

PRIORITIZING EFFECTIVE TEACHERS AND LEADERS IN ESEA REAUTHORIZATION

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Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony to the Senate Health Education Labor and Pensions Committee today on the critical topic of reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in order to reach the goal of ensuring that every student in every classroom achieves at the highest levels.

Since the 2002 reauthorization of ESEA, the nation has learned many lessons on what has and what has not worked. There are pockets of excellence that prove beyond a doubt that all children, irrespective of their social and economic status, can excel. An opportunity now exists to scale these pockets of excellence into systems of excellence. I would like to thank Chairman Harkin and Senator Enzi and the members of this Committee for their great efforts to take advantage of this opportunity and reauthorize ESEA in a bipartisan and effective manner.

Research has shown that nearly 60 percent of a school's impact on student achievement is attributable to principal and teacher effectiveness, 25% being directly attributable to principals. This statistic is not surprising given that principals are responsible for hiring teachers, developing school culture, and serving as instructional leaders.

With the other 33% of a school's impact being attributable to teachers, the principal's role in attracting and retaining effective teachers is key to making substantial achievement gains that are sustained over time. Effective principals ensure a high quality teaching staff through human capital management and instructional leadership, including the critical work of retaining the best teachers. In one recent survey of 40,000 teachers, "96% rated supportive leadership as absolutely essential or very important to retaining good teachers, more than any other factor." Therefore, whole-school change led by an effective principal is a crucial component of any effort to promote improved student learning and teacher effectiveness.

As the Chief Executive Officer and co-founder of New Leaders for New Schools, I am pleased to provide some information about our learnings so far on improving teacher and leader success from our current principal training work in over 400 schools serving 220,000 mostly low-income students in high-poverty communities in nine states across the United States – including: California, Illinois, Louisiana, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Tennessee and Wisconsin – as well as the District of Columbia.

Just as important as our direct work and impact on leaders and children, New Leaders has become an innovative action tank blending the power of a think tank with the results of and lessons learned from dozens of schools and school systems, including documenting and sharing practices through our Effective Practices Incentive Community (EPIC) across 26 states along with Washington, D.C. In addition to our internal analyses, we have partnered with RAND, which has designed a longitudinal research project that provides critical learning to our organization. Using the results of these analyses, we are learning what's working and what's not so that we can not only improve our principal training program but also share out our learnings to inform education policy at all levels.

Our data show that New Leaders principals are outperforming their peers by statistically significant margins. The percent of New Leaders K-8 principals beyond their first year making breakthrough gains in their schools increased from 15% in 2007 to 31% in 2009, even as our community has increased in size. And New Leaders-led high schools are also graduating students at higher rates and increasing the percent of graduates by wider margins than other schools.

Our analysis of the principals that have made breakthrough gains reveal that the patterns of what is happening in these schools, particularly as it pertains to phases of school improvement and school culture, are incredibly consistent. The schools these principals are leading serve as proof points that: 1) all students can achieve at high levels, and 2) the patterns found in these schools can be scaled. It is the data and insights that we have gained from our work in these high-need schools that form the foundation of the following recommendations for ESEA reauthorization:

- 1) First, the reauthorization must place a critical focus on school leadership both in terms of investments and accountability in effective school leadership. Currently, only a tiny portion of the Title II funds which make up the largest single vehicle for addressing this need and opportunity goes to school leadership. Senator Franken and Senator Hatch's proposed *School Principal Recruitment and Training Act of 2009*, which creates a competitive funding stream devoted to school leadership, serves as an important foundation on which Congress can build to ensure truly effective leadership in every school.
- 2) Second, the reauthorization should create a child- and performance-oriented approach to school leadership, including tracking outcomes and strategies for developing leaders to use as a means of accountability and continuous improvement. ESEA can focus on principal performance by:
 - a. Incentivizing states and school systems to measure principal effectiveness in a meaningful way that includes but is not limited to looking at student achievement impact and the practices correlating to those gains.
 - b. Investing in professional development for principals and other school leaders and tying that professional development to data and results. As instructional leaders, principals are a major driver of professional development for teachers, they play a major role in teacher evaluations, and they are also the number one factor for teacher retention. So, investment in the ongoing professional development of principals is crucial to promote teacher effectiveness and student achievement gains, especially in high-need schools and school systems.
 - c. Requiring teacher and principal preparation programs to track their graduates and ensure results - including their placement in and impact on high-need schools and districts – and base future investments upon those results, irrespective of their status as traditional or alternative routes to certification.
 - d. Investing in research and evaluation of human capital initiatives that are tied to student achievement, so that we can effectively identify what works and doesn't work, what explains the difference and incorporate those lessons into our work at scale.
- 3) Third, ESEA should be used as a vehicle to drive innovation and improvement through a much greater focus on competitive and performance-based grants. While formula-based funds are critical to ensuring more widespread reforms and results, it is essential that we incent all education stakeholders to drive dramatic change by focusing on quality and results in a competitive system. Building on this direction, we would recommend ensuring clear alignment of all the teacher and leader funding streams, both formula and competitive-based.

- 4) Fourth, ESEA should limit and even reduce the number of compliance-oriented requirements for schools and school systems. School change does not happen by mandating a laundry list of prescribed regulations; rather, we should be clear around the non-negotiable expectations, but still be flexible enough to enable educators to spend more time focusing on student achievement.

Thank you again for the opportunity to share our recommendations, which are based on New Leaders' ten years of working in high-need schools. I appreciate your continued leadership on these issues and I would be happy to discuss these issues in further detail to help inform your work to strengthen the ESEA to realize its full potential in making major strides in student achievement outcomes for our nation's children.