



Opportunities for Teachers,
Results for Urban Students

What Do Teachers Think About ESEA?

Teach Plus Congressional Briefing

June 4, 2015

Dirksen Senate Office Building, Room G-11

As the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) debate heats up and Congress faces key decisions on accountability, assessment, and equity, Teach Plus brought together a panel of current classroom teachers from across the nation to share their expertise and insights with policymakers. Nearly 50 staffers from Congressional offices heard from the teachers about the impact ESEA has on their students and schools, including the teachers' suggestions for improving the law's accountability and resource equity provisions. The teachers' prepared remarks follow.

Remarks by Raquel Maya Carson

2nd Grade Teacher, Powell Elementary School, Washington, D.C.



“Just like teachers set these high expectations for their students, the Every Child Achieve Acts must set high-expectations for our states. I can’t simply expect that my students will be able to write a well-organized opinion essay without differentiated scaffolds and supports to ensure their success. And we cannot simply think that states, without setting expectations around when to provide additional support to schools

and districts who continue to under-serve our, will take this action.”

“My name is Raquel Carson and I am a second-grade Dual Language Teacher at Powell Elementary, a public school in Washington, DC. Last night, I had the privilege of sharing stories of progress and growth with sixty 2nd grade families at our grade level’s last Academic Parent Teacher Team meeting of the year. Many in the room experienced the same goosebumps I did when I shared that for the first time in three years, more students are leaving second grade on or above grade level rather than below. We all felt chills when parents shared, in the language that felt most comfortable to them, how this year had dramatically changed their child’s disposition, ability to read and overall performance.

One family, glowed as they talked about how their daughter, unable to read at all at the beginning of the year, takes pride and has built confidence in knowing she can now read books with familiar word patterns.



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Another mom, who recently had a son that moved back to the states from Guatemala to be, shared how her child's beginning of year reading data inspired her to partner her second grader with her newly arrived son from Guatemala - having them read to each other nightly and seeing her Powell student increase 8 reading levels.

More than 90% of the students at my school are a subgroup - either because of their race and ethnicity or their English Language Learner status (which I refer to as bilingualism). There was extreme power in the ability to share this disaggregated data to a room that puts systems in place to ensure that those numbers translate into redistribution of resources across the school and greater instructional support to the staff and families. There has been power under current ESEA accountability measures in ensuring that this data continue to be disaggregated and shared district and state-wide.

The success of this grade level of students is due in huge part to the turnaround efforts our school began more than five years ago. When accountability measures were not met and students were not being served, several interventions were put into place so that our students and school could meet the expectations - investing in family engagement and high-quality teaching staff are what began to bring monumental changes to Powell.

Just like teachers set these high expectations for their students, the Every Child Achieve Acts must set high-expectations for our states. I can't simply expect that my students will be able to write a well-organized opinion essay without differentiated scaffolds and supports to ensure their success. And we cannot simply think that states, without setting expectations around when to provide additional support to schools and districts who continue to under-serve our, will take this action.

We saw 80% of our second grade families last night because they have established trust and confidence in us. They trust that when their students are not progressing or there is an indication that they may not show progress, interventions are put into place immediately we are modifying our instruction so they their child is in a small group, or receiving one-on-one support from a team at our school. Our families have this trust because of the results they have seen, because of the stories of progress shared. It is imperative that the trust our families give to us to serve their first-generation, bilingual students, be scaled in the reauthorization of ESEA by expecting states and districts to take proactive measures in implementing interventions and allocating resources to our most under-served students. Thank you."



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Remarks by Nathaniel Cole

Secondary Social Studies Teacher, E.L. Haynes Public Charter, Washington, DC



“The Senate bill, as proposed, requires that states merely report information about how well schools are doing. This is not enough. The bill must require states to have plans in place to address resource inequities in schools, to ensure that students that need help are getting it, and to allow the federal government to hold them accountable for following through on those plans.”

