



Opportunities for Teachers,
Results for Urban Students

April 14, 2015

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman, HELP Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member, HELP Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander and Senator Murray:

Thank you for your efforts to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). We applaud the bipartisan movement of a bill forward. The release of the *Every Child Achieves Act of 2015* is an important first step in laying the groundwork for policy changes that will enable our nation's education system to better serve all students, including the students who fill the classrooms of Teach Plus teachers: low-income students and students of color.

We appreciate the substantial progress that has been made and consider this bill a significant improvement over earlier drafts. We are grateful to both of you and your staff members for listening to our teachers' perspectives and taking them into account. We are particularly pleased by the continuation of the annual statewide assessment and maintenance of effort provisions as well as the removal of provisions that would dilute the impact of Title I funding (e.g. portability). We strongly support the continued commitment to state-set standards and greater transparency around disparities facing schools.

We are deeply concerned, however, about the accountability provisions, which get at the heart of ESEA as a civil rights law. It is not enough for districts to merely identify and report when groups of students are not making academic progress. Transparency without action is meaningless. Students and their families must be assured that action will be taken on their behalf when data shows that achievement gaps persist – both for students in chronically low-performing schools and for students in any school where a group of students consistently underperforms. As we commemorate the 50th anniversary of ESEA, it would be devastating for children – particularly low-income students and students of color – to reverse course on accountability. We support the Murphy accountability amendment and are eager to work with you as the bill moves forward to improve the accountability provisions. If the accountability provisions are not strengthened as the bill moves forward, Teach Plus will, unfortunately, be unable to support it.

Other areas for which we respectfully recommend improvements to the bill include the following:

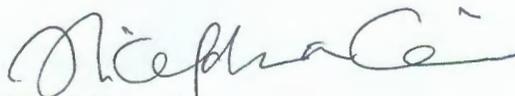
- **Improve the Ability of High-Need Schools to Recruit and Retain Effective Teachers** – We support the broadened Teacher and School Leader Incentive Program and the provisions that allow districts to use Title II dollars to recruit, hire, and retain highly-effective teachers in low-income schools and to improve within-district equity in the distribution of teachers. But more must be done to ensure that all high-poverty schools actually have access to high-performing teachers they need. To that end, ESEA should

set aside funds specifically for districts that want to recruit, select, grow, reward, and retain high-performing teachers to work in high-poverty, low-performing schools.

- **Address Resource Inequity and Close the Comparability Loophole** – We support improved transparency around measures that will help identify disparities in educational opportunity, including access to effective teachers, per-pupil expenditures, school climate, and discipline. But once again, reporting without a requirement to act on the basis of that information does not do enough for students. It is imperative that states take action to address disparities in access to resources between school districts and that the comparability loophole be closed. **We support the Baldwin-Warren state resource equity amendment and the Bennet comparability amendment.**
- **Encourage Teacher Leadership Opportunities, including Teacher-Led Professional Development** – Teacher leadership is a smart investment that makes a difference for teachers, their students, and their schools. When teachers grow, students learn. Empowering teachers to take on leadership positions allows them to grow in the profession while remaining in the classroom and improves retention – a problem that plagues many high-poverty schools. Teacher leadership should include opportunities for highly-effective teachers to lead evidence-based professional development for their peers in order to improve the quality of professional development while allowing teacher leaders to grow. **We support the Bennet teacher leadership amendment.**
- **Streamline District Over-Testing** - Funding should be available for district level audits that ensure tests are well-aligned to standards, integrated into the curriculum, and give teachers the information they need to improve their practice. **We support the Baldwin-Cassidy assessment audit amendment.**
- **Encourage Teacher Leadership in Improving STEM Education** – Ensuring that all children have access to STEM education is important for our nation as we compete in the increasingly technical global economy. It is imperative that we invest in recruiting, developing, and retaining STEM teachers and empowering highly-effective STEM teachers to mentor new teachers and share best practices with the STEM education community. **We support the Franken STEM Master Teacher Corps amendment.**
- **Encourage Evidence-Based Innovation** - We are supportive of the efforts to provide funding to grow innovative, evidence-based activities that show promise so they can reach more students. **We support the Bennet-Hatch innovation amendment.**

We look forward to working with you as the bill moves forward. If you have questions, please do not hesitate to contact me or our Federal Policy Analyst, Christina Ross, at 703-579-7631.

Sincerely,



Alice Johnson Cain

Vice President for Federal and State Policy