

S. 1716 – “Assuring Successful Students through Effective Teaching Act” (Sen. Sanders)

A bill to improve teacher quality and increase access to effective teachers

Purpose

To ensure that all students have access to highly qualified and effective teachers. This bill:

- ✓ Defines a “highly qualified teacher” as someone who has fully completed a State-approved traditional or alternative teacher preparation program or, where available, has passed a rigorous State-approved teacher performance assessment and has obtained full State certification.
- ✓ Defines effective as someone who has demonstrated effectiveness based on not less than 3 years of evidence, as measured by a comprehensive teacher evaluation and support system that is developed locally and includes a robust and varied set of methods and measures.
- ✓ Changes parent notification requirements to include automatic notification if a child has been taught by an emergency, intern, or other provisional status teacher for 4 or more weeks. Information provided also includes how their child’s school compares to other schools in the State, and non-Title I schools, in terms of the number and percentage of highly qualified and effective teachers.
- ✓ Changes state plans to include a strategy for recruitment, support, retention, and equitable distribution of highly qualified and effective teachers, while acknowledging that certain districts, such as rural communities, face particular challenges and need additional support.
- ✓ Requires that supervision, guidance, and support be provided to non-highly qualified teachers in order to help them strengthen their practice and provide them with the professional development needed to become highly qualified.

Background

A provision inserted in H.R. 3082, the December 2010 Continuing Resolution for government funding, diluted the federal definition of a “highly qualified teacher” under No Child Left Behind by allowing states to label teachers as “highly qualified” when they are still in training in alternative route preparation programs. This provision allows under-prepared teachers to continue to be disproportionately placed in schools that serve low-income students, students of color, English language learners, and students with disabilities, and relieves schools from having to disclose this information to parents and the public. Equally concerning is that by maintaining the current definition, we relieve schools from having to develop policies that attract and retain fully-prepared teachers to the neediest schools.

It is also critical that we move towards measuring teacher effectiveness and ensuring that students have access to highly effective teachers. However, it takes two to three years to measure effectiveness, therefore there must also be a meaningful standard in place for early career teachers. Since “equitable distribution” is based on whether a teacher is highly qualified, this definition needs to be meaningful. It is also important that teacher effectiveness be evaluated as well, and that equitable distribution, and therefore access, be based on early career teachers who are highly qualified and more experienced teachers who have demonstrated effectiveness.

Rationale – Teacher Preparation is Tied to Student Achievement

- **Teachers-in-training aren't as effective as fully-trained teachers.** Would you be as eager to board an airliner flown by a pilot-in-training as by one fully certified to fly? Of course not. That doesn't mean she won't be a great pilot when fully trained. But it does mean she isn't as capable as a pilot who has completed the training required for certification. Teachers are no different, and the research confirms it. A recent study of high school students in North Carolina, for example, found that students' achievement was significantly higher if they were taught by a teacher who was fully prepared upon entry, certified in his or her teaching field, and had taught for more than two years. Studies examining the effects of teacher education and certification on student achievement have consistently found that fully prepared and certified teachers are more effective at raising student achievement than under-certified teachers or teachers still participating in alternate route programs who have had little preparation before they enter the classroom.
- **A student's chance of being taught by an intern is strongly correlated with the concentration of students of color at the school, the concentration of low-income students at the school, and the level of academic achievement at the school.** Students from low-income communities, students of color, English language learners, and students with disabilities are more likely to be taught by underprepared teachers still in training in alternate route programs. Teachers who become certified after completing a high-quality alternate route program are often just as effective as those who complete traditional programs. But studies have consistently found that teachers-in-training are less effective before they have completed their preparation than those who enter teaching fully prepared, and that these teachers are primarily assigned to low-income and minority students, who may experience untrained beginners year after year. Not only are alternate route trainees less effective than fully-certified teachers, but they have higher attrition rates, thereby subjecting low-income and minority students and students with disabilities to a churn of underprepared, inexperienced teachers. A nationwide study by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) found, for example, that among recent college graduates, 49% of those who entered teaching without certification left the profession within five years, as compared to only 14% of certified entrants. In the Teach for America program, published studies show that more than 80% of TFA teachers have left their districts after three years.
- **Students with disabilities are less likely to be taught by credentialed educators.** Research examining fully-prepared versus less extensively prepared teachers demonstrates that more extensive preparation in special education matters to the achievement of students with disabilities. Teachers with substandard credentials may not be prepared to address complex students' needs, such as challenges with learning, communication, emotional and behavioral disorders, physical disabilities, and developmental disorders. Because 60% of students with disabilities spend 80% of their day in the general education classroom, this issue doubly impacts students with disabilities and it is therefore critical that both general and special educators have the experience and support needed to appropriately accommodate their needs.
- **Programs like Teach for America will continue to play an important role in addressing teacher shortages, under the ASSET Act.** The bill simply requires that participating teachers-in-training pass a teacher performance assessment to earn recognition as a "highly qualified" teacher. If they cannot earn that status, the bill ensures that they will be adequately supervised and not concentrated only in schools serving kids from low-income families — and that parents are informed that their children are being taught by a teacher who is not highly qualified and is receiving the support and guidance they need.