“Thank you for the opportunity to meet with you today. My name is Nate Cole, I have been a teacher for ten years. Since 2008, I have taught high school history and social studies at schools in high-poverty communities, both in the South Bronx and here in our nation’s capital. I currently teach history and AP Government at E.L. Haynes Public Charter School in the Petworth neighborhood of Washington, D.C. I would like to talk to you today about what my experiences have taught me about resource equity and the crucial role that ESEA can play in ensuring that states are fighting for our most at-risk children.

Teachers at my school are leading advocates in the area of resource equity because we create opportunities for students of every race, socioeconomic status, and home language to have access to Advanced Placement courses. Too often throughout our country, students living in poverty and students of color have disproportionately low access to AP courses. They have fallen victim to what President George W. Bush called the “soft bigotry of low expectations.” To overcome this, my school backs up the statement that all children can learn by allocating our resources to make sure our school’s curriculum will properly prepare students for the rigors of AP coursework.

My school will celebrate its first graduating class on the 20th of this month. One hundred percent of our graduating class has taken at least two AP courses and 100% of them have been accepted to a 2- or 4-year university. Our effort to ensure equitable access to resources such as AP classes is paying off and it is important that states be held accountable for ensuring that high-poverty students have both the opportunities and support they need to be successful.



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I want to tell you about one of the students in my AP Government class this year. Albert is a smart, curious, and mature 17-year-old who I've known for three years. He is a sharp, critical thinker, who energizes class discussions with insightful comments and questions. Outside of school, Albert takes on a great deal of responsibility, helping his single mom care for his four younger brothers. His mom is wonderfully supportive and visits our school often--but she is busy with her job and school work as she takes her own classes to complete her bachelor's degree.

Albert has more maturity and determination at his age than I ever had. He's even given me cooking tips, as we've compared notes on the dinners he regular prepares for his younger brothers while his mom is at work or school and the things I cook for my young son. For Albert, the road to success is filled with obstacles. You see, he began 9th grade reading and writing on a 3rd grade level. He has spoke openly about how frustrating this has been for him and, when asked at the end of his freshman year about his goals, he said, "to be able to read better." Because Albert works extremely hard and benefits from the literacy interventions we are able to provide, he has made progress and is on track to graduate on time next year.

However, it is all too common for students like Albert to enter high school years behind in their academic skills--just one of many hurdles that students from high poverty neighborhoods, who are disproportionately students of color, must overcome on a regular basis. The hundreds of low-income students I have worked with in my career have all entered high school with great potential and with areas in which they are deeply intelligent. However, like my student Albert, so many of them are unfairly burdened by one or more major obstacles.

Because a high percentage of students in low-income communities will invariably need help overcoming these barriers, states need to be held accountable for making sure there is equitable distribution of resources to help these students close the achievement gap. The Senate bill, as proposed, requires that states merely report information about how well schools are doing. This is not enough. The bill must require states to have plans in place to address resource inequities in schools, to ensure that students that need help are getting it, and to allow the federal government to hold them accountable for following through on those plans.

Schools like mine are trying their best to develop the interventions our kids need. At E.L. Haynes we provide hundreds of extra hours of research-based, data-driven literacy instruction for struggling readers. We have implemented school-wide positive-behavior programs to teach and incentivize good behavior and work habits. We have an excellent staff of social workers who provide much-needed mental health support for the staggeringly high number of students who have experienced trauma or other challenges. These programs are working but we have realized that good interventions require expert implementation, ongoing monitoring for improvement, and, simply, time for their effects to be



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realized. Requiring states to specify how they'll work towards these improvements and not simply to report on inequities is an important step in ensuring interventions will succeed.

When schools are failing their students, states must be required to intervene to give hard-working teachers and principals the resources they need to level the playing field for their students. Students who start life with the deck stacked against them, even when they go to a good school with great teachers, need extra support to help them close the achievement gap. Real equity means that we take action upon the belief that all students can learn by responding to obstacles that are disproportionately found in our underserved communities. By doing this, we will move closer as a nation to achieving the American Dream for all of our students."



