September 22, 2015

The Honorable Thad Cochran  The Honorable Barbara Mikulski
Chairman  Vice Chairwoman
Committee on Appropriations  Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate  United States Senate

The Honorable Roy Blunt  The Honorable Patty Murray
Chairman  Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, Education, and Health and Human Services, Education,
and Related Agencies  and Related Agencies
United States Senate  United States Senate

Dear Chairman Cochran, Vice Chairwoman Mikulski, Chairman Blunt, and Ranking Member Murray:

The Coalition for Teaching Quality (CTQ)—comprised of more than 100 civil rights, disability, rural, parent, community, and education organizations—is committed to ensuring that every student in every classroom in America has access to fully-prepared and effective teachers. For that reason, we strongly oppose extending the highly qualified teacher (HQT) provision (Section 163 of H.R. 3082 P.L. 111-242), which was enacted in December 2010. This provision allows individuals serving as a teacher-of-record who have not yet completed teacher preparation programs or who are currently enrolled in an alternative teacher preparation program to be classified as “highly qualified”-- even though they are still in training. During the FY 2014 appropriations process, the provision was extended through the 2015-2016 school year despite the opposition of more than 90 organizations.
The FY 2013 appropriations process also included a one-year extension, as well as a requirement for the U.S. Secretary of Education to submit a report to Congress by December 31, 2013 on the distribution of teachers-of-record still participating in alternative certification programs.

In June 2015, the U.S. Department of Education finally released its long overdue report on this issue as directed by Congress. This report confirmed a weakening of the HQT definition has allowed states and school districts to disproportionately place teachers who are still in training in classrooms predominately serving students from low-income families, English Language learners, and special education students – those students who often have the greatest needs and would benefit most from a well-prepared teacher who has fully completed their preparation and training for the classroom. The data reveal that there are approximately 35,000 teachers still in training leading classrooms across the country. Even more concerning is that these teachers are more than twice as likely to be teaching in the highest poverty school districts as compared to the lowest poverty districts.

Under the current provision, teachers-in-training can continue to teach for as long as three years even if they never complete their preparation program, pass certification tests, or meet other state certification standards. Even more concerning, parents are never notified that their child’s teacher may still be in training and therefore not actually “highly qualified” according to the original definition of the term.

As such, CTQ continues to strongly oppose any continued extension of the HQT provision as it will perpetuate the harmful practice of allowing teachers with little-to-no training to be recognized as “highly qualified” teachers. Further, CTQ does not believe the provision is consistent with the original intent of the authorizing statute, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, and including this provision in any FY 2016 appropriations bill undermines the work that is currently being done by the respective House and Senate education committees to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The proper place for discussion and review of any HQT legislative language should be in the reauthorization -- not appropriations -- process.

Every student, especially students from low-income homes, students of color, students with disabilities and English Language learners, deserve teachers who are fully prepared on day one. Federal policy must further this goal, and not undermine it by permitting the current definition of “highly qualified” to have no basic or minimal standard for being a teacher of record.
Far from destroying alternative teacher preparation programs or creating an unworkable situation in our nation’s schools, allowing the current HQT amendment to sunset after the 2015-2016 school year will give policymakers another opportunity to restore parents’ and policymakers’ ability to identify and monitor the inequitable distribution of teachers-in-training, and target teacher capacity-building to teachers with the least experience and greatest need for support.

While we understand that states and school districts must address the short-term reality of teacher shortages, putting teachers in training in the classroom is not a long-term solution. It is not fair to the students in the classroom who deserve a teacher who is fully prepared to meet their needs. Nor is it fair to the teacher in training to place them in a position where they are not fully prepared to succeed. A more systemic nationwide strategy is needed to address the teacher shortages, where states and districts invest in building a pipeline of teaching excellence and support across all communities. Equitable access and improved student outcomes will not be met if we continue to lower the bar for teachers. Labeling teachers “highly qualified” who are not highly qualified does nothing to improve the teaching profession and serves only to mask the inequities that exist and prevents meaningful reform.

We urge you to allow this provision to expire and not to include an extension of it in any FY2016 appropriations bill. We also ask that Congress once again require the U.S. Secretary of Education to provide a follow-up report on the distribution of teachers-of-record still participating in alternative certification programs.

Sincerely,

Members of the Coalition for Teaching Quality (listed below)

**National Organizations**

Alliance for Excellent Education
Alliance for Multilingual Multicultural Education
American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education
American Association of People with Disabilities
American Association State Colleges and Universities
American Council for School Social Work
American Council on Rural Special Education
American Federation of Teachers
ASPIRA Association
Association of University Centers on Disabilities
Autism National Committee
Autistic Self Advocacy Network
Broader Bolder Approach
Center for Teaching Quality
Citizens for Effective Schools
Coalition for Community Schools
Council for Exceptional
Children Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates
Disability Policy Collaboration, A Partnership of The Arc and UCP
Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund Inc.
Easter Seals
Education Law Center
FairTest, The National Center for Fair & Open Testing
First Focus Campaign for Children
Gamaliel Foundation
Helen Keller National Center
Higher Education Consortium for Special Education
Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities
Latino Elected and Appointed Officials, National Taskforce on Education
Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
League of United Latin American Citizens
Learning Disabilities Association of America
Learning Policy Institute
Movement Strategy Center
National Alliance of Black School Educators
National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Association of State Directors of Special Education
National Board for Professional Teaching Standards
National Center for Learning Disabilities
National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future
National Consortium on Deaf---Blindness
National Council for Educating Black Children
National Council of Teachers of English
National Council of Teacher of Mathematics
National Disability Rights Network
National Down Syndrome Congress
National Down Syndrome Society
National Education Association
National Indian Education Association
National Latino Education Research & Policy Project
National Network of State Teachers of the Year
National Opportunity to Learn Campaign
Opportunity Action
Parents Across America
Partnership for 21st Century Skills
PDK International
Progressive States Action
Public Advocates Inc.
Public Advocacy for Kids
Rural School and Community Trust School
Social Work Association of America
Southwest Education Development Laboratory
TASH—Equity, Opportunity, and Inclusion for People with Disabilities
Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children
TESOL International Association
The Arc United
Cerebral Palsy
United Church of Christ Justice & Witness Ministries

State and Local Organizations
Abbott Leadership Institute–Newark, New Jersey
Action Now–Illinois
Action Now–North Carolina
ACTION United
Alliance for Quality Education (AQE)
Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment (ACCE)
Arkansas Community Organizations
Bay Area Parent Leadership Action Network
Brighton Park Neighborhood Council–Chicago
California Association for Bilingual Education
Californians for Justice
Californians Together
California Latino School Boards Association
Campaign for Quality Education
Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning
Coalition for Educational Justice
Citizen Action of New York
Delawareans for Social and Economic Justice
Educate Our State
Education Voters Pennsylvania
Grow Your Own Illinois
Inner City Struggle
Justice Matters
Legal Advocates for Children and Youth
Montgomery County Education Forum
Parent---U---Turn
Parents for Unity
RYSE Center
Texas Association of Chicanos in Higher Education
Young Voices---Providence, Rhode Island
Youth On Board—Somerville, Massachusetts
Youth Together