- **Qualification gives parents confidence, as teachers gain experience and demonstrate effectiveness.** We won't know for years whether a new teacher develops into an effective teacher. Even a good evaluation system will take years to assess a teacher's effectiveness, and every teacher should become more effective with experience. But ensuring that teachers are fully prepared (highly qualified) on their first day offers parents some assurance that they will have the knowledge to understand what students need and the skills to deliver it successfully. And if a child is being taught by a teacher-in-training, that child's parents should know it, so they can play an active role in ensuring that their child's needs are met.
- **Quality and diversity go hand in hand.** America's Historically Black Colleges and Universities represent less than 4% of the nation's higher education institutions, but they graduate 50% of bachelor's degree-prepared African American teachers. Where full scholarships are available to fully-prepare teachers, as through the North Carolina Teaching Fellowships and California's CAL T-Grants, they draw disproportionate numbers of students of color. These realities demonstrate that we can improve the diversity of America's teaching workforce, as we improve the qualification of America's teaching workforce.
- **These amendments would still allow alternative certification teachers to teach without supervision if they pass a state teacher performance assessment.** There are over 200,000 teachers teaching across the country in classrooms who are not highly qualified under the current NCLB 100% Highly Qualified Teacher requirement, according to the Department of Education's most recent data. A change in the definition would not prevent alternative certification teachers from teaching. Districts can still hire these teachers, but may not use Title II funds. These teachers would still be able to serve where there are teacher shortages – both No Child Left Behind and the HELP bill contemplate this in recognizing there won't be 100% HQTs and calling for reporting and equitable distribution of non-HQTs. The most effective alternative certification programs are 3-year residency type models where during the first year this teacher is not the teacher of record but is mentored in a classroom while they complete their preparation program. Then, they would be fully prepared, highly qualified, and effective for their 2nd and 3rd year of teaching.
- **The high turnover rate of unprepared teachers is costly. It is more efficient to focus funding on support and retention than recruitment.** The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF) estimates that growing teacher dropout rates cost over \$7.3 billion annually. The commission suggests turnover issues are draining resources, diminishing teaching quality, and undermining the ability to close the student achievement gap. NCTAF notes their estimate does not include the district's cost for teachers who move from school to school within a district, nor does it include any federal or state investments that are lost when a teacher leaves. Were all of these costs taken into account, the true cost would be far in excess of \$7 billion annually.
- **Determining full certification isn't a challenge for states.** States can easily determine which credentials constitute their full level of certification. The National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification has been doing this for years with its cross-state certification descriptors as has the Department in its HEOA and NCLB implementation. Without a "full certification" requirement, every state, if it chooses, could identify all their teachers "highly qualified" (with the possible exception of those who hold a document specifically entitled "emergency" or "waiver" in some way) before they meet current "full certification" requirements.