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Remarks by Corey Morrison

Secondary Math Teacher, Lindblom Math and Science Academy, Chicago, IL



“States need to be held accountable for underperforming subgroups or achievement gaps. The greatest strength of NCLB is that it finally addressed the achievement discrepancies within overall successful school districts.”

“Good morning. My name is Corey Morrison, and I teach Math in grades seven through twelve at Lindblom Math and Science in Chicago Public Schools. Thank you for taking the time to listen to the experiences of my colleagues and me today. I am here to insist that accountability based on annual assessment is necessary, but interventions need to be flexible and well-funded.

States need to be held accountable for underperforming subgroups or achievement gaps. The greatest strength of NCLB is that it finally addressed the achievement discrepancies within overall successful school districts. When I attended Shaker Heights High in Ohio, our school was known as high performing but the sub-group data showed another side entirely. Although my school was roughly 50% minority students, I was one of only a handful of minority students who took AP and honors classes. On the other hand, remedial classes and traditional courses were usually entirely comprised of minority students. There had been an achievement gap for decades that is only now gaining the attention and resources needed to correct the issue. Shaker Heights has focused on creating programs that get more minority students ready for AP courses through elementary mentorship programs, specific summer intervention for minority students, and leadership opportunity for high school minorities to take ownership of these issues.

We cannot afford to take a step backward and once again mask the inequalities of schools by systemically denying minority and poor students access to rigorous course work. Moreover, States and districts should be required to collect data that clearly reflects indicators of growth while publishing which schools are excelling and why. Holding States responsible for supporting and sharing innovative ideas to address underachievement and gaps is the primary role of ESEA.

However, accountability must include incentives for schools and districts to move away from a culture of compliance and towards a culture of innovation. I am completing my fourth year of teaching math with a mix of grade levels from 7th graders up to seniors. My first year I was a nervous wreck, and did not have meaningful mentorship to guide my development as an effective teacher. So, I simply copied



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the curriculum of the math teacher down the hall. That was my worst year of teaching. Besides being extremely boring, there was no measure how well I impacted student growth. Similarly, teachers from schools on strict intervention plans often tell me they follow the script and comply with mandates even though those interventions are not tailored to the strengths of specific teachers. These teachers are stifled and lost on how to be more effective. In this culture of compliance, teachers are incentivized to continue the status quo because much of the work such as lessons, assessments, and paperwork is already done.

In my second year I set out to be innovative. I received funding to make my classroom partially paperless by using wireless calculators and an online homework website. My department sent me to numerous professional development opportunities to learn how to better integrate these calculators into my classroom. Sure enough, student engagement began to tick up. I have a student Zoe who is not in attendance here, sadly, but gets bored very easily. In class she often pushes back on why a method is preferred over another and has a difficult time memorizing facts. In my class because of the technology, Zoe has a real opportunity to explore a math concept for herself and decided her own learning path. That is powerful, intervention because otherwise, the conversation would revolve around her lack of participation, or her apparent dislike for math. Because we are able to teach Zoe, in a way tailored to her strengths, she thrives in Math class. Since, this intervention is personal and not ham-handed, students remember the lessons. I received an email just last Wednesday from a former student who is now a sophomore in college and said, "if you remember we were working with those big fancy calculators a lot." She struggled in math in high school and continues to struggle but yet she continues to love math. My self-efficacy has improved as I witness student success but moreover, as I witness other teachers transform their classrooms into dynamic, engaging classrooms at these professional developments. Schools have to support strong, effective teachers because classrooms are not on islands. With a team of effective teachers we are on pace to have 70% of our Middle grade students pass our District Algebra exam, which is 33% higher than the district average. Not having a real mentor ended up being a blessing in disguise for me – but I still needed resources and support from my school and my colleagues.

