



# ISSUE BRIEF

## TEACHER AND PRINCIPAL EFFECTIVENESS

### BACKGROUND

Research indicates no other school-related factor has a greater impact on student achievement than the quality and effectiveness of the student's teacher. Further, increasingly studies also point to school leadership as the second most impactful factor in improving the learning environment. Meanwhile, school districts nationwide face challenges involving both teacher and principal recruitment and retention, particularly in high-need subjects and harder-to-staff schools. The federal government should play a limited, but helpful role by assisting states and districts in meeting the challenges of recruiting, retaining and rewarding quality teachers and principals for its students.

The Obama Administration and the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress have taken bold steps in focusing on the need to ensure that students have access to highly effective teachers and leaders through unprecedented levels of funding from the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA)*, and its companion piece labeled Race to the Top Fund. One of the four assurances in the ARRA speaks to teacher effectiveness and equitable distribution of quality teachers. Congress and the Obama Administration added \$200 million in teacher incentive funds under the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)* to help school districts reward effective teachers. An additional \$100 million was also added to the *Higher Education Act's* Teacher Quality Grants to strengthen teacher preparation programs and assist school districts' recruitment and retention efforts.

The recently released Race to the Top (RTTT) priorities clearly emphasize effective teachers and school leaders. Of a possible 500 points on the application rubric, 138 are available for strategies to generate great teachers and school leaders. For example, the priorities encourage state applicants to design strategies for low performing schools that include instructional and leadership reform, to demonstrate that their data systems can link student outcomes to teacher effectiveness, and permit multiple measures of teacher and principal performance.

Additional funds for school leadership are provided in FY2010 appropriations for education. Funding for competitive grants to assist high-need LEAs in recruiting, training and retaining principals and assistant principals increased from \$19.2 million in FY2009 to \$29.2 billion in FY2010.

President Obama is a strong proponent of teacher residency programs and championed the issue as part of the *Higher Education Act (HEA)* as a senator. He and leading lawmakers also have expressed support for the concept of performance-based pay for teachers, which became a flash point in the short-lived NCLB/ESEA reauthorization debate in the last Congress. The 111<sup>th</sup> Congress may closely examine the parameters of Title II of ESEA, which authorizes most of the federal government's \$3 billion investment to prepare, train and recruit high quality teachers and principals. A framework for the ESEA reauthorization released by the Department includes a focus on Great Teachers and Leaders, including promoting the profession, focusing on effectiveness and equity, promoting leadership and effective preparation programs.

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#### OFFICE OF ADVOCACY

## **Congressional Support during the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress**

Additionally, proposed changes in federal regulations to implement School Improvement Grants send strong signals through its intervention models that include changes in school leadership and a wide range of initiatives. Such initiatives include new or revised instructional programs, high-quality job-embedded professional development, and review of compensation and performance plans. Congressional leaders are expected to continue their keen interest in utilizing federal policy and funding to bolster teacher and principal effectiveness, likely building on efforts begun in the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress.

To quickly recap, the previous Congress did advance several pieces of legislation in the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress that addressed various issues related to teacher quality. For example, Congress overwhelmingly passed the *Higher Education Act (HEA)* that contains support for teacher education programs. Specifically, Title II of HEA authorizes grants aimed at strengthening teacher quality by improving teacher preparation programs and assisting districts in their teacher recruitment and retention efforts.

Among the key changes to HEA that school boards should be familiar with are a streamlined focus on partnership grants that directly involve local districts, stepped up accountability for teacher preparation programs, the addition of teacher residency programs that will pair prospective teachers with a mentor in hard-to-staff schools, and an emphasis on recruiting teachers for shortage areas. More than a dozen NSBA recommendations were included in the final bill, such as emphasizing the preparation of general education and special education teachers to effectively instruct children with disabilities and to participate in IEP teams, as well as including programs offering alternative routes to teacher certification as an allowable partner for the grants.

Congress also passed legislation to provide grants and scholarships to prospective teachers who go to work in high-need schools and subjects. These include TEACH Grants of up to \$16,000 over four years in tuition aid for high-achieving undergraduates and up to \$8,000 over four years for graduate students who commit to teach a high-need subject in a high-need school for at least four years after earning their degree. Additionally, the *America COMPETES Act* authorized scholarships of up to \$10,000 a year for three years for prospective teachers to earn a bachelor's degree in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) fields with a concurrent teaching credential.

## **NSBA POSITION**

Hiring and staffing decisions, as well as professional development programs, are the responsibility of local school districts. Success will ultimately depend on the collaborative and ongoing efforts of school and community leaders and the institutions that prepare teachers and principals. Congress should be mindful of that fact as it considers legislation that aims to strengthen teacher and principal effectiveness. NSBA believes the federal government should play a limited, but not unimportant, role by assisting states and local school districts in their teacher and principal recruitment, retention and professional development efforts through targeted incentives and fewer federal restrictions.

In particular, NSBA urges the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress to:

- Provide incentives to states and districts to help recruit, retain and reward effective teachers and principals in schools that most need them, and for subjects with shortages (e.g. math, science, foreign languages, special education). Incentives should include support for locally-designed performance pay programs. Recruitment and retention incentives and funding (e.g. Title II of ESEA) should cover a portfolio of spending options for districts to reflect unique local conditions;
- Invest in professional development initiatives to enable educators to effectively teach 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, including the use of technology to transform learning;

- Fund, facilitate and disseminate quality research, best practices and innovations on effective teaching and school leadership; and,
- Assist in broadening the pool of new and effective teacher candidates by supporting programs that offer alternative routes to certification that can help increase the number of minority teachers, as well as mid-career professionals. All teacher preparation programs should collaborate with states and local districts to meet their needs, and be held accountable for the quality and preparation of their program's graduates.
- Expand federal support focused on effective school leadership, through partnerships with universities and promotion of research-based programs.

*For additional information, please contact Lucy Gettman, director of federal programs, at the National School Boards Association, at 703-838-6763, by e-mail, [lgettman@nsba.org](mailto:lgettman@nsba.org).*