

**Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions  
Hearing on ESEA Reauthorization: Teachers and Leaders  
April 15, 2010**

**Context:** The Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions held a hearing today, April 15, on Teachers and Leaders as part of a series of sessions on the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The hearing was conducted in a roundtable format with the Senators and ten witnesses engaged in a discussion focused on two driving queries – what support and leverage the federal government might provide to states and districts to ensure that all students have good teachers and leaders, and what data and evaluation systems that might improve teacher and leader success.

**Testimony Summary:** In their opening remarks, Chairman Harkin (D-IA) and Ranking Member Enzi (R-WY) agreed on the importance of instructional leadership and effective teaching. Chairman Harkin discussed the importance of preparation and professional development programs and their connection to addressing the high attrition rate of many teachers. Ranking Member Enzi noted that the federal government was moving in the right direction as it replaced the paper qualifications of teachers and leaders with effectiveness determinations.

The ten hearing witnesses and their areas of focus in two-minute presentations were as follows:

- **Randi Weingarten** (President, American Federation of Teachers) discussed the need to ensure that teachers receive support from competent administrators and work in supportive environments. Weingarten supported an overhaul of the evaluation system, but stressed that the next iteration should not rely on single snapshots of student performance.
- **Diana Fesmire** (Teacher, Sierra Elementary School, Alamogordo, NM) summarized her district's success and asserted that the best support for teachers is effective professional development.
- **Timothy Daly** (President, The New Teacher Project), citing *The Widget Effect* study, advocated for legitimate evaluations at the district level that place significant weight on student performance; the equitable distribution of good teachers; and strategic funding, with more competitive grants to supplement the base of formula funds.
- **Thomas Kane** (Professor of Education and Economics, Harvard Graduate School of Education/Gates Foundation) discussed the Measures of Effective Teaching project on which he is working. The project measures student gains on state tests and supplemental assessments; uses trained experts to conduct classroom observations; and collects student feedback on teacher practice.
- **Stephanie Hirsh** (Executive Director, National Staff Development Council) asserted that professional development is the only strategy to improve effectiveness that reaches every teacher and principal. She promoted a new statutory definition of professional development that employs student performance data to establish a learning agenda and a requirement that states and districts regularly evaluate the impact of federally-funded professional development

- **Ellen Moir** (Executive Director, New Teacher Center) stressed the importance of induction and mentoring for teachers and suggested a federal funding stream with accountability measures for such programs.
- **José Valenzuela** (Teacher, TechBoston Academy and Boston Teacher Residency Program Graduate) discussed his experience in the Boston Teacher Residency Program.
- **Camilla Benbow** (Dean of Education and Human Development, Vanderbilt University Peabody College) stressed the important role of higher education in preparing teachers. She discussed some of Vanderbilt's initiatives, including a performance evaluation for administrators.
- **Layne Parmenter** (Principal, Urie Elementary, Lyman, WY) noted the need for better professional development for principals. He supported common core standards, vertical data systems, and improved evaluation systems for teachers and leaders. He cautioned that increasing competitive grant funding at the expense of formula programs could disadvantage rural schools.
- **Jon Schnur** (Chief Executive Officer and Co-Founder, New Leaders for New Schools) observed that focus on school leadership had been lacking in the past with only 2% of Title II funds targeting school leaders.

**Discussion Focus:** Following the witnesses' testimony, members of the Committee participated in an informal discussion session. Occasional questions from Senators resulted in lengthy discussions among the witnesses.

- Sen. Alexander (R-TN) pondered Congress's role in the development of better teacher and leader evaluation tools. Mr. Kane recommended that the federal government require evaluations that include student achievement growth in grades and subjects where feasible; for non-test-based measures, the measures used still should relate to student growth. Hirsh suggested teachers lead collaborative determinations of the measures for non-tested courses. Ms. Benbow promoted federal government funding for research efforts to develop accurate evaluation tools, including Vanderbilt's work on a national teacher performance assessment. Finally, noting that exemplary practices exist but have not been brought to scale, Mr. Schnur and Mr. Daly advocated for federal investment in competitive funding for innovative efforts that can serve as exemplars for evaluating teachers and leaders; such funding, he asserted, would create an evidence base and examples that could be taken to scale.
- Spurred in part by comments from Sens. Franken (D-MN) (who is co-sponsoring a bill on principal recruitment and training with Sen. Hatch (R-UT)) and Reed (D-RI), witnesses discussed efforts related to principal recruitment and training. Mr. Schnur and Ms. Benbow outlined the models, respectively, of the New Leaders for New Schools program and a Vanderbilt program for school leaders in Nashville. Mr. Parmenter noted that nationally, principals constitute a fairly young demographic that would benefit from professional development, particularly in early literacy and school turnaround. Ms. Moir noted that a major reason for teacher attrition is a lack of quality school leadership. And Ms. Fesmire asserted that in her district, principals played an important role in the curricular reform that led to district success.
- Witnesses (particularly Ms. Moir and Mr. Valenzuela) and Sen. Murkowski (R-AK) discussed the promising results of well-designed mentoring programs. Ms. Benbow noted that the Vanderbilt program for principal training also includes a mentorship component.
- The discussion frequently returned to the themes of collaboration and community, both within and beyond the school. Ms. Weingarten, for example, asserted that collaboration was essential in

schools, with stakeholders building upon each other's knowledge. Witnesses including Ms. Hirsh promoted collaborative professional development. Additionally, witnesses, particularly Ms. Benbow and Ms. Moir, noted the importance of working with the larger community to develop strong schools. Ms. Weingarten and Sen. Dodd (D-CT) highlighted the New Haven school system's work to engage the larger community in reform.

- At times, Senators questioned the fundamental structure of the public education system. Sen. Bennett (D-CO) noted that the system was designed during the colonial period and the workforce until recently was staffed by virtue of discriminatory practices against women. Chairman Harkin questioned the continued reliance on property taxes to fund schools, a practice which exacerbates inequities.

**Analysis:** The roundtable format of the hearing resulted in a congenial, conversational atmosphere. Witnesses spoke for the majority of the time, with Senators occasionally offering their own thoughts or posing questions. In closing, Chairman Harkin summarized the Committee's commitment to supporting efforts to ensure the all students have access to quality teachers and leaders. He reaffirmed his hope to have an ESEA bill in the Committee in May/June with introduction to the floor possible by late June/July.