

One day, all children in this nation will have the opportunity to attain an excellent education.

TEACHFORAMERICA

November 24, 2014

### **Teach For America Comments on Sen. Harkin's HEA Reauthorization Bill**

Teach For America was encouraged to see the introduction of an HEA Reauthorization Bill by Senator Harkin. Enacting this thoughtful, critical legislation would improve the lives of millions of American students. It is hard to imagine the United States Senate without Tom Harkin's commitment and passion to education, and we thank him for his lifetime of service to the American people.

The Higher Education Act plays a critical role in shaping teacher preparation programs across the nation. Reporting requirements should, without being burdensome, include outcomes, and fair accountability measures that are consistent for all kinds of teacher preparation programs. We were pleased to see that in Senator Harkin's bill, traditionally and alternatively certified teachers are held to the same high standards - with real, financial consequences - with respect to the quality of their programs as demonstrated through the required reporting data.

We commend the bill for limiting the number of evaluation measures and making them meaningful, rather than a laundry list, and for including both inputs and outputs to measure the quality of teacher preparation programs. We believe inputs should reflect goals we all want to achieve, including increasing the diversity and breadth of the talent pool from which districts and school leaders may select their faculty. For this reason, we are glad the bill requires states to factor in GPA and entrance exams by looking at averages across cohorts, rather than setting a rigid bar for each individual student. In so doing, measures such as GPA and test scores can be combined with other factors such as demonstrated leadership skills, strong verbal and written communication skills, and a demonstrated commitment to serving in high-need local educational agencies. Additionally, recognizing the importance of having schools with racially, ethnically and socioeconomically diverse teachers, we're glad the legislation requires teacher preparation programs to report data on graduates disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, and Pell Grant recipient status.

The bill also includes reporting requirements on critical outcomes, which will serve to hold all teacher preparation programs, traditional or alternative, to a high level of quality. These outcomes include teacher performance, based on factors such as student achievement growth examined over a period of time, and the percentage of teachers who are rated highly based on state surveys. We also agree with the legislation requiring states who do not report any teacher preparation program in its state as low-performing to describe the reliability of evidence used to measure teacher program performance.

In addition, we commend the bill for including a comprehensive, thoughtful list of teaching skills, including instruction on culturally responsive teaching and how to engage and



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involve parents in their children's education. Teachers should create educational environments where students feel a sense of self-worth and acceptance along with scholastic success and achievement. Culturally responsive teaching creates academic accomplishment while retaining a student's identity and cultural values in an authentic, meaningful way.

Finally, within any HEA reauthorization, we call on Congress to provide loan forgiveness for teachers, especially those working in low-income areas. We must do this if we, as a nation, are serious in our commitment to recruiting and retaining a high-quality, diverse teaching corps.

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