

July 29, 2008

The Honorable Edward M. Kennedy
Chairman
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Michael B. Enzi
Ranking Member
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable George Miller
Chairman
Committee on Education and Labor
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Howard McKeon
Ranking Member
Committee on Education and Labor
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Conference Committee Action on H.R. 4137, the Higher Education Opportunity Act

Dear Chairmen and Ranking Members:

The National School Boards Association (NSBA), representing 95,000 local school board members across the nation through our state school boards associations, thanks you for your leadership in advancing the long-delayed reauthorization of the “Higher Education Opportunity Act”, H.R. 4137. As conferees prepare to meet tonight, we wish to provide our views on Title II (Teacher Quality Enhancement Grants) in particular because of the important role the grants can play in helping to strengthen teacher quality, which is a critical component to raising student achievement and fulfilling the goals of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) / No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

In general, NSBA is pleased with the reforms within Title II, including the streamlined focus on partnership grants that directly involve local school districts, the strengthening of pre-baccalaureate teacher preparation programs, the promising addition of teaching residency programs, and heightened accountability for teacher preparation programs for increasing the number of teachers in shortage areas.

We are pleased that the conference agreement under consideration reflects school boards’ preferences for a number of provisions where the House and Senate (S. 1642) bills had differed. Among the recommendations we offered, we appreciate 1) the inclusion of programs offering alternative routes to teacher certification as an allowable partner for the grants, 2) the emphasis on preparing general education and special education teachers to effectively teach students with disabilities and participate in individualized education program teams, as well as preparation for effectively teaching English language learners, 3) the emphasis on recruiting teachers from underrepresented populations, rural and urban communities, teachers of subject shortage areas, and mid-career professionals; and, 4) giving priority grant status to partnerships that include teacher preparation programs with a rigorous selection process.

We strongly support Section 206 “Teacher Development,” which requires teacher preparation programs to publicly report on annual quantifiable goals for increasing the number of teachers trained in shortage areas, increasing collaboration with local school districts to ensure training matches school districts’ needs, and focusing on effective training to teach students with disabilities, a diverse student enrollment, and in urban and rural schools.

Lastly, while we support the potentially promising addition of teaching residency programs to Title II, we believe conferees should clarify that the establishment of criteria for selecting mentors for the teacher residents does not create a federal definition of “teacher effectiveness.” Our concern is with Section 202 (e) (2) (A) (iv), which states that “evaluation of teacher effectiveness *shall* be based on, but not limited to, observations of the following:” We believe conferees should substitute the term “may” for “shall,” so that there is no confusion that Congress is mandating how local districts define or evaluate teacher effectiveness.



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- *Barbara L. Bolas
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Executive Director*
- *Michael A. Resnick
Associate
Executive Director*

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Again, we applaud your leadership in moving forward with the reauthorization of this important legislation and for addressing many of our previous recommendations. We appreciate your continued consideration of our remaining concerns and would be pleased to answer any questions you may have. Please contact Marcus Egan, Director of Federal Affairs, at (703) 838-6707 or megan@nsba.org, for any additional information.

Sincerely,



Michael A. Resnick
Associate Executive Director

MAR: me/kc
G:Adv/HillLetters/Senate/07.29.08HEALtrtoConferees

Cc: Members, Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
Members, House Committee on Education and Labor