My school has been a Level 1 plus school for the past 9 years. This means that since my students have done well on assessments, the District has been more hands-off with interventions. We are currently ranked 17th in the state of Illinois. My school serves a 98% minority population with more than 70% of those students qualifying for Free and Reduced Lunch. Despite those stereotypical statistics, teachers are trusted to prepare students for end of year exams but are expected to expose students to the joy of math or any other subject in the process. Students are expected to learn how to be creative, socially responsible, and collaborative. So how are we able to excel with the same population of students as similar schools on the South Side of Chicago? Our teachers are given the autonomy to teach how we see fit with high expectations, funding and guidance to implement our ideas. Thus accountability must



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include incentives for schools and districts to move away from a culture of compliance and towards a culture of innovation. Interventions at a school like Lindblom will look very different than a school down the street. Thus why there needs to be support for strong, effective teachers and administrators to identify unique strengths and weaknesses of the students and tailor personalized instruction.

It's helpful to see that the Senate bill proposes to replace the prescriptive federal intervention models of No Child Left Behind with district-designed improvement strategies that can better meet individual needs of teachers, students and schools. What's missing from the legislation is requiring states to use those strategies in the lowest performing schools and in schools where low-income and minority students are not meeting academic goals. More importantly, our intervention plans need time to show improvement, but if they aren't working after 3 years, it is critical that schools are expected to try something new. When I set out to be innovative, not everything I tried worked. When it didn't, I didn't just stay the course – I tried something new.

Lastly, I know that schools will struggle with interventions – regardless of who came up with them – if they do not have equitable access to the resources to meet the needs of their students. Resources means many things – access to technologies like those “fancy calculators” my kids used and teachers who have had meaningful PD to integrate that technology effectively into instruction, and strong, trained administrators who know how to grow teachers and students. It also means more social workers, guidance counselors, PD for teachers to address students' emotional and mental health. This is so important for schools with high concentrations of students who come to school hungry, who live in economically depressed neighborhoods riddled with violence, or have very adult responsibilities at young ages. Resource equity can also mean making sure that all students have effective teachers, not by closing schools and shuffling students around but, by supporting teacher development with meaningful mentorship and professional development so that all teachers have a chance to become effective. Without including provisions in ESEA that ensure states will come up with a plan to ensure equitable access to resources, schools with high concentrations of poor students will continue to struggle.

In conclusion, I am glad that the new legislation gives schools more room to innovate and develop interventions that will meet the needs of their unique group of students, but I urge Congress to make sure that states are held accountable for actually acting when schools or subgroups within schools aren't meeting state-set goals. Congress can make achievement more attainable by ensuring that schools have equitable access to the resources they need to be successful.”



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Remarks by Melissa Blair Tracy

Secondary Social Studies Teacher, Conrad School of Sciences, Wilmington, DE



“I hope you, the audience, will not only remember the story of my school but also think more acutely about how to improve the existing legislation so that more Conrad success stories occur nationwide. More specifically, we must ensure that states hold ALL schools accountable for the academic performance of each and every student. This includes students traditionally overlooked in our public school system in low-performing sub-groups.”

My name is Melissa Blair Tracy. I am a National Board Certified teacher in Wilmington, Delaware. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.

I currently teach at an allied health and biotechnology school (6th-12th) in Wilmington, Delaware called Conrad Schools of Science that serves students living within the city limits as well as the surrounding area. With outside funding from companies such as AstraZeneca and DuPont, the mission of the school is to prepare students of varying abilities for higher education at college or universities, or postgraduate entry into health care professions. My school has operated for eight years and serves a diverse student population. Conrad is also a major feeder school for E.L.L. students. A founding teacher at Conrad, I have taught every grade and nearly every social studies subject. I currently teach 9th-12th grade social studies including but not limited to the following courses: Advanced Placement human geography, Advanced Placement comparative government, personal finance, legal process, and world history. Outside of the classroom, I'm the Model United Nations, WorldQuest, and Youth in Government advisor to 6th-12th graders.

