



# Advancing Teacher and Principal Effectiveness

Four Recommendations for Reforming the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

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Ulrich Boser and Robin Chait April 2011

Center for American Progress



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# Introduction and summary

If our nation is going to remain a global economic leader, we must ensure all students—regardless of their family background—have the strong teachers they need and deserve. Effective teachers are critical to raising achievement and closing longstanding gaps between student subgroups. The upcoming reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, or ESEA, offers an important opportunity to improve teacher and principal effectiveness.

To make greater use of ESEA as a lever for reform, Congress should hold the line on formula funding—budget speak for noncompetitive monetary awards based on a predetermined formula—while increasing competitive funding for programs that support promising reforms. We also believe federal funding should be used more strategically and ensure all students have access to strong teachers. This report will examine some of the issues with the current law and offer our recommendations for change. Specifically we recommend that Congress:

- Authorize a Teacher and Leader Innovation Fund that supports innovative strategies to recruit, retain, and reward effective teachers and principals
- Create a Teacher and Leader Pathways program that focuses on preparing effective educators for high-needs schools
- Require states to develop next-generation teacher and principal evaluation systems and ensure the equitable distribution of strong teachers
- Improve effectiveness by boosting capacity and consolidating programs

In the pages that follow, we will detail the reasons why these four reforms are essential to future economic competitiveness of our nation and the individual prosperity and well-being of our new generations of Americans. But briefly, here is a quick summary of our four recommendations.

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## Authorize a Teacher and Leader Innovation Fund

A new Teacher and Leader Innovation Fund, or TLIF, would award grants to states and school districts to support innovative strategies that attract and support effective teachers and principals in high-need schools. States or districts could use the funds to develop more aggressive recruitment strategies, strengthen tenure processes, and institute career ladders for teachers, among other reforms.

The TLIF is similar to a proposal from the Center for American Progress for “teacher effectiveness grants,” which would award competitive funds to states and districts that support reforms to teacher compensation, tenure, and evaluation.<sup>1</sup> Under TLIF, states or districts should be required to demonstrate that the activities are increasing educator effectiveness. Given the program’s importance, TLIF should be made the new Part A of Title II of ESEA. State Teacher Quality Grants would become Part B.

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## Create a Teacher and Leader Pathways program

A Teacher and Leader Pathways program would consolidate a number of existing recruitment and preparation programs into a larger program focused on preparing educators for high-needs schools. The program would focus on teacher and principal preparation and provide competitive grants to districts as well as nonprofit and university partners.

Programs would be designed to meet the specific needs of districts. And the programs must either have a record of preparing effective educators or commit to tracking and measuring the effectiveness of graduates in the classroom.

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## Develop teacher and principal evaluations and ensure the equitable distribution of strong teachers

Congress should require that states create new evaluation frameworks for both teachers and principals. For teachers, the evaluation system should be in use no later than five years after ESEA reauthorization. Together with The Education Trust, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit group, we at the Center for American Progress developed a specific set of actions for states to implement robust evaluation systems that incorporate measures of teacher impact on student growth.

The new teacher evaluation systems must include measures of teacher impact on student growth as a substantial factor in the evaluation.

Another significant part of the teacher evaluation process should be rigorous observations of their practices in classrooms. Evaluations should differentiate teachers into at least four groups of performance, with states determining the names of the categories and their precise cutoff points.

Once a state has a new teacher evaluation system in place, it should use the results to inform critical human resources decisions, including tenure, compensation, and professional development, as well as to hold teacher preparation programs accountable for the performance of their graduates. The data should also be used to identify inequities within districts based on factors of race and poverty. And if a district has not significantly narrowed gaps in teacher quality between schools over time, they should lose part, or eventually all, of their ESEA Title II funds.

Until stronger evaluation systems are online, Congress should require states to create a Teacher Quality Index that would identify inequity and guide action to fix it, and we propose a series of steps detailed in the main pages of this report that will help states identify inequities and take the actions necessary to correct them.

