

**House Committee on Education and the Workforce
Hearing on Education Reforms: Exploring Teacher Quality Initiatives
July 27, 2011**

Context: On July 27, the House Committee on Education and the Workforce held a hearing on teacher quality initiatives, examining successful state and local efforts to improve teacher quality in an effort to inform federal policymaking.

Testimony Summary: In opening remarks, Chairman Kline (R-MN) noted limitations in both federal and state laws on teacher effectiveness. For example, the federal definition of a highly qualified teacher does not include a focus on whether students are progressing in the classroom. Sharing an anecdote of a Teacher of the Year who subsequently lost his job due to "last in, first out" rules, Chairman Kline called the valuing of credentials and tenure over effectiveness "completely unacceptable." He then shared a list of promising developments, including legislation in Tennessee and Indiana on teacher evaluations, initiatives like teacher residency programs, and pay-for-performance policies. He stated that the Committee would work to support states and districts in their efforts to recruit and retain effective teachers. In his remarks, Ranking Member Miller (D-CA) applauded the recent progress on teacher effectiveness. He also noted that teacher quality is an issue of equity, with poor and minority students often lacking access to the important school resource, effective teachers.

The hearing witnesses were The Honorable Kevin S. Huffman (Commissioner, Tennessee Department of Education); Mr. Tom Boasberg (Superintendent, Denver Public Schools); Mr. David Cicarella (President, New Haven Federation of Teachers); and Ms. Kate Walsh (President, National Council on Teacher Quality).

- **Commissioner Huffman** summarized Tennessee's new system of teacher evaluation, mandated under state law, in which teachers are evaluated annually, given one of five ratings, and assessed as follows: 35% determined by a value-added score on standardized assessments (for teachers in non-tested grades and subjects, a schoolwide value-added measure will be used), 15% on other student achievement metrics, and 50% on qualitative measures through classroom observation (Tennessee has selected the TAP rubric, which evaluates teachers on 19 indicators). Teachers will be observed by trained evaluators who must pass inter-rater reliability tests; veteran teachers receive four observations and novice teachers six, and all teachers receive written and verbal feedback within a week. Evaluation results will offer real-time feedback, identify top performers for recognition and best practice dissemination, and identify low performers for tailored professional development and, in some instances, exit from the system. Noting that no evaluation protocol is perfect, Commissioner Huffman stressed that policymakers should not derail an important reform effort for want of perfection.

- **Superintendent Boasberg** outlined Denver's Leading Effective Academic Practice (LEAP) system, which the district – with collaboration from teachers – piloted in spring 2011 and will use in the upcoming school year. LEAP has 21 indicators, which fall into 8 specific expectations. Superintendent Boasberg shared information about observation tools as well as student questionnaires that are incorporated into LEAP. Teachers will be assessed on multiple measures, including 50% on measures of student growth.
- **Mr. Cicarella** described the contract negotiations in New Haven that led to a model for urban school reform, with teacher voice valued in all key decisions. The contract was ratified by members, 855-42. Teachers are evaluated on multiple measures, participate in a goal-setting conference at the start of the school year, and are assessed on student learning, instructional practice, and instructional values.
- **Ms. Walsh** contended that government spending on education does not reflect what research shows: teachers are the most important investment in a school. While school spending has increased at a rapid rate, very little has been directed at improving teacher quality. For example, of Title II of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) funds, 42% is used for unspecified professional development activities, 36% for class size reduction, and only about 5% for improving teacher quality. Ms. Walsh also decried the quality of teacher preparation in the nation.

Ms. Walsh next noted that significant state legislative reform occurred in 2010 and 2011 in the area of teacher evaluation and anticipated continued reforms in the near future. Nonetheless, she observed that a majority of states still do not require annual evaluations for veteran teachers, do not include evidence of student learning in teacher evaluations, and grant tenure in summary fashion.

Discussion focus: Following the witnesses' testimony, members of the Committee participated in a question and answer session.

- Chairman Kline and Representatives Heck (R-NV), Hanna (R-NY), and Hinojosa (D-TX) requested additional information about **multiple measures of teacher effectiveness**. Chairman Kline pressed Commissioner Huffman on Tennessee's decision to use a schoolwide value-added measure for non-tested teachers. Commissioner Huffman shared his view that it often makes sense to use an individualized value-added measure, but that other circumstances may warrant a schoolwide measure 1) to avoid testing in every subject and 2) to reflect the collective enterprise of schooling in which all teachers contribute to the school climate. He noted that districts in Tennessee are field-testing assessments in non-tested grades and subjects that may be used in future years.

