



March 8, 2013

The Honorable Arne Duncan  
Secretary of Education  
Department of Education  
Lyndon Baines Johnson (LBJ)  
400 Maryland Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Secretary Duncan:

On behalf of the more than 150,000 members and supporters of the American Association of University Women (AAUW), I urge you to fill the position of a Special Assistant for Gender Equity (SAGE) at the Department of Education.

Representative Louise Slaughter (D-NY) recently urged the Department to fill this position, and AAUW completely agrees. AAUW strongly supports programs that meet the needs of girls and women in elementary, secondary, and postsecondary education, including vigorous enforcement of Title IX and all other civil rights laws pertaining to education,<sup>i</sup> and filling the SAGE position would be an important milestone.

The need for the SAGE position was identified by AAUW in the early 1990s,<sup>ii</sup> and Congress amended the U.S. Department of Education Organization Act to create the position in 1994. The statute states:

There shall be in the Department, a Special Assistant for Gender Equity who shall be appointed by the Secretary. The Special Assistant shall promote, coordinate, and evaluate gender equity programs, including the dissemination of information, technical assistance, and coordination of research activities. The Special Assistant shall advise the Secretary and Deputy Secretary on all matters relating to gender equity.<sup>iii</sup>

Yet while the position remains in the statute, it has not been filled since 2000. We believe now is the time to fill this position.

A Special Assistant for Gender Equity would be critical to the Department of Education's efforts to promote, coordinate, and evaluate gender equity programs, particularly science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education programs. AAUW's 2010 report, *Why So Few?*, found that environmental and social barriers—including stereotypes and gender bias—continue to block women's full participation in STEM fields, prompting many women to leave the field entirely.<sup>iv</sup>

As noted in the National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education's 2012 report, Title IX compliance with regard to STEM education is "essential in order to take full advantage of the potential of our country's best and brightest minds to advance technology and innovation."<sup>v</sup>

Appointing a SAGE who will work on these issues will further the Department's efforts to fight discrimination and promote women and girl's engagement in STEM.

In a global marketplace that is increasingly driven by technology, leveling the playing field for women and girls in STEM is an essential strategy for boosting U.S. competitiveness. Ensuring that all students have equal opportunities is critical to creating an environment where talent and innovation can flourish in our schools, businesses, hospitals, research facilities, and government agencies.

We believe the Department of Education should make gender equity in STEM a priority, and believe that a Special Assistant for Gender Equity is a significant step in that process. We urge you to support funding and filling this critical position.

Sincerely,



Lisa M. Maatz  
Director, Public Policy and Government Relations

cc: Senator Tom Harkin  
Representative Louise Slaughter  
Representative George Miller  
Tina Tchen, Assistant to the President and Chief of Staff to the First Lady  
John Holdren, Director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy

---

<sup>i</sup> AAUW. (2011). *Biennial Action Priorities*. Retrieved March 7, 2013, from [www.aauw.org/resource/principles-and-priorities/](http://www.aauw.org/resource/principles-and-priorities/)

<sup>ii</sup> Education Week. (September 1994). *Idea of 'Gender Gap' in Schools Under Attack*. Retrieved February 1, 2013, from [www.edweek.org/ew/articles/1994/09/28/04gender.h14.html](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/1994/09/28/04gender.h14.html)

<sup>iii</sup> U.S. Government Printing Office. (1994). *20 U.S.C.* [www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/USCODE-2011-title20/html/USCODE-2011-title20-chap48-subchapII-sec3412.htm](http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/USCODE-2011-title20/html/USCODE-2011-title20-chap48-subchapII-sec3412.htm)

<sup>iv</sup> AAUW. (2010). *Why So Few?* Retrieved February 1, 2013, from [www.aauw.org/learn/research/whysofew.cfm](http://www.aauw.org/learn/research/whysofew.cfm)

<sup>v</sup> National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education. (2012). *Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math: Equality Narrows the Achievement Gap*. Retrieved March 7, 2013, from <http://ncwge.org/TitleIX40/STEM.pdf>