

Statement of Principles on Teacher Quality and Effectiveness in the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

October 7th, 2011

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman
Senate Committee on Health, Education,
Labor & Pensions
731 Hart, Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Kline
Chairman
House Education & Workforce Committee
2439 Rayburn, House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Michael B. Enzi
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Health, Education,
Labor & Pensions
379A Russell, Senate Office Building
Labor & Pensions
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable George Miller
Ranking Member
House Education & Workforce Committee
2205 Rayburn, House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Harkin, Ranking Member Enzi, Chairman Kline, and Ranking Member Miller:

As your work on the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) continues, we urge you to make every effort possible to spur states and school districts to advance new policies that help ensure every child has a skilled, knowledgeable, and effective teacher and every school has an effective leader.

Research shows overwhelmingly that the only way to close achievement gaps – both gaps between U.S. students and those in higher-achieving countries and gaps within the U.S. between poor and minority students and those more advantaged – and transform public education is to recruit, develop, and retain great teachers and principals. As such, a top-notch public education system in turn requires a structure for identifying, nurturing, and rewarding greatness in classroom teaching and school leadership. Unfortunately, most existing state and local systems are not equipped to measure excellence. All too often, these systems accept mediocrity as the fullest extent of a teacher's potential.

We believe strongly that when ESEA is reauthorized it must compel states to create and implement more specific and finely tuned measures directed at improving the quality and effectiveness of teachers and principals and ensuring the equitable distribution of effective teachers across all schools, including those with high proportions of low-income and minority students.

There are other issues that all of our organizations care deeply about, including school turnarounds, the creation of new educational options for children and their parents through charter schools or other innovative models, and equity. The fact that they are not addressed in this document does not mean they are of lower priority.

For our purposes here, we want to focus solely on teacher quality, effectiveness, and equity. As such, we iterate the following principles that we believe are essential to any ESEA reauthorization:

NEW TEACHER EVALUATION SYSTEMS

- All states and districts should begin moving immediately to create teacher evaluation systems comprised of multiple measures that are part a single statewide assessment of teacher effectiveness. Criteria should include, at a minimum:
 - ▶ A state-determined method for measuring teacher impact on student growth in tested academic subjects and grades, as a predominant factor in a teacher’s evaluation;
 - ▶ A statewide model for how local education agencies will incorporate measures of student growth for teachers in non-tested subjects and grades;
 - ▶ Multiple, comprehensive classroom observations per year, both announced and unannounced;
 - ▶ Four or more levels of teacher performance; and,
 - ▶ Evaluations conducted and incorporated in policy decisions at least annually.
- States should be allowed a total of five years to develop their teacher evaluation systems: one year to develop their measures, one year to pilot, and three years to administer to obtain baseline data. Those states that can move faster – including states that have already begun the process pursuant to other federal or state initiatives – should do so, based on where they are when these new requirements take effect;
- Evaluations, once in place, shall be used by districts to tailor professional development and other supports for teachers and shall serve as the basis for human resources decisions, including hiring, staffing, licensure, tenure, compensation, teacher assignment patterns, and dismissal;
- States must monitor and publicly report within-district and between-district inequities by patterns of access to teachers with high evaluations. Specifically, states must examine the distribution of teachers with high evaluations within and between each district by race and poverty of the students they teach;
- States and school districts should develop and implement plans to ensure that schools with high proportions of low-income and minority students have their fair share of highly effective teachers. These must include policies that provide school principals with autonomy in all teacher hiring decisions.

INTERIM STEPS TO EQUALIZE THE DISTRIBUTION OF HIGH-QUALITY TEACHERS

- Low-income and minority students can’t afford to wait 5 years to have fair access to good teachers. Therefore, in the interim, states and districts must use information that they already have to ensure greater equity in effective teacher assignment;
- States should continue to collect and report measures of teacher quality based on indicators in current law:
 - ▶ Percentage of teachers beyond their first year of teaching;
 - ▶ Percentage of course sections taught by in-field secondary teachers; and,
 - ▶ Percentage of certified teachers.

- To make this information actionable, states should create a Teacher Quality Index to help measure progress on these measures both within and across school districts and require districts to develop and implement plans to close the teacher quality gap in no less than five years;
- These plans should include policies that provide school principals in schools with a disproportionately high number or percentage of the least qualified and least effective teachers with autonomy in the hiring and dismissal of teachers;
- If a district has not significantly narrowed inequities in teacher assignment between schools within two years from the date of enactment, the district shall use all Title II funds for the sole purpose of eliminating those inequities.

Thank you for your consideration of these issues. We look forward to continued work with you to revise and amend ESEA to further our shared goal that *every* child has access to a high quality education.

Sincerely,

California Business for Education Excellence
 Center for American Progress Action Fund
 Civic Builders
 ConnCAN
 Connecticut Parents' Union
 Democracy Builders
 Democracy Prep Public Schools
 Democrats for Education Reform
 Education Equality Project
 Education Reform Now
 Education Trust
 Educators 4 Excellence
 Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education
 Hope Street Group
 League of United Latin American Citizens
 MinnCAN: The Minnesota Campaign for Achievement Now
 National Council of La Raza
 NewSchools Venture Fund
 Rodel Foundation of Delaware
 Rhode Island Mayoral Academies
 RICAN: The Rhode Island Campaign for Achievement Now
 State of Black Connecticut Alliance
 Step Up for Students
 StudentsFirst
 Students for Education Reform
 Teach Plus
 50CAN: The 50-State Campaign for Achievement Now