When I first began teaching at Conrad, the school had a reputation for being one of the most underperforming schools in the state of Delaware. Our school had an exceptionally high teacher turnover rate and a significant percentage of our high needs students did not perform well on state standardized testing in Mathematics and English Language Arts. Since our school had failed to meet AYP requirements several years in a row, the Delaware Department of Education mandated that our school restructure or risk being taken over by the state in 2006. Consequently, corrective action was taken to improve the school. This included several major changes that positively impacted our student



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population. First, all teachers had to reapply for their jobs. This change in staffing helped to ensure that all teachers had a similar mindset in respect to “turning around” Conrad. A new principal was hired too! Fortunately our new principal firmly believed in the importance of empowering teachers and he offered us autonomy in the classroom to be creative and to be problem solvers. Another significant change included increasing instructional time. Our school went from having a traditional schedule to a block schedule. As a result, students spent less time in the hallways and more time learning in the classroom. At the middle school level, students also received extra instruction in English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics. Additionally, students were offered remedial support during the school day and afterschool. Programs such as C.A.S.A. (Conrad After School Achievers) literally helped students fill skill gaps in both content areas by helping them develop much needed content literacy skills. Most importantly, our school created a new and improved school climate. As a result, we saw a dramatic drop in in school suspensions. This meant students spent more time in the classroom learning. Lastly, the teachers at our school used data to inform instructional goals. We shared this data with our students and parents too! This helped guide us in our journey to improving academic achievement at our school.

As a teacher I witnessed firsthand the dramatic turnaround of my school. Conrad literally went from being one of the worst schools in the state to one of the highest performing schools. Of course, this dramatic turnaround did not happen overnight! It took several years of hard work for the school to improve. Most importantly, students were the biggest benefactors of this change. Undoubtedly, my school is an example of what can happen when a district and an individual school have the much needed flexibility to make changes in a non-punitive manner.

Today we are not here to discuss No Child Left Behind. Rather, we are here to discuss the proposed new legislation for Elementary and Secondary Education Act. I hope you, the audience will not only remember the story of my school but also think more acutely about how to improve the existing legislation so that more Conrad success stories occur nationwide. More specifically, we must ensure that states hold ALL schools accountable for the academic performance of each and every student. This includes students traditionally overlooked in our public school system in low-performing sub-groups, for example, African-American students and English Language Learners. In many respects, this is a civilRights issue. We cannot afford to look the other way when students do not meet proficiency goals. If students at any school are not mastering skills as evidenced by standardized state testing, then the state should be able to intervene and provide resources to improve the educational experience of the aforementioned students. Furthermore, we must seek realistic solutions to the current “Opt Out”



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movement. Simply permitting students to opt out of a test does not solve the problem. Ample opportunities exist to think intelligently about the quantity and quality of testing. I worry greatly if a high percentage of students no longer take standardized tests because the students historically marginalized by our education system will suffer the most. Without access to accurate and meaningful data, individual schools, districts, and states will struggle to act when students' academic needs are not being met. I firmly believe that all students should experience a high quality education in our country. Let's make changes to proposed ESEA legislation to reflect the realities of our schools.



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Remarks by Chris Hofmann

4th Grade Teacher, KIPP Raíces Academy, Los Angeles, CA



“Alex’s growth was no accident. Even before he and his classmates lined up for the first day of school, I knew that Alex needed help. This was because I had analyzed my incoming class’s standardized test results from previous years. And when Alex walked into my classroom, I already had a plan in place to make his growth a reality. If grade-span testing were to take the place of annual assessments, educators like myself would lose a critical source of data to help us identify the needs of students like Alex and make use of every learning moment.”

“Hello, my name is Chris Hofmann. I’m a fourth grade teacher at KIPP Raíces Academy in East Los Angeles, California. I would like to start my remarks today by expressing my sincere appreciation that all of you have taken time from your busy schedules to be here today.

