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Denver Public Schools, in Partnership with Teach For America, Hires Educators with Deferred Action Status

Private Funding Clears Way for DPS to Hire Teach for America Corps Members with Deferred Action Status

Denver – The Denver Public Schools (DPS) and Teach For America announced this week their partnership to hire promising Teach For America corps members with deferred action status to teach in the classroom. The partnership with DPS and Teach For America is made possible thanks to funding from the Ben and Lucy Ana Walton Fund of the Walton Family Foundation, Inc., which allows Teach For America to recruit, train and provide ongoing support for corps members with deferred action status. In 2013, Colorado was the first Teach For America region to recruit, train and support two Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients who were hired by DPS. The DACA directive, implemented on August 15, 2012, offers undocumented immigrants who came to the U.S. before the age of 16 – and who meet certain criteria –the opportunity to live and work in the U.S.

“Our highest priority is to have the best teachers in our classrooms. Nothing means more to the growth and success of our kids than the quality of their teachers,” said DPS Superintendent Tom Boasberg. “Thanks to this partnership, we are now able to hire some very talented teachers who are committed to giving back to their community and who are an inspiration to our kids. These teachers often are bi-lingual or multi-lingual and have a deep personal understanding of the challenges that many of our students face who similarly came to this country in undocumented status as young children. We are grateful to Teach For America and the Ben and Lucy Ana Walton Fund for this partnership.”

Thanks to the private funding, DPS and Teach For America will expand the program for the 2014-2015 school year to attract other talented educators with deferred action status in Denver’s classroom. All prospective Teach For America applicants

must earn a bachelor's degree, with an undergraduate GPA of at least a 2.50. All Teach For America corps members in Colorado receive an alternate license issued by the Colorado Department of Education. After the first year, and through a program at CU-Denver, TFA teachers are issued a traditional license.

"Bringing in more teachers with deferred action status speaks to the importance of equity and opportunity at Teach For America and Denver Public Schools," said Alejandro Fuentes Mena, one of two Teach For America corps members with DACA status teaching in DPS. "The impossible that existed in my childhood is something that is plausible and a reality now. I now have the opportunity to impact my students and show them that they too can achieve at the highest levels."

Fuentes teaches fifth-grade English Language Arts at the Denver Center for International Studies (DCIS) at Ford, and the second Teach For America corps member on DACA status to be hired by DPS is Kareli Lizarraga, who teaches seventh-grade reading at STRIVE Prep – Sunnyside.

"I think having teachers with deferred action status in the classroom is important for educational equity," said Lizarraga. "Through this we are showing students with deferred action status that their story is valuable and that education is the great equalizer. Providing students with teachers who share similar backgrounds and experiences is a testament to what is possible for them regardless of their immigration status."

Denver Public Schools is the fastest-growing urban school district in the country and is the largest school system in Colorado with 87,398 students. Roughly 72% of DPS students qualify for free and reduced lunch, and about one-third are English-language learners.

Teach For America recruits top college graduates and career-changing professionals to make an initial two-year commitment to teach in urban and rural public schools and become lifelong advocates for educational equity. Currently, 265 Teach For America corps member and nearly 900 alumni (including 345 teachers and 35 principals/system leaders) of the organization work in Denver and Colorado Springs. Corps members are teaching in more than 80 schools in five districts statewide with Pueblo City Schools being added in the 2014-15 school year.