

July 19, 2011

Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman
Committee on Health, Education,
Labor and Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Michael Enzi
Ranking Member
Committee on Health, Education,
Labor and Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Enzi:

We write to express our concern regarding S. 1250, the “Growing Education Achievement Training Academies for Teachers and Principals Act” introduced by Senators Michael Bennet, Lamar Alexander, Barbara Mikulski, Mary Landrieu, and Mark Kirk. While our organizations support the reform of educator preparation programs, we have several concerns about this legislation, and we ask you not to support it.

One major concern is a provision requiring states to allow these new academies to award certificates that would be treated as equivalent to a master’s degree while not obligating the academies to meet the same requirements as traditional higher education providers. This bill discourages states from leveling the playing field for all providers of educator preparation.

Congress should instead focus efforts to reform teacher preparation on institutions of higher education, which educate nearly 90 percent of all new teachers. Rather than creating this new program, especially given the current fiscal environment, Congress should maintain funding for the existing Teacher Quality Partnership (Title II HEA) Grant program and expand it to include the preparation of all educators. Our organizations believe that the proposed new legislation would only create new small providers that will require years of additional funding to bring to scale – if they prove successful. Currently Teacher Quality Partnership (TQP) Grants and TEACH Grants are producing reform in university-based preparation programs and providing evidence that such reforms enhance candidates capacity to advance achievement of their students.

Below are our other concerns with S. 1250:

- 1) This bill will not result in the systemic improvement of our nation’s teacher and principal preparation programs.
 - a. It is unlikely to involve, in any broad way, the higher education system that prepares 90 percent of all new teachers.
 - b. It does not require partnerships with PK-12 schools.
- 2) It will lower academic standards required to prepare teachers and principals.
 - a. No education experience is required to prepare to be a principal candidate.
 - b. The creation of a “certificate” which is undefined and considered equivalent to an MA degree will devalue the MA degree and bypass generally accepted academic practices.

- c. The bill enables government to create an academic credential.
 - d. The bill prohibits requirements on the number of course credits required as part of the program of study.
 - e. The bill prohibits that accreditation be required for the academies.
 - f. The bill prohibits requirements for academy faculty to have advanced degrees.
 - g. It will promote principals and teachers serving as independent practitioners before they have completed their programs.
 - h. It requires States that receive grants to have a separate authorization and approval process for academies than other teacher and principal preparation programs, thus creating a second set of standards.
 - i. There are no clinical standards set in the bill; thus the clinical component of an academy could last only a day.
 - j. There is no required induction for new teachers.
- 3) This is not a wise investment of limited federal resources.
- a. Unlike other federal education programs, there is no requirement for teachers and principals to teach or serve in schools after completing the program (e.g. TEACH Grants require four years and TQP Grants require three years).
 - b. There is no match required of grant recipient (e.g. the TQP Grant program requires a 100 percent match).
 - c. It duplicates reform efforts already underway with TEACH and TQP Grants.
 - d. The evaluation components of the program are weak.
- 4) It will drain already stretched resources to support students pursuing a college degree.
- a. It will siphon off financial aid to students from Americorps and redirect it to non-profits that are not institutions of higher education.
 - b. It allows participants in the academy to be eligible for State financial aid to the same extent as participants in other State-approved preparation programs

On behalf of the 11 associations below, we thank you for taking the time to hear our views on this matter.

Sincerely,

American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education
 American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers
 American Association of State Colleges and Universities
 American Council on Education
 Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities
 Council of Graduate Schools
 Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities
 National Association of Elementary School Principals
 National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities
 National Association of Secondary School Principals
 National Council of Professors of Educational Administration

cc: Members of the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
Members of the U.S. House Education and the Workforce Committee
Honorable Arne Duncan, U.S. Secretary of Education