Similarly, principal evaluation systems need to be introduced and should be in use no later than four years after ESEA reauthorization. Districts could create their own evaluation systems as long as they followed guidelines set by the state. State guidelines should include a measure of schoolwide academic growth as well as research-based rubrics that assess whether principals are taking the actions they need to improve student learning and teacher practice.

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### Improve effectiveness by boosting capacity and consolidating programs

Federal education funding should advance equity and excellence in education. To make the greatest use of ESEA dollars, Congress should continue to support formula-based programs while boosting competitive funding for programs that encourage reform. In order to boost capacity, states should retain an additional 2.5 percent of Teacher Quality funds so they can develop and implement improved evaluation systems.

At the same time, there are a number of programs within Title II of ESEA that are too small to have much of an impact. They should be consolidated to better leverage the funds. Like the Obama administration, we propose eliminating or consolidating a number of these programs to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our federal education spending while ensuring those funds are spent fairly to improve the educations of all of our children.

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## The time to act is now

Improving the quality of teachers and leaders is historically a critical aspect of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2001. The law boasts a number of vehicles for improving teacher quality. Title II of ESEA provides funding to improve teaching and school leadership, and the highly qualified teacher provisions in Title I ensure minimum qualifications for teachers. But after nine years of implementation, it is clear that while the various provisions have led to some progress, they have not had the impact the authors of the law had hoped for.

Almost all teachers now meet the highly qualified definition but elementary and middle schoolers across the nation are still not proficient in math and reading, and large achievement gaps between low-income and higher-income students remain in every state. States have spent significant Title II dollars on professional development and class-size reduction with little to show for it.<sup>2</sup> This can—and must—change. This paper’s four recommendations are the way to do so.

# Recommendation No. 1: Congress should authorize a new Teacher and Leader Innovation Fund

Federal policy does little to prioritize teacher effectiveness. The exception is one program that has never been authorized: the Teacher Incentive Fund, or TIF, which provides competitive grants to support performance-based teacher and principal compensation systems in high-need schools, or those with high percentages of students in poverty. While the program was created in an appropriations bill in 2006, it has never been officially authorized within ESEA.<sup>3</sup> This means the program can be rolled back more easily than other federal reform initiatives that have been authorized.

While TIF hasn't had a federal evaluation, it has supported a number of programs with very promising evidence of success. It's also clear that the program supports initiatives that are developing new ways not only of compensating but also evaluating, developing, and retaining teachers. The latest iteration of the program also has a greater focus on supporting comprehensive approaches to compensation reform that further strengthen professional development and evaluation systems.

One case in point: TIF supports Guilford County's Mission Possible program in North Carolina, which serves 28 high-need schools and provides ongoing professional development, collaborative support, and smaller class sizes. Teachers are offered recruitment or retention bonuses to work in Mission Possible schools and become eligible for performance bonuses. A recent evaluation of the Mission Possible program found a number of positive consequences of the program, including reduced teacher turnover and increases in meeting Annual Yearly Progress goals.<sup>4</sup>

This is why we recommend (as does the Obama administration) expanding the TIF program to create a new Teacher and Leader Innovation Fund, or TLIF, that would award grants to states and school districts to support innovative strategies to recruit, retain, and reward effective teachers and principals.<sup>5</sup> The TLIF is similar to a proposal from CAP that was released last year.<sup>6</sup>

States or districts that receive funds should be required to demonstrate that the activities increase educator effectiveness. We also recommend that the Teacher and Leader Innovation Fund should be made part A of a newly authorized Title II in order to emphasize its importance within the law. State Teacher Quality Grants would become Part B.

Funds should also support activities that improve the school culture as well as help teachers and students be more successful. For instance, within the TLIF, a set-aside should be allotted for matching grants that support what is commonly referred to as “strategic staffing.” Specifically, districts that use their Title I dollars to support strategic staffing would also be eligible for a matching grant of Title II dollars up to a specified amount.

