

April 21, 2015

The Honorable Lamar Smith, Chairman
The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson, Ranking Member
House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
2321 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Smith and Ranking Member Johnson:

The LEARN Coalition (The Learning and Education Academic Research Network), a coalition of Deans of leading research colleges of education, believes that research supported by the National Science Foundation (NSF) is critical to our efforts to improve educational outcomes in the STEM fields. NSF research is vital to our nation's competitive future and we welcome the opportunity to work with the Committee to craft a reauthorization bill that reflects these national priorities.

Unfortunately, we are troubled by certain provisions in the America COMPETES Reauthorization Act (H.R. 1806) that was recently introduced. While we are pleased that there is movement toward a reauthorization of NSF and a recognition of the critical role the Foundation plays, we write to express three concerns: (1) The overall authorization level for NSF does not establish a sufficient goal for critical research funding; (2) The authorization length of 2 years does not provide the research community the continuity and predictability it requires to adequately to develop the strategic planning capabilities needed to address many of the long-term vexing problems NSF funding is designed to address; and (3) the inclusion of specific authorization levels for individual directorates clearly treat certain scientific disciplines differently – a decision more appropriately made by qualified, non-political personnel at NSF.

The LEARN Coalition strongly recommends more robust authorization levels for NSF to send a clear message that Congress recognizes the crucial role NSF research plays in addressing some of the most important scientific problems facing our country, and at times, our world. We are particularly concerned that the legislation freezes the funding level for NSF over the bill's authorization period. In addition, we are troubled by the proposed 45 percent cut in funding for programs under the Directorate for Social, Behavioral and Economic Sciences (SBE). Funding from the SBE Directorate is often used to support important, high-quality research on improving education, a critical need for the nation at a time that we are working to improve K-12 and postsecondary student achievement to help our country become more economically competitive globally. A strong message from Congress on the importance of SBE funding and funding for NSF in general would help colleges of education and other grantees to attract new resources for these research projects, such as state, private or philanthropic resources. This would allow grantees to leverage NSF funds for greater results and impact of research projects. The

authorization level for NSF overall and SBE in specific, in the proposed legislation does not denote this importance.

We are also concerned that a two-year authorization period will not provide sufficient continuity for research programs at NSF and other agencies. A longer authorization period will allow NSF to better plan for and allocate research funds. In addition, the colleges of education we represent, as well as other grantees, would have a better sense of the long-term priorities that Congress and NSF have for research issues in these areas, which would then allow grantees to keep their research efforts focused around these longer-term goals. We urge the Committee to extend the authorization period well beyond FY 2017 as has always been the case in previous reauthorizations.

Finally, as leaders in the field of education research, we know that NSF provides critical support to advance research on learning in STEM subjects. Previous reauthorizations have created a strong foundation for research at NSF and other federal agencies, and have indicated Congress' support for basic research across all scientific disciplines, including education research. We urge the Committee to continue that support in this reauthorization. Setting authorization levels for individual directorates within NSF will hamper NSF's flexibility and ability to respond to the changing research landscape and work in partnership with colleges of education and others in the research field to identify critical priorities.

NSF reauthorization bills have enjoyed bipartisan support in the past and we hope the same can be achieved this year. We thank you for your work on this important reauthorization legislation and hope that the LEARN Coalition can work with the Committee on a bipartisan basis as the process moves forward.

Sincerely,
Co-chairs of the LEARN Coalition:

Dean Glenn E. Good
University of Florida, College of Education

Dean Donald E. Heller
Michigan State University, College of Education

Dean Donna L. Wiseman
University of Maryland, College of Education