Head Start should be budget priorities.

**Formula-funded programs must be Congress’s top priority.**

Actions in the past few years to move away from formula-funded programs in favor of competitive grants have seriously undermined the ability of states and local education agencies (LEAs) to build sustainable programs to serve students. Formula-funded programs authorized by Congress like Title I and IDEA, distribute funds to the students and schools with the greatest need and allow local schools to focus on serving those students rather than writing grant applications to federal specifications.

California’s public schools educate approximately 13% of all K-12 students in the United States and nearly 60% of California’s students are from low-income households. As a result, Title I funding is absolutely critical to the nearly 5,000 California schools that serve students from low-income households. Further, California serves more English language learners (ELL) and foreign-born students than nearly all the other states combined. The migrant and ELL programs included in ESEA are essential to ensuring that our state’s diverse student population receives the additional resources they need to succeed.

When IDEA was originally passed, Congress promised that federal funding would cover 40% of the average per pupil cost to implement the bill. However, since passage, federal funding has provided no more than 17% of the funding for IDEA. In California, county superintendents review and approve the budget of every school district in the state. Our experience is that the unfunded requirements of special education are a huge financial problem for every school district in California. CCSESA urges Congress in its Budget Resolution to recognize the federal IDEA funding promise and allow an increase in federal IDEA support to help pay for the costs of this mandated federal program.

In 2000, Congress passed the Secure Rural Schools (SRS) Act to provide funding for counties and public schools to recover revenues that had been lost due to restrictions placed on business activities in national forests. These revenues are vital to hundreds of small, rural school districts and county offices of education in California. It is a top priority that funding for the Secure Rural Schools Act be continued.

**The sequestration of important education programs should be avoided.**

Although CCSESA appreciates federal budget constraints, we are troubled that the Budget Control Act caps could impose across-the-board cuts upon already significantly under-funded domestic programs. Congress through its Budget Resolution can and should establish priorities, one of which should be the protection or increasing of grant programs that support core educational services – programs like ESEA and IDEA.

CCSESA recognizes that ensuring the financial stability of the budget must be a top priority for Congress and the President. However, it is also critical that the Budget Resolution recognize education as an investment in the future and as a budget priority. Funding for K-12 education is a small part of the overall federal budget, but that federal funding is critically important to the local budget of every school district in California. In determining federal budget priorities, we urge Congress to adopt a Budget Resolution that will maintain or increase those formula grant programs that support on-going services to students, particularly students in poverty and those with special needs. Budget Resolution priorities should strengthen programs such as ESEA, IDEA, Perkins, SRS, preschool and Head Start.

Sincerely,

Peter Birdsall

Executive Director