

December 1, 2015

Honorable Harold Rogers
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
H-305, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Nita Lowey
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
H-305, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Senator Thad Cochran
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Room S128, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Barbara Mikulski
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Room 128, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairmen Rogers and Cochran and Ranking Members Lowey and Mikulski,

We, the undersigned groups, write to express our opposition to any appropriations rider prohibiting the promulgation or enforcement of the proposed teacher preparation program regulations. These regulations will support the nation's education system by improving teacher effectiveness through stronger quality, accountability, and transparency in teacher education. The new rules will reveal meaningful outcome information about teachers and their students to identify successful teacher preparation programs and help those that are not self-improving. Data on each program's graduates' placement and retention in K-12 schools, classroom success with student learning, and reported satisfaction will be publicly disclosed.

The new regulations will help protect the \$4 billion annual federal investment in teacher preparation by empowering teacher candidates to choose programs with a more fully demonstrated record of success. In order to improve student academic performance and close achievement gaps, it is essential that teacher education programs that show good results educate more students and receive a greater share of public resources in doing so. Those programs that lack positive results should focus on improvement or lose at least a small portion of public funding. With studies linking quality teacher preparation programs to effective educators and student achievement, Congressional interference with proposed regulatory changes in this regard would damage the quality of education our children receive and the nation's economy.

Over the past several years, the Department of Education has prudently gone through a public rulemaking process to allow multiple stakeholders to offer comments on how to best improve teacher preparation programs. We strongly urge Congress to allow this work to come to completion by excluding language from the FY 2016 appropriations bill that prohibits federal funding for the implementation of the new teacher preparation regulations.

Nearly 200,000 graduates from schools of education and those who have completed alternative route teaching programs are placed in classrooms each year. Too often, these educators and the school districts that hire them find out all too soon that they are ill prepared for the demands of today's classrooms. Yet, two-thirds of the states have never identified a single teacher preparation program as low performing or at risk and less than three percent of all teacher preparation programs are identified as low performing. This neglect by our current system is unfair to educators and is devastating to students, especially low-income students, students of color, English language learners, and students with disabilities, who are most likely to be assigned teachers who are least equipped to grow their knowledge and skills.

Research shows teachers have the greatest in-school influence on student achievement. Yet, we have been slower than many other countries to focus energy and resources on assuring the quality of our teacher preparation programs. In light of this, we've supported the Department of Education's effort to generate more meaningful, actionable information on the quality of teacher preparation programs.

Currently, states and institutions are required to report reams of data about teacher preparation, but very little of this information is useful. Less than 20 percent of all institutions of higher education collect outcome data and only a handful of states even have the capacity to do so. The department has proposed shifting the reporting requirements toward focusing attention where it is needed: on results.

The regulations' requirements to report on employment outcomes, student learning outcomes, and surveys on teachers' and employers' experiences will help create more meaningful feedback loops for a full range of stakeholders – from prospective teachers to hiring school districts, college presidents, state education leaders, and preparation programs themselves.

Employment outcomes are important because they help ensure that preparation programs are aligned with school districts' actual staffing needs. Currently, there's a glut of certified teachers in some areas and a dearth in others. By requiring reporting on teacher placement rates, both generally and for high-need schools, as well as on teacher retention rates in both settings, program officials – and their potential applicants – can ascertain whether or not they are aligning themselves with districts' staffing needs.

Done correctly, the requirements to report **student learning outcomes** of program graduates could generate more meaningful information about what happens after program graduates begin teaching. In too many preparation programs, the curriculum is disconnected from the new college- and career-ready standards, the coursework lacks effective instruction in practical skills, and there's a lack of quality control in choosing supervising teachers for teaching candidates' clinical practice. In these instances, information could also help to identify and learn from those programs that are doing a good job of preparing candidates for the demands of the classroom.

Student learning measures and employment outcomes are crucial, but cannot provide the full picture of how teachers are doing in the classroom. That's why **surveys of teachers' and employers' experiences** are also important. Good surveys, as envisioned in the regulations, can help identify specific areas where improvement is needed. For example, a quarter of teachers nationwide report feeling underprepared to work with children of varying abilities or to maintain class order, and a similar percentage of principals agree – suggesting areas of improvement. Teachers also report a need for more extensive clinical practice in their preparation. Good surveys can also help identify strengths. For example, evidence suggests that many new teachers have more realistic expectations than veteran teachers of the number of special education students they will teach. Programs that ensure that their candidates have reasonable expectations should have confirmation that they're doing well on that front, as should program applicants.

Additionally, the regulations' proposed requirements to report data for all teacher preparation programs, whether or not based at institutions of higher education is a welcomed change because it will reveal important information about alternative certification programs. With so many new teachers, many who are teaching students of color and students in poverty, now entering the profession through alternate-route programs, the new regulations will help fill this existing information gap.

Finally, the proposed regulations take a step towards promoting teacher quality by preventing programs failing to prepare teachers effectively from continuing to receive federal money through the TEACH Grant program to send teachers to the highest needs schools. This program is intended to help prepare teachers to teach students who are significantly underperforming. We are deeply troubled that of the 38 teacher preparation programs designated low-performing or at risk through the current Title II reporting system, 22 have participated in the TEACH Grant program. Linking TEACH Grant eligibility to program quality is an important lever for bringing accountability to the programs ostensibly equipping teachers to teach in the highest-need schools.

We are encouraged by the Department of Education's efforts to make an important shift to evaluating how preparation programs are doing on what really matters: preparing teachers who can teach effectively at the schools where students need them most. Preparation programs that fail their graduates also fail students and ultimately our country. Congress should not stand in the way of the department moving forward to ensure teacher preparation programs are producing effective educators and leaders.

Thank you for considering our views.

Sincerely,

Teach Plus
Education Trust
National Council on Teacher Quality
Education Reform Now
Democrats For Education Reform
Teach For America
TNTP
Third Way
Educators 4 Excellence
New America
National Center for Teacher Residencies