



Remarks of Bootsie Battle-Holt

To the U.S. Department of Education on ESSA Implementation

January 19, 2016

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Bootsie Battle-Holt. I am a middle school math teacher at Marina del Rey Middle School and Performing Arts Magnet, a Title 1 school in LAUSD.

I applaud the ESSA for including several opportunities that have the potential to positively impact my students. There is some particularly promising language concerning re-evaluating student testing, so that assessments are fair, accurate and worthwhile; holding all stakeholders accountable for student growth; and the resources provided to my students under Title 1.

Additionally, there is one consideration that I am excited has been written into this Act because it has not been part of prior legislation. That is the support of teacher leadership.

What's exciting is that this support affirms that teachers are made stronger and are better able to help students when we collaborate. Teaching has long been thought of as an individual pursuit. Many envision a lone teacher in a single room as students filter in and out. Often times, even when a curriculum has been designed so that many teachers are teaching from the same page at the same time, the

nuances and practices that create varying levels of success from one classroom to another are misunderstood without collaboration.

I have been lucky since the beginning of my teaching career. My first assignment was first grade and my colleagues at Paseo del Rey Elementary School had already cultivated a culture of collaboration. Before the year even started they described to me the way that they presented certain lessons, they shared materials, and they were my thought partners. In an environment with mentors and teacher leaders, parents aren't afraid to get the new teacher and students are supported by the collective expertise of a whole group of educators. One fabulous mentor of mine, Ms. Miyabe, said to me "Great teachers are not born. They are made from the teacher next door." This has become a mantra that I have held onto throughout my career as a classroom teacher. But, I know this sort of camaraderie is not true at all schools. I know that many teachers are going it alone without teacher leaders nearby to turn to. This is why teacher leadership should be the norm - every teacher should have access to colleagues who can offer support.

In my decade as a teacher, I've been fortunate to be part of many collaborative opportunities including the nationwide Teach Plus C2 program that identifies teachers to lead classes on Common Core implementation. However, programs like C2 have been supported by private funds because districts and schools have not always been able to cultivate true teacher leadership. Sometimes districts try - like last year when I worked as an LAUSD math fellow to create lessons for district-wide use. But, the funds dried up and we fellows concluded our work. As a National Board Certified teacher, my district also does make funds available for me to mentor others, but again, this work is outside of the school day, rather than an integral part of what takes place at school sites. What's worse is that often our best teachers, who are

passionate about helping other teachers, leave the classroom to take on roles where they can do so; and our kids lose out on having those great mentor teachers in their classrooms.

My hope is that the funds marked for teacher leadership under ESSA will support efforts like hybrid rolls so teachers can stay in the classroom but still work with other teachers; or teaching exchanges and fellowships where teacher leaders can experience other schools and bring knowledge back to their districts and sites; as well as increased opportunities for teachers to be heard in policy discussions about how to best serve all students.

We are in an exciting time when we must honor how the valuable experience of our veteran teachers can inform learning in an era of new methods and technologies. Teacher leadership has the promise to build that bridge. I've heard our time described as one where a teacher must transition from being "the sage on the stage" to "the guide on the side." It is true that we are no longer the keepers of information, rather we help our students filter, discover, and create. Research shows that modern students are wired differently. Teachers must collaborate to keep up. Again, I applaud ESSA for recognizing teacher leadership as a path to professional growth for educators, because what is happening on another teacher's classroom will inform how I engage my student Jalen who gets easily bored when tasks aren't interactive or Kenya who I can always count on to look at problem solving in new ways or kids like Johanna, the 3rd sister from the same family that I've had as learners in my room - who has a talent for explaining so clearly how to graph a line or shade an inequality or play her instrument. And, when I talk about engaging these students in my work leading sessions for other teachers, we all get better by working together.