



Remarks of Mike Stryer

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

January 19, 2016

Good afternoon. I'm Mike Stryer, CA Executive Director for Teach Plus. I'm also a former Social Studies teacher- having taught for 8 years here in LA Unified at Fairfax High School. I very much appreciate the chance to share some thoughts around the Every Students Succeeds Act.

Teach Plus is a national not-for-profit organization focused on empowering our strongest teachers to become leaders in policy and practice issues that directly impact their students. For the last six years, we have grown from just a few passionate teachers in the Boston area to a network of tens of thousands of urban educators committed to strengthening K-12 public school education for our highest needs students. Within this context, Teach Plus and our teachers have a keen interest in the implementation of ESSA- as our students' future literally hinges on how well the new law is implemented across our country.

Later today, you will have the opportunity to hear directly from two of Teach Plus' Teaching Policy Fellows currently teaching in Los Angeles' public schools. I won't steal their thunder. But I would like to address two key aspects of ESSA that have been identified by Teach Plus fellows as critical to more equitably meeting the needs of all

students- particularly students of color and those in lower socio-economic communities.

These aspects include appropriate administration and use of annual assessment AND authentic teacher leadership.

The recently-passed ESSA legislation is notable in at least two areas related to assessment:

First, the legislation is notable in the continuing requirement that at least 95% of all students participate in selected assessments. The bottom line is that every student must count! Full rates of participation allow all of us to continue to use these assessments to highlight disparities between specific sub-groups of students and to provide a rich source of information in addressing these disparities. Clearly, insistence on high participation rates is critical.

Second, the legislation is notable in its focus on streamlining assessments. As we know, in some districts, the high number of assessments has diluted the potential effectiveness of assessments in both identifying students needs and in pinpointing areas for growth in teacher practice. Retention of the highest quality assessments is fundamental to a rational streamlining process. In the words of Casie Jones, a teacher and coach in Tennessee: "Assessment should be a subtle, ongoing process used to measure teacher efficacy and student skill level. It is a process that will yield information that directs students and teachers to the next level of learning. "

In assessment-related issues, as well as in other aspects of ESSA legislation, teacher leadership is paramount. In the recent federal legislative process, our teachers actively sought the inclusion of new Title II provisions- those focused on teacher leadership in outcome-focused professional development, those focused on support for

instructional leadership teams, and those focused on promotion of innovative career pathways. Over the past few months, Teach Plus teacher-leaders here in L.A. met with numerous legislators here in their district offices and participated in Congressional briefings and Hill Days in DC- advocating for their inclusion. And we are gratified to see that they are largely part of the final legislation. It marks an important step forward for teacher leadership. As one Teach Plus alum puts it, “Our district will only thrive if more teachers step into leadership. We need to ensure our evaluation system is accurate, fair and growth-oriented. Teachers must help define what new 'teacher leadership' roles look like in schools.”

But good intentions are just the first step. Teachers cannot be brought in to the implementation process just to add a “stamp of legitimacy.” We need to go well beyond the idea that teachers need to “buy in” to the process. Rather, there needs to be authentic engagement- whether it’s in decisions around streamlining of assessments, whether it’s in design of teacher-led professional developments, or whether it’s in other key aspects of ESSA.

It is not an exaggeration to say that the success of ESSA- both for our students and for the teaching profession- hinges on early, meaningful engagement of our strongest teachers throughout the U.S. At Teach Plus, we are excited about this opportunity and look forward to continuing to link our teachers with critical aspects of ESSA implementation.

Thank you!