

January 27, 2011

Honorable Barack Obama  
President of the United States  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

As organizations concerned with promoting educational quality and equity, particularly for students who have traditionally been least well served by our educational system, we are deeply committed to the development of well-prepared, experienced, and effective teachers for all communities, and to ensuring that every student has a fully prepared and effective teacher. On behalf of the nation's 50 million elementary and secondary students, we write to you with a sense of urgency about a critical issue that threatens the welfare of many of them.

We are deeply concerned about a provision inserted in H.R. 3082, the Continuing Resolution for government funding passed in December, which undermined the federal definition of a "highly qualified teacher" in the No Child Left Behind Act by allowing states to label teachers as "highly qualified" when they are still in training – and, in many cases, just beginning training – in alternative route programs.

This provision – inserted in the law without notice to concerned public stakeholders and without public debate – codifies a Bush-era regulation that was challenged by parents of low-income students of color in court because their children were disproportionately taught by such underprepared teachers and because the regulation removed the obligation of states and districts to disclose and rectify the inequity. The provision seeks to reverse the recent federal appeals court ruling these parents obtained, which held that the regulation patently violated NCLB's unambiguous requirement that only fully prepared teachers be deemed "highly qualified" and that, as such, teachers still in-training must be publicly disclosed and not concentrated in low-income, high-minority schools.

Our concern with this provision (and with any federal policy that reinforces the unequal allocation of fully trained and certified teachers to all students) is that it disproportionately impacts our most vulnerable populations: low-income students and students of color, English language learners, and students with disabilities who are most often assigned such underprepared teachers. Further, this provision hides this disparate reality from parents and the public by disingenuously labeling teachers-in-training as "highly qualified" and hindering advocacy for better prepared teachers. Research confirms what logic and experience dictate: that teachers-in-training are significantly less effective in supporting student achievement than those who are fully trained when they enter teaching, and that the negative effects are particularly pronounced for students whose success depends most acutely on fully-trained professionals. We believe that students with the greatest needs should have the best-prepared and most effective teachers to support their success, and that pursuit of that goal should be the purpose of federal policy.

In the coming weeks, we will propose specific actions to the Administration and the Congress that can achieve this goal, including repeal of this provision and development of a transparent definition of teacher quality, along with a set of policies that will allow the nation to put a well-prepared and effective teacher in every classroom. We will work tirelessly and in concert to see that policy is enacted that will support high-quality teaching for every child.

Respectfully,

Action United

Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment

Alliance for Multilingual Multicultural Education

American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education

American Association of People with Disabilities

American Association of State Colleges and Universities

American Federation of Teachers

ASPIRA Association

Association for Persons in Supported Employment

Association of University Centers on Disabilities

Autistic Self Advocacy Network

Bay Area Parent Leadership Action Network

California Association for Bilingual Education

California Latino School Boards Association

Californians for Justice

Californians Together

Campaign for Fiscal Equity

Campaign for Quality Education

Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning

Center for Teaching Quality

Citizens for Effective Schools

Coalition for Educational Justice

Council for Exceptional Children

Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates

Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund

Easter Seals

ELC, Education Law Center

FairTest, The National Center for Fair & Open Testing

Higher Education Consortium for Special Education

Justice Matters

Knowledge Alliance

Latino Elected and Appointed Officials National Taskforce on Education

Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law

Learning Disabilities Association of America

Los Angeles Educational Partnership

Movement Strategy Center

NAACP

National Alliance of Black School Educators

National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities  
National Association of State Directors of Special Education  
National Center for Learning Disabilities  
National Council for Educating Black Children  
National Council of Teachers of English  
National Disability Rights Network  
National Down Syndrome Congress  
National Down Syndrome Society  
National Education Association  
National Latino/a Education Research and Policy Project  
National League of United Latin American Citizens  
North American Association for Environmental Education  
Parent-U-Turn  
Parents for Unity  
Philadelphia Education Fund  
Philadelphia Student Union  
Public Advocates Inc.  
Public Education Network  
Rural School and Community Trust  
RYSE Center  
School Social Work Association of America  
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center  
TASH: Equity, Opportunity, and Inclusion for People with Disabilities  
Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children  
Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages  
Texas Association for Chicanos and Higher Education  
United Church of Christ Justice & Witness Ministries  
Youth Together

cc: Arne Duncan, Secretary of Education, U.S. Department of Education