

April 14, 2011

Dear Member of Congress:

Last December Congress enacted a provision, as part of the Continuing Resolution (Section 163 of H.R. 3082), which changed the statutory definition of a “highly qualified teacher” in No Child Left Behind. The provision sought to overturn a 9th Circuit Court decision (*Renee v. Duncan*) by codifying into NCLB, through the 2012-2013 school year, a regulation that had been struck down by the court. The regulation allows states to describe teachers as “highly qualified” when they are still in training – and, in many cases, just beginning training – in alternative route programs. Our concern with Section 163 (and with any federal policy that reinforces the unequal allocation of fully prepared and certified teachers to all students) is that it disproportionately impacts our most vulnerable populations: low-income students and students of color, English language learners, and students with disabilities who are most often assigned such underprepared teachers. Further, this provision disguises this disparate reality from parents and the public by labeling teachers-in-training as “highly qualified.” In January, we urged Congress to repeal this provision and develop a transparent definition of teacher quality, along with a set of policies that will allow the nation to put a fully-prepared and effective teacher in every classroom.

Since then, members of our coalition have met with numerous Congressional leaders and their staff, as well as representatives from the White House and the Department of Education, to discuss our concerns. In those meetings, many expressed an interest in continuing the conversation in the context of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) reauthorization and requested specific recommendations from our coalition. To that end, please find attached a set of seven core principles that we believe should guide the ESEA and Title II Higher Education Act reauthorization processes as concerns teacher quality.

We look forward to working with you in the coming weeks and months to turn these principles into law so that our nation moves closer to achieving the goal of college and career readiness for all students.

Respectfully,

ACTION United
Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment (ACCE)
American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education
American Council on Education
American Association of People with Disabilities
American Association of State Colleges and Universities
American Council for School Social Work
Association of University Centers on Disabilities
ASPIRA Association
Autism National Committee
Autistic Self Advocacy Network
Bay Area Parent Leadership Action Network
California Association for Bilingual Education
Californians for Justice
Californians Together
California Latino School Boards Association
Campaign for Quality Education
Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning
Center for Teaching Quality
Citizens for Effective Schools
Coalition for Educational Justice
Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates
Disability Policy Collaboration, A Partnership of The Arc and UCP
Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund Inc
Easter Seals
Education Law Center
FairTest, The National Center for Fair & Open Testing
First Focus Campaign for Children
Higher Education Consortium for Special Education
Inner City Struggle
Justice Matters
Knowledge Alliance
Latino Elected and Appointed Officials National Taskforce on Education
Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
Learning Disabilities Association of America
Legal Advocates for Children and Youth
Movement Strategy Center
NAACP
NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of State Directors of Special Education
National Center for Learning Disabilities
National Council for Educating Black Children
National Council of Teachers of English
National Council of Teachers of Mathematics
National Disability Rights Network
National Down Syndrome Congress
National Down Syndrome Society
National Education Association
National Latino Education Research and Policy Project
League of United Latin American Citizens
Parent-U-Turn
Parents for Unity
Public Advocates Inc.
Public Education Network
Public Education and Witness
Rural School and Community Trust
RYSE Center
School Social Work Association of America
Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children
Texas Association of Chicanos in Higher Education
United Church of Christ Justice & Witness Ministries
Youth Together

Principles to Ensure Student Access to Fully Prepared and Effective Teachers Under ESEA and HEA Title II

Research indicates that teacher quality is the most important school factor impacting student achievement. Yet, students in low-income and minority schools are far less likely to have access to well-prepared and effective teachers, as are students with disabilities and English learners. In many communities, students experience a revolving door of untrained and under-supported novice teachers who cannot sustain a high-quality education.

To promote and support the creation of a stable supply of qualified, effective educators for all communities, we put forward the following principles for ESEA and HEA Title II reauthorization.