What the Research Says About the Impact on Achievement and Teacher Retention

- A recent study of high school students in North Carolina found that students' achievement was significantly higher if they were taught by a teacher who was fully prepared upon entry, certified in his or her teaching field, had higher scores on the teacher licensing test, graduated from a competitive college, had taught for more than two years, or was National Board Certified. One of the greatest disadvantages to students found to be instructed by a new teacher from the state's "lateral entry" route into teaching, which allows more than 1000 people to enter teaching each year without prior training, mostly teaching students in low-income schools.
- Uncertified and alternatively certified teachers were found to be significantly less effective than fully prepared and certified teachers in a six-year longitudinal study in Houston, Texas. Examining 132,000 elementary students and 4,400 teachers, researchers found that certified teachers consistently produced stronger student achievement gains on six tests in reading and mathematics. Compared to fully certified teachers, uncertified teachers (including those from Teach for America) had significant negative effects on student achievement on five of six tests. **Teachers without standard certification were assigned primarily to teach African American and Latino students and had attrition rates nearly double those of fully certified teachers.**
- A study of elementary student achievement in Arizona, examining 110 matched pairs of certified and under-certified teachers (alternatively certified or uncertified) from five low-income school districts, found that students of certified teachers significantly out-performed students of teachers who were under-certified on all three subtests of the SAT in reading, mathematics and language arts. Students of Teach for America teachers did not perform significantly differently from students of other under-certified teachers. **In reading, students of certified teachers outperformed students of under-certified teachers by about 4 months on a grade equivalent scale. Students of certified teachers also outperformed students of under-certified teachers by about 3 months in mathematics and about 3 months in language arts.**
- Similar results were found in a study of 3,766 new teachers who entered teaching in grades 4-8 through different pathways in New York City. Students of beginning teachers, prepared through alternative routes, scored significantly lower in reading/language arts in grades 4-8 and in mathematics in grades 4-5 than students of new teachers who graduated from college-based teacher education programs. **Although alternative route teachers who stayed in teaching became more effective in later years as they gained experience and training, most left teaching much earlier than other teachers. By year four, more than 50% of these alternative program entrants and 85% of Teach for America candidates had left as compared to 37% of college prepared teachers. Teacher effectiveness and student achievement improves each year over the first five years of service for all teachers.**

Organizations Supporting S. 1716

1. Action Now – Illinois
2. Action Now– North Carolina
3. ACTION United
4. Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment (ACCE)
5. Alliance for Multilingual Multicultural Education
6. American Council on Education
7. American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education
8. American Association of People with Disabilities
9. American Association of State Colleges and Universities
10. American Council for School Social Work
11. The ARC (For people with intellectual and developmental disabilities)
12. Arkansas Community Organizations
13. Association of University Centers on Disabilities
14. ASPIRA Association
15. Autism National Committee
16. Autistic Self Advocacy Network
17. Bay Area Parent Leadership Action Network
18. Brighton Park Neighborhood Council – Chicago, IL
19. California Association for Bilingual Education
20. Californians for Justice
21. Californians Together
22. California Latino School Boards Association
23. Campaign for Quality Education
24. Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning
25. Center for Teaching Quality
26. Citizens for Effective Schools
27. Coalition for Educational Justice
28. Communities for Excellent Public Schools
29. Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates
30. Delawareans for Social and Economic Justice
31. Disability Policy Collaboration, A Partnership of The Arc and UCP
32. Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund Inc
33. Easter Seals
34. Education Law Center
35. FairTest, The National Center for Fair & Open Testing
36. First Focus Campaign for Children
37. Gamaliel Foundation
38. Grow Your Own Illinois
39. Helen Keller National Center
40. Higher Education Consortium for Special Education
41. Inner City Struggle
42. Justice Matters
43. Latino Elected and Appointed Officials National Taskforce on Education
44. Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
45. Learning Disabilities Association of America
46. Legal Advocates for Children and Youth
47. Movement Strategy Center
48. NAACP

49. NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc
50. National Alliance of Black School Educators
51. National Association of School Psychologists
52. National Association of State Directors of Special Education
53. National Center for Learning Disabilities
54. National Consortium on Deaf -Blindness
55. National Council for Educating Black Children
56. National Council of Teachers of English
57. National Council of Teachers of Mathematics
58. National Disability Rights Network
59. National Down Syndrome Congress
60. National Down Syndrome Society
61. National Education Association
62. National Indian Education Association
63. National Latino Education Research & Policy Project
64. National Parent Teacher Association
65. National Urban League
66. League of United Latin American Citizens
67. Parent-U-Turn
68. Parents Across America
69. Parents for Unity
70. Public Advocates Inc.
71. Public Education Network
72. Rural School and Community Trust
73. RYSE Center
74. San Francisco Teacher Residency
75. School Social Work Association of America
76. South East Asia Resource Action Center
77. TASH – Equity, Opportunity, and Inclusion for People with Disabilities
78. Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children
79. Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc. (TESOL) International
80. Texas Association of Chicanos in Higher Education
81. United Church of Christ Justice & Witness Ministries
82. Youth On Board – Somerville, MA
83. Youth Together