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STATEMENT OF RHODE ISLAND ASCD PROVIDED BY THE RI
WHOLE CHILD STEERING COMMITTEE:

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ON

A Whole Child Approach for the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

Statement of Rhode Island ASCD for the
Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
November 20, 2011

Dear Chairman Harkin, Ranking Member Enzi and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony related to the recent committee-approved legislation reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Rhode Island ASCD (RIASCD) is the local affiliate of ASCD, an educational leadership organization with 160,000 members including principals, teachers, professors, and advocates from more than 140 countries and serving members through 58 affiliate organizations such as ours. The nonprofit's diverse, nonpartisan membership is its greatest strength, projecting a powerful, unified voice to decision makers around the world about the best ways to support the success of each learner.

RIASCD is endeavoring to strengthen education in Rhode Island by explicitly linking educational reform infrastructure to the ASCD Whole Child initiative. A whole child approach to education is defined by policies, practices, and relationships that ensure each child, in each school, in each community, is **healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged**. It involves all stakeholders—students, educators, families, and community members—in a collaborative and mutual effort that leads to improved educational outcomes benefiting all involved. We believe that this approach should be the guiding principle for the reauthorization of ESEA.

A whole child approach is grounded in the understanding that no single program or initiative provides the silver bullet for school improvement; rather it is the application of child-adolescent growth and development theory in the context of learning within a specific community that creates opportunities for each child to succeed. A whole child approach challenges educational leaders and policymakers to consider broad implications of education reform agendas.

-A Whole Child Approach to Education and the
Common Core State Standards Initiative, ASCD, 2011.

Research indicates that educational leaders need support to exert a positive influence on factors not always directly within their control and beyond traditional education approaches related to improving teaching and learning. A whole child approach encourages school leaders and policymakers to address issues such as lack of access to health care which impact education, but are not typically considered a role of schools. For example, asthma and other chronic health conditions that are not managed properly can lead to high absenteeism. Children who are not in school cannot learn. Rhode Island's Asthma Control Coalition has developed partnerships and resources aimed at creating home and school environments with no asthma triggers. The Coalition connects children and families to health related resources in and out of school to help manage asthma. The power of the whole child approach is in the collective responsibility and contributions that can help schools meet their fundamental educational mission by addressing issues beyond the school day and school boundaries and yet impacting children and their learning.

An example of this kind of partnership is embedded in the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Healthy People 2020 Objectives that focus on increasing high school graduation rates to 90%. This initiative recognizes the interrelationship between health and academic achievement. Children who come to school ready to learn become adolescents who graduate from school ready to lead productive lives. Overall, achievement in education is a predictor of lifelong health.

The recent partnership between HHS and US Department of Education (ED) on the Early Childhood Education Race to the Top programs is another encouraging example. This federal model promotes similar relationships needed at the state and local level to support the whole child. Many agencies within HHS could support a whole child approach to education. For example the Administration for Children and Families administers evidence-based teen pregnancy prevention programs. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention support coordinated school health programs, tobacco control, and promotion of physical activity and sound nutritional practices. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services provide needed supports for children and families to increase access to healthcare. All of these health components support student learning. Most importantly, this education/health partnership acknowledges that there can be factors beyond teaching that influence how students learn. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration is another Department that could be engaged in the whole child initiative. This department supports mental health, suicide prevention, bullying and other programs that can help create safe and nurturing school environments. The fact that we need excellent educators for every child is indisputable. It is equally irrefutable that attention to health creates healthy, safe, supportive and engaged learning environments to support academics.

Attention to existing connections within The US Department of Education also underpins a whole child approach and the reauthorization of ESEA legislation.

- The Full Service Community school initiative underscores the connection and value of family and community involvement related to the whole child. Community assets are coordinated to serve children and families. Parent support and engagement and a multitude of other services can be offered based on the needs of the community.
- The Office of Safe and Healthy Students supports social and emotional well being for students that enables them to focus on challenging academic work.

Our work has demonstrated that a Whole Child Framework must be the structure within which all educational reform needs to be approached. From ESEA to the Common Core, a Whole Child Framework encourages collaboration and partnerships among organizations, social service agencies, business round tables, legislators, not-for-profits, and many others. Especially at a time when resources are strained, it is imperative that agencies **communicate, cooperate, and coordinate** to better provide for all children especially, those with the greatest needs. In that regard, there is some good news in our state.

RI Full Service Community School Alliance (a group comprised of the State's 10 Child Opportunity Zones) recently received private foundation support to expand this model in other RI schools. The Full Service Schools have improved educational outcomes for students in their schools and have increased family engagement and community support for schools. Each site looks different based on the assets and needs within each community. The effort is driven by standards based on the US DOE's full service community school model.

Funding from the US DHHS's Administration on Children, Youth and Families is supporting the implementation of evidence based teen pregnancy prevention programs in Rhode Island. The Teen Outreach Program will be implemented in the coming year in five selected communities. This program includes 15 sessions of comprehensive sexuality and family life curriculum aligned with Rhode Island's health education outcomes and a community service component designed to connect youth with caring adults. Community service is a graduation requirement in many Rhode Island school districts. This approach recognizes that it requires more than academic learning to support youth in making healthy choices. Youth development literature emphasizes the

important role of non-family mentoring adults and the positive impact they can have in the lives of youth.

The Providence After School Alliance and the Rhode Island After School Plus Alliance have developed nationally lauded programs and standards to create healthy, safe, engaging, supporting, and challenging environments for students in the time after school.

City Year in Rhode Island serves the five largest cities where only 36% of eighth graders read at proficient levels. This puts them at risk as they enter high school and more likely to drop out before finishing. City Year tutors and mentors are powerful role models to youth and help create solutions for community problems by creating environments that support a whole child approach.

RIASCD has partnered with the Rhode Island Healthy Schools Coalition for the past four years. The Coalition is over 100 members strong and focuses its emphasis on nutrition, physical activity and staff wellness in supporting academic success among Rhode Island's school children.

With reference to language in ESEA reauthorization focused on professional development, over the course of this school year, RIASCD professional development will include a Whole Child strand for each session we offer. As an organization, we think it is important to connect each academically themed professional development opportunity to child and adolescent growth and developmental needs. By explicitly making the connection within each professional development opportunity, we underscore how whole child tenets can and must be incorporated into any academic endeavor.

In summary, in the final version of the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, it is critical that the following be stressed:

- The use of the Whole Child Framework as the organizing framework for educational reform
- The emphasis on linkages between child and adolescent health and education
- The benefits and necessity of working in community partnerships to meet the needs of the whole child
- The challenge to other federal departments to explore how their work can support a whole child framework at the federal, state and local levels.

In closing we quote a recent ASCD publication: "True school improvement is hard. It's not about a single passionate leader. It's not about "fixing" teachers and teaching or parents and parenting. It's not about poverty. It's not about money. And it's not about high standards. It's about all of them, and more. Only a whole child approach aligned across curriculum and instruction, school climate and structures, professional development and student learning, can truly ensure that each child, in each school, in each community, will be healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged for long-term success in college, career, and civic life."

We appreciate your consideration of this testimony.

RIASCD Whole Child Steering Committee