Rep. Heck expressed interest in measures of student achievement other than statewide assessments; Commissioner Huffman explained that districts, working with experts, were considering use of the AP exams and ACT scores. Rep. Heck also asked about student perception parameter a measure of effectiveness; Superintendent Boasberg explained that Denver uses this measure in secondary schools and sees a high correlation between

student responses to carefully-tailored questions and student achievement. Ms. Walsh added that a Gates-funded study confirmed the efficacy of using student perception data.

Finally, Rep. Hanna asked what potential problems had been identified with the measures. Commissioner Huffman noted that Tennessee is concerned about potential inconsistent application of the system by districts, particularly because state-level decisions like tenure will be informed by evaluation results. The State plans to employ a database to view observation scores in real time to identify any district differences and ensure they correlate with student performance.

- Ranking Member Miller and Representative Heck asked the panel about the **proper role of the federal government**, and Representatives Payne (D-NJ) and Davis (D-CA) questioned the propriety of making Title II of ESEA competitive. Superintendent Boasberg agreed with Ranking Member Miller that the federal government should assert high standards and expectations for professionals when providing funding. Mr. Cicarella cautioned that the federal government should not overly prescribe components of teacher evaluation but encouraged the federal government to incentivize collaboration. Commissioner Huffman recommended that states and districts retain flexibility to design systems. Finally, Ms. Walsh recommended that the federal government maintain reporting and transparency requirements and offer incentives to make reforms. To the concern of Reps. Payne and Davis, Ms. Walsh noted that there is an insignificant return on investment for Title II's annual allocation of \$3 billion and contended that the status quo is ineffective at producing necessary changes in the teaching profession.
- Representatives Roe (R-TN) and Woolsey (D-CA) discussed the **degree to which teachers should be held accountable**, given aspects of students' lives beyond their control. Noting the important role of parents, Rep. Roe asked whether states considered the educational level of parents when evaluating teachers. Rep. Woolsey expressed concern that certain teachers would be disadvantaged by serving high-needs students. Commissioner Huffman explained that use of Tennessee's value-added metric had not resulted in teachers in high-need classrooms being disadvantaged. Superintendent Boasberg added that Denver boasted three of the four highest growth schools in Colorado, with more than 90% of the students at those schools living in poverty. Mr. Cicarella concluded that states and districts should consider the legitimate reasons, beyond teachers, for student struggles and provide wraparound services.
- Spurred by questions posed by Representatives Loeb sack (D-IA), Buschon (R-IN), Thompson (D-PA), McCarthy (D-NY), Tierney (D-MA), and Holt (D-NJ) the panel discussed issues surrounding **teacher preparation, recruitment, and hiring**.

On preparation, Ms. Walsh discussed NCTQ's effort to rank teacher preparation programs across 17 standards that examine content and pedagogical preparation, an effort that has been met with resistance from many education schools. She next asserted that it is easier to obtain admission to an education program than to qualify academically to play college football, a comment for which Rep. Loeb sack requested evidence. Superintendent Boasberg agreed that some preparation programs do not adequately prepare their

graduates. Rather than concentrate on professional development (with districts spending inordinate amounts of money on many activities that lack value), Ms. Walsh encouraged an initial investment in teacher preparation, noting that districts should not be burdened with providing content knowledge to teachers. For example, Massachusetts is the only state that requires that prospective elementary school teachers pass a rigorous mathematics test before entering the classroom. Ms. Walsh agreed with Rep. Tierney's observation that institutions of higher education should consider ways to support new teachers in their communities, even where they were not trained by the particular institution.

The panelists also discussed their practices for attracting and hiring good talent. Commissioner Huffman argued that school districts traditionally have been too passive with hiring and highlighted the Teach for America model, which aggressively and proactively recruits talent to schools. Superintendent Boasberg described Denver's efforts to hire from multiple sources, including from particular preparation programs and through its homegrown residency programs. He also noted that hiring in Denver is decentralized with principals and teachers forming personnel selection committees. Mr. Cicarella agreed that a paper application and interview are insufficient to identify effective teachers.

Analysis: The tenor of the Committee hearing was congenial, with most members expressly supporting the evaluation models described by the panelists. While there was no discord within the Committee, Ranking Member Miller and Representative Holt both expressed disapproval of the non-collaborative reform strategies pursued by some Republican governors in the last year.

Observing that he long has believed that the "teaching to the test" charge was an excuse in the face of, rather than a result of, enhanced accountability, Chairman Miller observed that comprehensive evaluative rubrics like those in Tennessee and Denver require robust, engaging instruction that will lead to improved test results. Chairman Kline closed by noting his belief that the Committee is making progress in determining the proper role of the federal government in this reform area.