Strategic-staffing initiatives provide incentives to a highly effective principal and a small team of effective teachers to teach in low-performing schools and often support other improvements in working conditions. Modeled after a program in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools in North Carolina, these teams of educators would be intended to lead a transformation of the school culture.<sup>7</sup>

# Recommendation No. 2: Create a Teacher and Leader Pathways program

Federal efforts to recruit and prepare teachers and leaders for high-need schools are inconsistent. There are several overlapping programs with different funding streams and supervisory agencies, which impedes coordination and efficacy.<sup>8</sup>

The programs also have different levels of effectiveness. Some programs, such as Teach for America, a nonprofit that recruits teachers into high-need schools, are backed up by rigorous studies that have found that their teachers perform well in the classroom.<sup>9</sup> Others, such as the Teacher Quality Partnership Grant Program, which seeks to improve the quality of new teachers by creating partnerships between universities and schools, have far less research behind them, and a recent evaluation found that the program's effectiveness is inconclusive.<sup>10</sup>

We propose (as does the Obama administration) consolidating several of these recruitment and preparation programs into a single Teacher and Leader Pathways program that would cover both alternative and traditional teacher and leader preparation programs. Similar to the administration, we also propose significantly increasing funding for these initiatives. The following programs would be consolidated:

- Transition to Teaching
- Teacher Quality Partnerships
- Teachers for a Competitive Tomorrow
- Teach for America
- School Leadership programs

Once consolidated into the Teacher Pathways and Leader Pathways programs, these two new programs should each be a separate subpart of Title II with its own funding stream. So let's describe each of these programs' goals in a bit more detail.

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## Teacher Pathways

The Teacher Pathways program would provide competitive grants to improve teacher recruitment and retention. The grants could go to districts, nonprofits, universities, or other partners to prepare teachers for work in high-need districts, schools, and subjects. Programs would be designed to meet the specific needs of a district or districts, and must either have a record of preparing effective teachers or commit to tracking and measuring the effectiveness of their graduates in the classroom.

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## Leader Pathways

The Leader Pathways program should provide competitive grants to high-need districts alone or in partnership with nonprofit organizations or institutions of higher education for the recruitment, preparation, and support of effective principals and leadership teams. The program should be targeted to programs with proven records of preparing effective leaders or those who commit to tracking and measuring the outcomes of their graduates.

In addition, priority should be given to programs intending to prepare principals to turn around persistently low-performing schools. The program should receive a substantial increase in funding given the critical importance of principals for attracting and retaining effective teachers and turning around low-performing schools.

# Recommendation No. 3: Develop teacher and principal evaluation systems and ensure the equitable distribution of teachers

Effective teachers are critical to raising achievement and closing longstanding gaps between students from disadvantaged backgrounds and their more privileged peers. Students who have three or four strong teachers in a row will soar academically, regardless of their racial or economic background, while those who have a sequence of weak teachers will fall further and further behind.<sup>11</sup> But studies also demonstrate that access to effective teachers is not equitable. Although there are strong teachers in many schools, research shows that students in high-poverty schools are more likely than students in more affluent schools to have the least effective teachers.<sup>12</sup>

Despite the overwhelming need to match our struggling students with our strongest educators, few states or districts have good information on teacher performance. Fewer still use that information to ensure that low-income students and students of color gain access to the teachers they need and deserve. If we are going to ensure that all students receive a rigorous kindergarten-through-12th grade education, then we must get serious about accurate ways to evaluate teachers based on their performance in the classroom and their individual impacts on student learning, and use that information to improve the practice for all teachers.

For its part, ESEA required in the last reauthorization that all teachers be “highly qualified.” Specifically, teachers had to have state certification, a bachelor’s degree, and demonstrate knowledge of their subject area. But for the most part, states papered over the requirements, and the U.S. Department of Education reports that an exceedingly unlikely 96 percent of core academic classes in public schools were staffed by highly qualified teachers during the 2009 school year.<sup>13</sup>

This not-credible statistic is one of the reasons why we, together with The Education Trust, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit group, recommend a specific set of actions for states to implement robust evaluation systems that incorporate measures of teacher impact on student growth.<sup>14</sup> Building these systems is a critical step toward ensuring a fair distribution of teachers. Specifically, we recommend states to:

- Create a Teacher Quality Index
- Develop new teacher evaluation systems
- Ensure all children are educated equitably
- Introduce principal evaluation systems

Let's examine each of these recommendations in turn.