ESEA and No Child Left Behind have left and continue to leave an indelible mark on my career as a teacher and the educational experiences of my students. Right now my school serves 535 students. Ninety-six percent of our students are Latino, and 90% of our students qualify for the federal free and reduced lunch program. For me, ESEA and Title I aren’t just extra federal dollars. They are those extra “Weird School” books in my classroom library that got Joseph excited to read. They are the laptops and mathematical programs that made borrowing make sense for Samantha. They are the professional development opportunities that have shaped my practice as a teacher. And more recently, since the passage of No Child Left Behind, they are the state tests and the accountability provisions that we use to evaluate and reflect upon Joseph, Samantha and all my students’ academic success.

In reference to accountability and the Every Child Achieves Act, there are three things I want you to know. More specifically, there is one thing we need to fight to keep, there is one thing we need to change and there is one thing we need to address if this law will live up to its ESEA’s legacy as a seminal civil rights law.

First, we must fight to keep annual tests. I am thrilled that after some discussion about grade span testing, the current version of ECAA maintains annual standardized tests. While there is still much we have to improve about our standardized tests, these tests provide such valuable information for



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schools, educators and ultimately students. This was definitely the case for Alex, a bright-eyed 4th grader who started the year significantly behind his peers in reading. By the end of the year, he had gained over two years and caught up to his classmates.

Alex's growth was no accident. Even before he and his classmates lined up for the first day of school, I knew that Alex needed help. This was because I had analyzed my incoming class's standardized test results from previous years. And when Alex walked into my classroom, I already had a plan in place to make his growth a reality. If grade-span testing were to take the place of annual assessments, educators like myself would lose a critical source of data to help us identify the needs of students like Alex and make use of every learning moment.

In addition to offering a clearer insight into individual students' needs, yearly assessments provide an important tool with which to evaluate the choices that teachers and schools make about curriculum. These assessments provide us with an opportunity to look for blind spots and adjust our educational programs accordingly. Last year, my grade-level team observed a recurring trend in our data: our students demonstrated significantly better comprehension on fiction texts than on nonfiction texts. Because we noticed this trend in our standardized test results, we were able to make changes to our curriculum, adding an additional nonfiction unit and incorporating more nonfiction reading throughout the year. By shifting to grade-span testing, teachers in many grades would lose this independent lens through which to view their teaching and curriculum. We must maintain annual assessments.

Second, we need to ensure that all states are expected to act and support struggling schools and students. As ECAA is currently written, states are only required to rate and identify low performing schools. Simply reporting on the data is not enough. States also need to be expected to provide funding for supports and interventions. In some ways, this change from No Child Left Behind and its federally defined punitive consequences is understandable, but if left unchanged, this provision of the legislation will not be good for all kids in all states. Think about if we extended this line of thinking to our classrooms. The current legislation is akin to saying I have to give tests, identify the students who can't read, put them over in the corner, say they need help and that's it. We wouldn't accept that from our teachers, and we shouldn't accept that from our states. ECAA should not only require states to identify schools "in need of locally determined intervention"; it should also require states to act on it. Unless we make it clear that some action is necessary, I am worried that some schools and some students in some states won't get the help they desperately need.

Third, if we ever want to achieve replicable, excellent outcomes for all students, we must address the massive disparities in resources between schools in different communities. Educational resources, such as school libraries, computers, small classes, and school counselors, all have a vital impact on student achievement. We sometimes say that a great teacher and great parents can make up for the lack of



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these resources, and that's true. I believe that to my core, but it's also not easy, and it won't ever be truly scalable, unless we make sure every student has what he or she needs to learn. Each and every day I work with dedicated teachers who go above and beyond what is expected. I work with families who advocate for their children and seek out every opportunity to help them thrive, but this in itself is not always enough. We need to make sure schools have equitable access to resources like the library books that motivated Joseph to read and the computers and small class size that allowed Samantha to learn math at her own pace. We must require states to track these critical factors of school quality and compel states to address the vast inequities that exist. If we want truly excellent outcomes for all students, we must fight for resource equity.

