



NHLA National Hispanic Leadership Agenda

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United States Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
United States Hispanic Leadership Institute
United States-Mexico Chamber of Commerce
Voto Latino

December 4, 2020

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
Office of the President-elect
Washington, D.C.
Sent via email

Dear President-elect Biden,

The National Hispanic Leadership Agenda (NHLA) has voted to strongly recommend Lily Eskelsen García, former president of the National Education Association, for nomination as the next U.S. Secretary of Education. NHLA is composed of over 40 leading national Hispanic civil rights and public policy organizations.

Eskelsen García is the ideal candidate to lead the U.S. Department of Education in a new direction from the previous destructive practices and policies of the Trump Administration. Her extensive experience in education both as a public school teacher and as the president of the National Education Association (NEA), the largest labor union in the country, has prepared her to understand the key issues currently facing students, families, and educators in the classroom. Furthermore, our public school system is facing an unprecedented and constantly evolving crisis that is widening the education gap for many students of color and low-income students, and the Department of Education requires strong and dynamic leadership to tackle the short- and long-term effects on students' education.

Over the years, Eskelsen García has been a powerful advocate for the nation's public school system, speaking out against injustice, inequity, and the chronic underfunding plaguing public schools, particularly those that predominately serve students of color. In light of the Department of Education's failure over the past four years to defend students' civil rights as well as the Department's active efforts to undo previous protections for students, the Department urgently needs a new leader such as Eskelsen García, who has a long history of promoting equity and civil rights in schools. Eskelsen García is dedicated to serving students regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic background, or zip code, and will address the pressing needs of our nation's most vulnerable students. The appointment of Eskelsen García would reinforce the Biden Administration's promise to invest in our country's youth and work to dismantle systemic racism in our schools.

Eskelsen García has been a particular champion of the rights and interests of immigrant students, from working to guarantee meaningful access for undocumented students to all aspects of education to ensuring that the rights of all English learners to a complete and equitable education are respected. This history is particularly critical following the current Education Secretary, who once suggested to Congress that school districts have a choice about whether to provide an education to undocumented students, contradicting a clear and enforceable 1982 Supreme Court decision in *Plyler v. Doe*.

Eskelsen García would be the first Latina appointed to serve as Secretary of Education. Only two Latinos have previously served in this role, with Lauro Cavazos serving under presidents Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush over 20 years ago, and John King Jr., who served under President Barack Obama, but only in an acting capacity. Latino students now make up greater than one quarter of all public school students from kindergarten through 12th Grade nationwide. Nominating a Latina Secretary of Education would make an important statement about the critical importance of the growing and significant Latino student population. NHLA strongly urges you to consider the appointment of several Latinos to your cabinet, reflecting the diverse population of our country, and to appoint Eskelsen García, a highly qualified candidate, as Secretary of Education.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to us to discuss this letter of support. Your staff may contact the Co-Chairs of the NHLA Education Committee, Thomas Saenz, MALDEF, at tsaenz@maldef.org and Antonio Flores, Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, at antonio.flores@hacu.net, if you have any questions about NHLA's position regarding this or any other appointments. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Thomas A. Saenz
Chair, National Hispanic Leadership Agenda
NHLA Education Committee Co-Chair
President & General Counsel
Mexican American Legal Defense and
Educational Fund (MALDEF)



Antonio Flores
NHLA Education Committee Co-Chair
President & CEO
Hispanic Association of Colleges and
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