

July 16, 2012

The Honorable Harold Rogers  
Chairman  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Norm Dicks  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Denny Rehberg  
Chairman  
Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,  
Health and Human Services, Education, and  
Related Agencies  
United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro  
Ranking Member  
Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,  
Health and Human Services, Education, and  
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United States House of Representatives

The Honorable John Boehner  
Speaker of the House  
United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Minority Leader  
United States House of Representatives

Dear Chairman Rogers, Congressman Dick, Chairman Rehberg, Congresswoman DeLauro, Speaker Boehner, and Minority Leader Pelosi,

We, the undersigned organizations, request that the current legal definition of a highly qualified teacher (HQT) as defined in Section 163 of Public Law 111-322 be incorporated into the next must-pass legislation under your jurisdiction. Failure to do so could result in hundreds of thousands of teachers losing their jobs, leaving more than 1.5 million students, the majority high risk or low income, without certified teachers.

Rigorous studies have consistently shown that alternatively certified teachers, as a whole, are as effective, if not more effective, than traditionally certified teachers. For example, a 2009 national randomized study commissioned by the U.S. Department of Education found that there is no statistically significant difference in performance between students taught by teachers certified through alternative as opposed to traditional routes. Similarly, a comprehensive study of teacher education research published by the American Educational Research Association found there were no differences in teacher efficacy or teaching competence, as measured by classroom observations, between alternatively and traditionally certified teachers.

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Based on these facts, participating in an alternative route to certification does not preclude a teacher from being highly effective, and thus should never prevent that teacher from being considered “highly qualified.” That said, we realize that with the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, an effort must be made to more accurately define highly effective teachers. Until then, it is important that all highly effective teachers, including those pursuing alternative certification, remain in their classrooms.

Teach For America and TNTP are just two of many programs with an excellent track record of producing high-performing, alternatively certified teachers. Nationally, about one-third of all new teachers are hired through alternative routes each year. This number is only expected to grow, as more current teachers reach retirement. In many states, alternative routes are providing a critical mass of teachers annually, including:

- Florida and Texas: More than 50% of teachers;
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- Mississippi: More than one third of teachers.

After a 2010 Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruling invalidated a 2002 Department of Education regulation and altered a decade of practice, Congress acted quickly to reaffirm Title 20 of the U.S. Code, recognizing that teachers meeting certain benchmarks while enrolled in high quality alternative certification programs are highly qualified. At that time, the expectation was that the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) would be reauthorized shortly, and the provision was set to expire at the end of the 2012 school year. As ESEA has not been reauthorized, allowing the provision to expire would have a devastating effect on jobs, school systems, and children and families across the country. It is current law, and extending it would serve to maintain the status quo.

There have been conversations about altering or eliminating the provision; however, in the spirit of not disrupting the longstanding approach to HQT on which states and local districts have relied, we strongly suggest that any modifications to the federal, state, and local regulations regarding who falls under the HQT umbrella be made as part of a broader ESEA reauthorization. It is vital to allow all relevant parties the chance to deliberate and weigh in on this critical provision. Radically shifting the current HQT approach will have a significant influence on the current system, and the potential to cause turmoil in schools next year. There will be particularly damaging effects for states and districts and charter schools that rely heavily on alternative routes to provide new teachers, with an overwhelming and disproportionate impact on many high poverty communities.

In an era of fiscal restraint, it is important to note that including this provision will not require any funding, and will not affect the Congressional budget. However, if the current HQT law is not extended, hundreds of thousands of tremendously gifted teachers who have a significant positive impact on students will not be able to continue to teach. That is a cost this country simply cannot afford to bear.

Every child in this country deserves to be taught by outstanding teachers. By taking alternatively certified teachers out of the equation, our ability to provide them with the high

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Rigorous studies have consistently shown that alternatively certified teachers, as a whole, are as effective, if not more effective, than traditionally certified teachers. For example, a 2009 national randomized study commissioned by the U.S. Department of Education found that there is no statistically significant difference in performance between students taught by teachers certified through alternative as opposed to traditional routes. Similarly, a comprehensive study of teacher education research published by the American Educational Research Association found there were no differences in teacher efficacy or teaching competence, as measured by classroom observations, between alternatively and traditionally certified teachers.

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Teach For America and TNTP are just two of many programs with an excellent track record of producing high-performing, alternatively certified teachers. Nationally, about one-third of all new teachers are hired through alternative routes each year. This number is only expected to grow, as more current teachers reach retirement. In many states, alternative routes are providing a critical mass of teachers annually, including:

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