Thank you again for your time. Please honor the legacy of ESEA by fighting to keep annual tests, ensuring that states are expected to act and support struggling schools and students, and addressing the massive disparities in resources available to schools in different communities.”



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Remarks by John F. Mastroianni

Director of Bands and K-12 Music Supervisor, Canton Public Schools, Connecticut



“I hope that we can all agree that in order to effect positive and meaningful change, teachers and school districts must have the necessary and equitable resources to advance the learning potential of all students. The volumes of data that we have become focused on collecting are meaningless until we formulate true action steps that will provide the tools and resources for success. Reporting simply does not suffice. If we are not part of the solution, then we are part of the problem.”

“Educational equality and resource equity are topics that are very near and dear to my heart, and I bring to the table a very interesting and unique perspective. My parents are Italian immigrants, and I was born, raised, and went to school in the inner city. My first teaching position was at the high school that I attended, four years after I graduated. Currently, I have accepted a teacher/leader position in the Canton, CT Public Schools, where I am the Director of Bands at Canton High School (sixty percent), and K-12 Music Department Chair (forty percent). I am now in the unique position of being responsible for the accountability of students and teachers. My thirty-three year career has led me to a diversity of teaching experiences, from the inner city to the affluent suburbs, but each experience has validated my belief that given the proper resources and interventions when necessary, all students can achieve!

In my previous position, the demographics of the town slowly began to change as low income housing became available. As a result, it attracted families who were much less fortunate than those currently living there. I quickly saw the achievement gap beginning to widen, and I became immediately determined to do whatever was necessary to ensure that all students had equal opportunity to achieve! I developed student mentor and teaching assistant programs, where high-achieving students provided lessons and various resources for those students that were falling behind. These positive interventions yielded remarkable results. Not only did the level of musicianship of these students advance, but their sense of pride, accomplishment and self-esteem elevated exponentially.

As a music teacher, I would be remiss if I didn’t address for a moment the power of the arts! Over the course of my career, I have literally witnessed countless number of lives that were saved through the immeasurable power of music. A myriad of studies also confirm the fact that students involved in the



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arts, and schools committed to educating the whole child, benefit academically, socially, artistically, and emotionally, just to name a few! Please allow me to reflect upon, and share some true success stories.

Mark: While working on my graduate degree, I would often come to school early to practice and compose music. The bell for first period would ring, and a few minutes later I would find Mark peering into the practice room window. I immediately went out and asked Mark why he wasn't in class, and he would reply, "I was just checking you out. I love to hear you play!" This went on repeatedly. On each occasion, I would explain to Mark and admonish him about the ramifications of skipping class, and then I would personally bring him to class. At first I thought that Mark was making an excuse to cut class, but then I realized that he had a true passion for music. To make a long story short, Mark is now a successful choir director and music producer. His love of music and the opportunity to cultivate it literally saved his life.

Willie: After participating in band competitions, we would often arrive back at school late at night. I would always be the last one out after cleaning up and making certain that all of the kids were picked up. I walked down the stairs and out to my car, and much to my surprise, there was Willie standing alone in the dark parking lot. When I asked if his parents were coming, he informed me that his dad refused to pick him up after a certain hour, and told him to walk home. Willie lived in one of the impoverished housing projects. I drove Willie home on several occasions and quickly became a father figure to him. I learned of his passion for music, a passion that still burns within him to this day. Willie sends me periodic updates on Facebook about his son's progress on his instrument. Once again, music saved his life, and made him the amazing man that he has become!

The gift of music provided these young men with the tools and the opportunity to become the successful members of society and the wonderful fathers that they are today.

I hope that we can all agree that in order to effect positive and meaningful change, teachers and school districts must have the necessary and equitable resources to advance the learning potential of all students. The volumes of data that we have become focused on collecting are meaningless until we formulate true action steps that will provide the tools and resources for success. Reporting simply does not suffice. If we are not part of the solution, then we are part of the problem.



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I thank you and applaud you all for having us here today, and for giving teacher voices the opportunity to be heard. This is a crucial step in the process as legislation is developed, revised, and acted upon, and vital to the success of any educational initiative.”



