

March 1, 2023

The Honorable Miguel Cardona  
Secretary of Education  
U.S. Department of Education  
400 Maryland Avenue S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary Cardona:

In your recent address, “Raise the Bar: Lead the World Initiative,” you outlined the Department of Education’s (Department) vision for academic excellence for K-12 education. As members of the U.S. graduate education community, we appreciate the Department’s dedication to K-12 education and the themes you laid-out in your address. After all, today’s kindergartener is tomorrow’s graduate student. However, we believe that themes included in your address also align with the mission, goals, and core values of the graduate education community. In this regard, the [Council of Graduate Schools \(CGS\)](http://www.cgsnet.org) would like to take this opportunity to share with the Department some of our policy priorities for this year and encourage the Department to make graduate education a high priority.

For over 60 years, CGS has served as the national organization dedicated to advancing graduate education and research. Our membership includes 500 institutions of higher education in the United States, Canada, and abroad representing over 1.8 million graduate students. Collectively, our members grant 87 percent of all U.S. doctorates and majority of U.S. master’s degrees. As an association, we are proud to represent a diverse and dynamic group of higher education institutions ranging from public and private research-intensive institutions to regional comprehensive institutions, Minority-Serving Institutions, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, and Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

#### **Access to Graduate Education and Scholarship**

The first theme mentioned in your address was “Achieving Academic Excellence.” This theme aligns with the vision, core values, and guiding principles found in the [CGS Strategic Priorities 2021-2023 Plan](#). CGS member institutions believe that “graduate education must be broadly accessible to all” and that “the primary purpose of graduate education is to support the learning and professional development of graduate students.” To ensure that prospective and current graduate students have access to high-quality education and training programs, CGS continues to support Department funded programs, including: the Graduate Assistance in Areas of National Need Program (GAANN), the Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program, and programs aimed at promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education.

As you know, **GAANN** provides valuable opportunities for graduate students to conduct vital research and produce scholarship that will meet the nation’s most pressing challenges. As the only grant aid program available to graduate students through the Department, GAANN is a critical source of support for academically talented graduate students who would otherwise face financial barriers in accessing a master’s or doctoral degree. Given the importance of this program, CGS encourages the Department to expand the “areas of national need” to academic areas that are representative of the demand for graduate-prepared professionals across a variety of disciplines. For example, the 2015 GAANN application announcement included: “Area, Ethnic, and Cultural Studies; Biological Sciences and Life Sciences; Chemistry; Computer and Information Sciences; Engineering; Foreign Languages; Mathematics; Nursing; Physics; Psychology; and Educational Evaluation,

Research, and Statistics.” While this list is also not exhaustive, it demonstrates a commitment to supporting a wider variety of areas of national need, which is essential to bolstering our nation’s workforce and global standing. CGS encourages the Department to expand the list of “areas of national need” in the next funding cycle for GAANN.

Promoting **diversity, equity, and inclusion** within graduate education enhances cross-cultural understanding, fosters intellectual collegiality, and enriches the scholarship produced at institutions of higher education. CGS strongly supports programs administered by the Department that enable graduate schools to attract and support students, postdoctoral researchers and fellows, and faculty from diverse backgrounds, including those from historically underrepresented minority groups, first-generation students, military veterans, students from rural communities, and students from the LGBTQI+ community. In this regard, CGS will continue to advocate for programs such as, the Promoting Postbaccalaureate Opportunities for Hispanic Americans program, Strengthening Historically Black Graduate Institutions program, and Strengthening Master’s Degree Programs at Historically Black Colleges and Universities. We will also continue to advocate for the Child Care Access Means Parents in School program. While this program does not get much attention, it provides much needed on-campus childcare centers and financial assistance to graduate students. These and other programs that affect the daily lives of graduate students and their families are a high priority for CGS, and we hope that they are high priorities for the Department.

#### **Supporting Graduate Student Mental Health and Wellbeing**

The second theme mentioned in your address was “Boldly Improving Learning Conditions.” CGS and our member institutions agree that it is important to invest in every student’s mental health. In fact, CGS member institutions are committed to providing educational environments that support the whole student. In our view, students are most likely to succeed when graduate programs recognize that physical, social, and emotional experiences – in addition to academics – are important aspects of any student’s life. In an April 2022 [letter](#) to Members of the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress, we noted that the nation’s graduate schools serve two important and distinctive roles in the mental health arena. First, graduate schools provide a refuge for graduate students and their families; a place where they can succeed academically and find the necessary resources and support to alleviate undue stress. Second, graduate schools educate and train the mental health professionals needed to provide health care services and support to the people in our communities. As the Biden Administration and the Department continues to take steps to address the mental health crisis in our country, please remember the graduate students and their families, who were also seriously affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, please remember that the nation’s graduate schools are the primary educators of the current and next generation of mental healthcare workers.

#### **Opportunities for International Engagement and Collaboration**

CGS is privileged to have universities from other parts of the world as members of our association. We believe that graduate education is evolving in a global context, and we must remain committed to exchanging good practices across national borders. In addition, U.S. universities and graduate schools must continue to be welcoming environments for international students and scholars. To this end, CGS welcomes the opportunity to partner with the Departments of Education and State as you continue to realize the goals laid-out in the 2021 Joint Statement of Principles in Support of International Education. Moreover, CGS will continue to engage the Department and the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress to advocate for international education and foreign language training programs that benefit graduate education, including the Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) Fellowships, the National Resource Centers program, and the Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad program.

Thank you for the opportunity to share some of CGS' priorities for this year with you and your leadership team. If you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact Ms. Amy Scott at [amscott@cgs.nche.edu](mailto:amscott@cgs.nche.edu) or Mr. Nick Cox at [ncox@cgs.nche.edu](mailto:ncox@cgs.nche.edu).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Suzanne T. Ortega'.

Suzanne T. Ortega  
President

## AFFILIATES

Conference of Southern  
Graduate Schools

Midwestern Association  
of Graduate Schools

Northeastern  
Association of Graduate  
Schools

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