

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
June 5, 2017

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:
Bryan Jernigan, Communications Director
bryan@nafisd.org or 202-624-3611

HERITAGE FOUNDATION PROPOSAL WOULD DECIMATE IMPACT AID

Undermines the Education of Military Connected and Native American Students

(WASHINGTON, DC) – The National Association of Federally Impacted Schools (NAFIS) takes issue with a report from The Heritage Foundation published last week that calls for “re-conceptualizing” the Impact Aid program into an Education Savings Account (ESA). The proposal, focused on military-connected students, would undermine the Impact Aid program, including for students on Indian lands.

“Impact Aid works,” said NAFIS Executive Director Hilary Goldmann. “This misguided report would jeopardize the education of millions of students enrolled in federally impacted schools across the country and dismantle a program based on fairness to taxpayers.” Impact Aid funds are flexible and locally controlled, and the program has a proud history of bipartisan support.

Impact Aid is a partnership between local communities and the Federal Government where there is significant non-taxable property, such as military installations, Indian treaty or trust land, low-rent housing facilities, national parks and laboratories. Congress recognized in 1950 that the Federal Government had an obligation to help meet the local responsibility of financing public education in areas impacted by a Federal presence. That same obligation holds true today. Turning Impact Aid into an ESA reneges on the Federal Government’s responsibility to local taxpayers.

“The proposals included in the Heritage Foundation report reflect a profound misunderstanding of the function of Impact Aid,” said National Military Family Association Executive Director Joyce Wessel Raezer. “Worse, they set unrealistic expectations among military families, who will be left holding the bag when the promised ESA’s aren’t enough to finance their children’s education. The Heritage Foundation proposals are a bad deal for military families – and a disaster for the local public school districts charged with educating our nation’s military children.”

“While the Heritage Foundation is eager to find solutions to increase student performance, they continue to ignore the real, long-term negative impacts of their policy proposals,” said National Indian Education Association Executive Director Ahniwake Rose. “Impact Aid is critical for schools and districts that cannot be funded by tax dollars. This funding is necessary to ensure schools have the ability to pay teachers, provide books, and keep the lights and heat on in their buildings. Removing Impact Aid from public schools decimates those schools and negatively impacts the students left behind who lack the

means and resources to pursue other avenues for success. The only solutions that are effective in tribal schools are ones that are tribe and community led, this proposal is anything but. We must invest in our students, not make it harder for them to get a quality education. The only real solution is to invest in these schools so all students benefit. This report ignores fundamental facts in favor of a political agenda."

Public schools that educate military connected children recognize the unique challenges facing these students, such as parental deployment and high mobility. As such, schools work hard to ensure appropriate staffing, programs, and services are in place to support these students. Additionally, the Military Children's Interstate Compact Commission, adopted by all 50 states and DC, allows schools and families to work together on challenges associated with frequent moves, such as credit transfers and graduation requirements. This benefit only applies within the public school system.

NAFIS opposes repurposing Impact Aid and other efforts to undermine the public school system through ESAs, private school vouchers, or portability. ESAs are as much of a concern as voucher programs in terms of their lack of accountability, transparency, and legal protections. Private schools are not required to abide by Federal civil rights and disability laws or comply with the accountability and reporting standards all public schools must meet.

NAFIS looks forward to working with our partner organizations, the Administration, and Congress to ensure that public schools have adequate resources to ensure all military-connected students, and other federally-connected students, receive a high quality education.

NAFIS is a nonprofit, nonpartisan association of school districts located across the United States. Founded more than 40 years ago, the association works to ensure the needs of the federally impacted school districts, and the children they educate, are met through adequate Federal funds.

###