

*Teacher Education Division  
Council for Exceptional  
Children*



September 14, 2012

Honorable Jack Reed  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Mike Honda  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Reed and Representative Honda:

We write to offer strong support for the legislation you have authored to reauthorize Title II of the Higher Education Act and strengthen educator preparation throughout our nation, the *Educator Preparation Reform Act*. Our organizations are dedicated to ensuring that students with disabilities have teachers and leaders who are well prepared to deliver instruction and leadership that will develop students with the skills needed for college and career readiness in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Your bill moves us toward this goal.

The Higher Education Consortium for Special Education (HECSE) is comprised of 65 universities with doctoral programs in special education. Our member institutions are at the forefront of teacher education, research and development in special education. We work extensively with local and state education agencies to ensure that teachers and other professionals have the skills they need to provide a free appropriate public education to all students with disabilities.

The Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children focuses on supporting children, youth, and families of individuals with exceptionalities by preparing special educators. Our membership of over 2000 individuals canvases the United States and is the largest professional organization in the nation representing those who prepare special education teachers and teacher educators.

Despite the productivity of our programs, shortages in special education remain in many school districts, particularly those in urban and rural areas. We know that preparation is most effective when a strong clinical program is at the heart of that preparation. Partnering with high need schools and assuring a commitment from program graduates to teach in those schools is an effective way to address the shortages. We are in strong support of these components of your legislation.

Special education candidates are big users of the Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education (TEACH) grants. Targeting those grants to juniors, seniors and graduate students will strengthen the program. Tailoring the repayment of an unfulfilled service

obligation to the extent of TEACH grant funding is also a step in the right direction to further sustain the program.

Establishing a transparent and structured state process to determine at-risk and low-performing programs will also serve to strengthen the field. The state is best positioned to make these determinations and the addition of a required timeline and transparent process will render this process a meaningful accountability scheme for teacher preparation.

During recent years, leaders of special education preparation programs have made significant progress in strengthening their programs. Preparing special educators to utilize evidence based strategies, such as Response to Intervention (RTI), Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) are important strides forward. An increased focus on preparing general education teachers to instruct students with disabilities is also an important trend underway.

Research tells us that the most important school-based factors for raising student achievement and turning around struggling schools are teacher quality and school leadership. Your legislation seeks to ensure that the future teachers and leaders in our highest need schools are prepared to be effective in the classroom and in the school. We look forward to working with you to advance this cause.

Sincerely,



Suzanne Robinson, TED President  
University of Kansas



Harvey Rude, HECSE President  
University of Northern Colorado

# **The Educator Preparation Reform Act**

## **Senator Jack Reed and Representative Mike Honda**

A bill to improve the quality of teaching in high need schools by reforming and strengthening accountability of educator preparation programs, and supporting partnerships to meet the needs of educators and educational leaders

### **Overview**

Research has shown that the most important school-based factors for improving student outcomes and turning around struggling schools are teacher quality and school leadership. The Educator Preparation Reform Act will improve accountability for teacher preparation programs by requiring reporting on program features that are related to future success in the classroom such as admissions standards, clinical preparation requirements, and outcome measures such as placement, retention, and performance. It makes significant improvements to the Teacher Quality Partnership Grants in Title II of the Higher Education Act by expanding the residency programs to include principals and providing partnerships flexibility in meeting the instructional needs of local school districts. The bill reforms the TEACH Grants to target student eligibility to those in the latter half of their preparation at the undergraduate level or those in graduate programs and restricts eligibility for grants at institutions designated as “low- performing” or “at risk.”

### **Key Provisions**

#### ***Improves the Teacher Quality Partnership Grants Program***

Maintains the core mechanism of the program providing for partnerships between institutions of higher education, high-need LEAs, and high-need schools to recruit and prepare teachers, principals, and other educators who commit to serve at least three years in a high need school. Requires that partnership grants be used to reform undergraduate teacher preparation programs, establish teacher or principal residency programs, or a combination of those activities. Allows partnership grants to support and improve programs to develop other educators needed by school districts, such as librarians, literacy specialists, and school counselors.

#### ***Strengthens Accountability for Programs that Prepare Teachers***

Requires all teacher preparation entities – higher education and non-higher education based – to submit report cards to the public with key indicators of program quality and performance. Offers states and institutions the option to utilize a valid and reliable teacher performance assessment to determine candidate readiness.

Requires reporting on candidate selectivity as measured by grade point averages for admitted students and scores on standardized admissions tests. Collects data about clinical preparation, a key component of effective preparation programs. Requires institutions to report on the availability of outcome data on program graduates and report that data, as applicable.

Strengthens the current state requirement to identify and report low-performing programs by requiring states to provide technical assistance to low-performing programs and to report programs that have been closed. Clarifies that it is the state’s responsibility to develop criteria for determining program performance levels in consultation with stakeholders and that the criteria must be submitted for public comment.

***Coordinates Elementary and Secondary Education Act Teacher Quality Initiatives with Educator Preparation Education Programs***

Requires that states use the 2.5 percent set aside under the ESEA Title II teacher quality state formula grant to:

develop and implement teacher performance assessments to determine the readiness of new teachers to be effective in the classroom; provide technical assistance to low-performing preparation programs; and develop a system for assessing the quality and effectiveness of professional development programs.

***Reforms TEACH Grants in Title IV of the Higher Education Act***

Amends the TEACH Grants to limit the eligibility for grants to juniors, seniors, and master's degree level students. Restricts institutional eligibility for institutions designated as "low performing" or "at-risk" by the state.

Allows for partial payback based on the length of service completed for TEACH Grant recipients who do not finish the four-year service requirement.

***Organizations supporting the Educator Preparation Reform Act***

Alliance for Excellent Education American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education American Association of State Colleges and Universities American Council on Education American Psychological Association Association of American Universities Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities Association of Public and Land-grant Universities Council for Christian Colleges and Universities First Focus Campaign for Children Higher Education Consortium for Special Education Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education National Association of Elementary School Principals National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities National Association of Secondary School Principals National Association of State Directors of Special Education National Council of Teachers of Mathematics National Science Teachers Association National School Boards Association Opportunity to Learn Action Fund Public Education Network Rural School and Community Trust Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children