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Remarks by Alice Johnson Cain

Vice President for Federal and State Policy, Teach Plus



“Good morning! I appreciate your making time to be here this morning. It’s good to see some familiar faces from when I worked here on the Hill.

I have three quick points to kick things off and will then turn things over to our wonderful group of teachers.

First, what is Teach Plus? We are a teacher leadership organization founded on the premise that if we’re serious about building a better education system for our children, teachers must play a leading role – both in changing schools and in changing policy. We run three national teacher leadership programs that collectively reach and empower thousands of teachers. Two things unite our teachers – one, they all choose to teach in high-poverty schools, and two, they are all effective in the classroom. In other words, Teach Plus teachers are doing exactly what ESEA is designed to do: close the achievement gap by making sure ALL students – including those in our most impoverished schools -- have the education they need to be successful.

Second, why does ESEA matter to teachers? If you go back to 1965 when the original ESEA was enacted as part of a whole series of civil rights bills, it did not come out of the blue. ESEA was the result of growing awareness that some children in our country – particularly those who were from low-income families and minorities – were in many cases not getting the same educational opportunities as other children.

ESEA is at its core about fairness, equality, and opportunity. I recently read the transcript of the Senate Floor debate on the original ESEA and was struck by this quote from Senator Bobby Kennedy: “Having traveled around this country a good deal, I can see such a tremendous difference in what is going on in one community in contrast to another. All I suggest is that we can do something to make sure we have the highest standards possible and that the money we are going to expend is not wasted, but that we are making progress in each one of these communities.”

This leads to my third point: the connection between accountability and resource equity. Sadly, 50 years after ESEA’s enactment, we still “see a tremendous difference in what is going on in one community in contrast to another” -- and even within the same community we often see a contrast between what is going on in one school and another. Those of us in the room who are parents know of schools in our communities where we want to send our kids – and schools where we don’t. This wasn’t acceptable then and it’s not acceptable now.



Opportunities for Teachers,
Results for Urban Students

Accountability is about measuring and being honest about what is working and what isn't as an essential step in the process of making sure things are working well in all of our schools for all of our kids. Without identifying the problems, we can't find or implement solutions. Accountability systems can also help us see the progress that is being made.

Accountability does not have to be punitive or one-size-fits all. It does need to inform our decisions about how to allocate education resources – to make sure dollars go as far as they can to do the most good for students. This means when accountability systems show that schools or groups of students in schools are struggling, we make sure interventions are put in place – and that schools have the resources they need to support those interventions and improve results. For example, this can include making sure every student has an effective teacher and making sure every teacher has what they need to reach every student.

The Every Child Achieves Act is an important opportunity to continue to original intent of ESEA. But as it exists today it falls drastically short on accountability. In its current form, it does not do enough to protect the historically disadvantaged and vulnerable students that ESEA is intended to serve.

We have learned over the past 14 years that overly prescriptive federally-set goals and interventions are NOT the solution. But neither is stripping the law of accountability completely. Whatever the faults of NCLB may be, we have to keep the original intent of ESEA and honor its legacy as a civil rights law.

As a solution, Teach Plus supports the forthcoming subgroup accountability amendment to ensure schools and districts intervene in schools when the data shows this is needed. The law must require timely state action to address inequities, with federal support for low-performing schools. We also support the forthcoming low-performing school amendment.

Lastly, as someone who has worked on education policy for many years, I have learned that federal law alone cannot solve education problems by simply imposing solutions from Washington DC. But federal law can make a tremendous difference in creating focus and leverage for solutions at the state and local level. Accountability is how we can best create that focus and leverage.

Now I'm going to turn it over to our teachers, who are going to share real stories about students in their classrooms that show why it is more important than ever for ESEA to include meaningful provisions on accountability and resource equity. Our first teacher is Nate Cole who teaches high school social studies at E.L. Haynes here in Washington DC. Nate?"