FULLY PREPARED AND EFFECTIVE TEACHERS FOR ALL STUDENTS

1. **All students are entitled to teachers who are qualified (fully prepared and fully certified), as well as effective.** The requirement that qualified teachers should be assigned to all students – and that states and districts make progress to ensuring that all of their teachers are qualified -- should be continued. To meet the “qualified” standard, teachers must have completed a full preparation program and have met full state certification standards in the field they teach.
2. **Teachers in training, if assigned as teacher of record, must be accurately identified, equitably distributed, and adequately supervised.** Where fully prepared teachers are not available, teacher trainees may be hired. In these cases, parents must be informed that their child’s teacher has not completed preparation and has not yet fully met state certification standards, and states and districts must report on the distribution of such teachers, by teaching field and school, and be required to distribute these teachers equitably. In addition, districts must ensure that such teachers and their students are closely overseen by a fully qualified and experienced Supervising Teacher who coaches and observes regularly in the classroom, reviews and signs off on lesson plans and assessment practices, tracks the progress of students, and ensures that the needs of all students, including students with disabilities and English learners, are being adequately met. The Supervising Teacher must be identified to parents and provided with release time and training to serve in this role.
3. **Teacher effectiveness should be evaluated based on valid measures of teacher performance.** For *Entering teachers* (whose classroom performance cannot be fully evaluated for some time), we recommend that, in addition to full preparation, effectiveness be evaluated by passing a robust, field-specific teacher performance assessment that validly and reliably measures whether a teacher can successfully teach diverse students in the classroom. *Experienced teachers* should be evaluated by trained assessors on the basis of professional teaching standards, their joint efforts to improve learning within the school, and appropriate and multi-faceted evidence of their contributions to student learning. The results of these multi-faceted evaluations should be used to guide professional development and personnel decisions: Teachers who do not meet standards of effectiveness should be offered the support necessary to improve, and those who do not improve should be removed.
4. **Any determinations made about the status of an individual teacher (e.g. qualified, effective) should be based on that individual teacher’s demonstrated skill, knowledge and ability.** An individual’s status should not be based on the preparation program or pathway he/she is enrolled in or previously attended.

EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION OF PREPARED AND EFFECTIVE TEACHERS

5. **ESEA comparability provisions should be strengthened and enforced** in order to ensure equitable resources and equally qualified teachers across schools serving different populations of students. ESEA should strengthen and enforce comparability requirements to ensure that poor and minority students, and students with disabilities, do not experience disproportionate numbers of *uncertified*, *inexperienced*, or *out-of-field* teachers. In addition, teachers identified as “trainees” (i.e., less than fully prepared teachers) or “not effective” should not be disproportionately concentrated in poor and minority schools.

POLICIES TO DEVELOP EFFECTIVE TEACHING

6. **Preparation programs should be held to common, high standards.** Credentialing programs should provide general and special education teachers with the content and pedagogical knowledge, skills and expertise needed to support learning for all students. Traditional and alternative route certification programs should be held accountable for both program quality and multiple indicators of graduates’ ability to teach successfully. Programs that do not meet standards should have an opportunity to improve, and if no improvement is shown over a reasonable period of time, they should be closed.
7. **Investments should be made in proven methods to recruit, prepare, develop and retain fully prepared and effective teachers in shortage fields and hard to staff schools.**
 - a. Expand and redesign the TEACH grants program so that it offers larger, more easily accessed grants to individuals preparing to enter teaching who will stay in high-need fields and locations for at least 4 years.
 - b. Use the Public Interest component of the Direct Student Loan program as a recruitment and retention tool by underwriting the first three years of loan payments for individuals who prepare for and enter teaching in Title I schools.
 - c. Fully fund the Teacher Quality Partnership grants under Title II of HEA (authorized at \$300 million annually) that support teacher residency programs and partnership school initiatives.
 - d. Increase investments in personnel preparation for special education and related service providers under IDEA, and for teachers of English learners under Title III of ESEA.
 - e. Invest in Grow-Your-Own programs, especially in high need communities, as well as teacher education programs in Minority-Serving Institutions that will prepare a strong pipeline of teachers and leaders in minority, low-income and rural communities.
 - f. Increase investments in high-quality professional development for all educators under Title II of ESEA, and ensure that educators have opportunities to learn to teach diverse students well.
 - g. Focus school turnaround efforts and teacher incentives on conditions that influence teacher retention and effectiveness: productive working conditions, effective instructional leadership, job-embedded professional development, mentoring, coaching, and time for collaboration.
 - h. Invest in the preparation and retention of expert principals and offer stipends for National Board Certified Teachers and those who take on master or mentor teaching roles in high-need schools