



Recruit, Train, and Retain

Congressional Appropriations Offer an Opportunity to Improve Access to Great Teachers and Leaders

Robin Chait April 2010

This is a historic time for education reform. The stress of a poor economy combined with a growing realization that not enough of our students are graduating from high school prepared for college and career has created unprecedented urgency to improve public education. And even more momentum for reform has come from the Obama administration's Race to the Top fund—a competitive grant program that rewards states that are engaging in an aggressive education reform agenda in a number of core areas.

President Obama and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan built on this movement with their recent blueprint for reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the fiscal year 2011 education funding bill, known as the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education appropriations bill.

Congress needs to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act this year in order to improve important components of the law and further education reform efforts in states and districts throughout the country. Yet it is possible that reauthorization will not be completed this year. Congress must therefore make sure that it does not miss the important opportunity presented by the appropriations process to advance many of the reform measures in the blueprint, including its strong initiatives to increase students' access to great teachers and leaders.

The administration's budget would provide a \$3 billion increase in K-12 education funding. It also places a greater emphasis on competitive grant programs that support innovative strategies for improving public education systems and prioritizes in particular programs that would improve students' access to effective teachers and school leaders. A growing body of evidence shows that teachers are the most critical school-related factor to students' learning, but that teachers vary tremendously in their effectiveness.¹ In other words, which teachers are standing in front of the classroom and what type of training and support they receive matters a lot. And principals are critical in leading strong schools and recruiting, developing, and keeping good teachers in them.

State and local policies have historically failed to reflect the great variation in teacher effectiveness.² For example, districts generally compensate all teachers the same way and their professional responsibilities have varied little throughout their careers. States and districts should have policies that encourage the most effective teachers to remain in the classroom and share their expertise with other teachers, provide targeted professional development to all teachers to improve their performance, and encourage the least effective to exit. And federal policy should encourage states and districts to develop these types of targeted strategies, particularly for high-needs schools that often have more challenges in attracting and retaining the workforce they need.

The president's budget invests almost a billion dollars in a new competitive grant program, The Teacher and Leader Innovation Fund, that would reward states and districts for implementing better systems for recruiting, developing, and retaining effective teachers and principals in high needs schools. This initiative is proposed as part of the administration's blueprint for the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. It builds on the existing Teacher Incentive Fund that CAP has supported and written about and resembles a proposal that CAP offered in a [January 2009 report](#).

The Teacher and Leader Innovation Fund encourages states and districts to invest in improving their human capital systems for teachers. Since experts argue that developing and retaining an effective teaching workforce requires comprehensive, aligned, and integrated human capital systems, the strategies supported by the Teacher and Leader Innovation Fund are likely to pay dividends in improved student learning in the future.

Competitive grants like the Teacher and Leader Innovation Fund are more likely than formula grants to spur innovation, reform, and to reward high-quality programs. The budget therefore slightly decreases by about \$400 million funding for Title II of ESEA, a formula grant program intended to improve teacher and principal quality. This reduction makes sense since, as CAP has written, there is little evidence that the current Title II program is actually improving teacher quality or effectiveness. Schools can use [Title II funding](#) for a wide array of activities intended to improve teacher quality, but the funding is not specifically targeted to activities that are likely to yield a significant return on investment.

The budget would also require states taking Title II formula funds to develop strong teacher evaluation systems, thus leveraging the formula program to make changes that would help school districts throughout the country. A great deal of recent research has highlighted the inadequacy of teacher evaluation systems.³ This research finds that evaluation systems fail to differentiate among teachers, don't provide useful feedback to teachers so they can improve, and give very few teachers unsatisfactory ratings. Improvements to these systems are a necessary foundation for improvements to many other teacher-related policies, such as compensation systems and tenure processes.

The budget offers \$405 million in funding for a new Teacher and Leader Pathways program that is part of the Obama administration's blueprint for reauthorizing ESEA. The program consolidates existing pathways programs to support competitive grants to school districts to create and expand high-quality pathways into teaching and leadership. The program significantly increases funding for alternative certification programs in order to increase the number of effective teachers serving in low-performing schools and high-need fields and subjects. CAP has long proposed a greater federal investment in high-quality alternative certification programs targeted to high-needs schools.

The Teacher and Leader Pathways program would also offer competitive grants to states and school districts to “recruit, prepare and retain effective principals and school leadership teams with the skills to turn around low-performing schools.” The focus on preparing leadership teams to turnaround low-performing schools is critical. One of the greatest challenges to districts' capacity to turnaround schools is the challenge of finding the school leaders with the skills to do the work. Federal support for recruiting and preparing educators specifically to meet this need is a wise and much-needed investment.

If Congress does not reauthorize ESEA this year, congressional appropriations committees should fund the Teacher and Leader Innovation Fund and the Teacher and Leader Pathways program through their processes just as they have funded the Teacher Incentive Fund. TIF has never been authorized, but has been funded since FY 2006 through the appropriations process.

It is time for federal policy to be more aggressive in supporting teacher and principal effectiveness, and encouraging better ways of recruiting, developing, evaluating, and retaining teachers. As Sen. Michael Bennet (D-CO) stated at a recent discussion about teacher evaluation at the Center for American Progress, “it really is time for the burden of proof to shift from the people who want to change the system to the people who want to keep the system the same.”

The president's budget makes critical investments that would encourage states and districts to try new and better ways of building an effective teaching workforce. Congress should follow the president's lead and support his budget.

Endnotes

- 1 Jane Hannaway, forthcoming CALDER Working Paper 41 (Urban Institute, forthcoming); Daniel Aaronson, Lisa Barrow, and William Sander, "Teachers and Student Achievement in the Chicago Public High Schools," *Journal of Labor Economics* 25 (1) (2007): 95-135; Steven Rivkin, Eric Hanushek, and John Kain, "Teachers, Schools and Academic Achievement," *Econometrica* 73 (2) (2005): 417-58; Jonah E. Rockoff, "The Impact of Individual Teachers on Student Achievement: Evidence from Panel Data," *American Economic Review* 94 (2) (2004): 247-252; Robert Gordon, Thomas J. Kane, and Douglas O. Staiger, "Identifying Effective Teachers using Performance on the Job" (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 2006).
- 2 Robin Chait, Raegen Miller, "Treating Different Teachers Differently, How State Policy Should Act on Differences in Teacher Performance to Improve Teacher Effectiveness and Equity" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2010).
- 3 Daniel Weisberg and others, "The Widget Effect, Our National Failure to Acknowledge and Act on Differences in Teacher Effectiveness" (New York: The New Teacher Project, 2009); Thomas Toch and Robert Rothman, "Rush to Judgment: Teacher Evaluation in Public Education" (Washington: Education Sector, 2008); Morgaen Donaldson, "So Long Lake Wobegon, Using Teacher Evaluation to Raise Teacher Quality" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2009).