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## Create a Teacher Quality Index

We cannot afford to wait until every state has a new evaluation system before taking steps to ensure highly qualified teachers are present in all classrooms. Thus we recommend that states collect, report, and act upon measures of teacher distribution even while they build stronger evaluation systems. Specifically, we recommend that states collect and report on the indicators included in current law for equity purposes:

- Percentage of teachers not in their first year of teaching
- Percentage of course sections taught by infield secondary teachers
- Percentage of certified teachers

To make this information more readily actionable, states should be asked to create a Teacher Quality Index that combines this collected data. By creating a composite index, states can more easily measure progress on inequities within and among districts.

To keep data collection burdens to a minimum, states should be allowed to use an index composed only of the three measures outlined above—that is, the ones they are required to collect and report on under current law. If states have data on the percentage of teachers in the top quartile of teacher impact on student growth, however, they should include that data within the index as well.

In addition, states that have additional measures of teacher quality should be allowed to include any of those additional measures.<sup>15</sup> In the index, states must weight each indicator equally. States must also annually report data for each element in the index for each school and district within the state. And in order to monitor progress, the selected indicators within each state's index should remain consistent until the state's new evaluation system has been in place for at least two full years.

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## Develop new teacher evaluation systems

There is widespread need for better information on teacher performance. School leaders need good information to make important decisions about staffing, compensation, and tenure. Teachers need good information so they can improve their practice. And parents need good information about teacher performance to inform their decisions about their child's education. Our recommendations aim to address these needs by requiring states to develop new teacher evaluation systems that identify effective teachers based on student achievement and other rigorous measures of practice.

To ensure fair and accurate information about teacher performance is available, Congress should require that states do the following as a condition of receipt of their Title II funds:

- Develop a statewide method for measuring teacher impact on student growth in tested subjects and grades as well as create guidelines for districtwide measures of student growth for teachers in nontested subjects and grades. Growth in nontested subjects and grades could be measured in a variety of ways, including externally graded assessments or external reviews of student work.
- Develop statewide minimum parameters for the evaluations that districts will use to inform critical human resources decisions, including those about tenure, compensation, professional development, equitable access to effective teachers in all classrooms, and dismissal. Districts should adhere to these statewide parameters in designing their individual local evaluation systems but should also have the flexibility to go above and beyond these practices.

At a minimum, evaluation systems should include measures of teacher impact on student growth as a substantial—but not the only—factor in a teacher's evaluation. Another significant part of a teacher's evaluation must be based upon rigorous observations of practice with multiple observations per year, some announced and some unannounced. And to ensure success, the evaluations must differentiate teachers into at least four groups of performance with states determining the names of the categories and their precise cutoff points. The criteria to match these categories must be defined by the evaluation system and each category does not have to contain equal proportions of teachers.

As part of a reauthorized ESEA, Congress should recognize that the bar for being highly qualified is currently set way too low and rename the requirement simply “qualified teacher.” And while states are developing new definitions of teacher effectiveness, they should continue to use the qualification requirements for all new teachers in order to ensure teachers meet minimum standards. Once a state has a next-generation evaluation system in place, the requirements would continue to apply to new teachers. We would also keep a version of the current requirements so teachers would have to successfully complete a traditional or alternative teacher preparation program, have a bachelor’s degree, and demonstrate knowledge of their subject area to qualify.

We believe next-generation evaluation systems have the potential to create a sea change in education. Once a state has a new teacher evaluation system in place, it should use the results to inform critical human resources decisions as well as to hold teacher preparation programs accountable for the performance of their graduates.

In particular, the results of the evaluation systems should inform professional development. And while Title II already requires districts to conduct a needs assessment, the new evaluation systems will provide far more robust information on teacher performance, which should help districts target their professional development dollars where they are needed most. Districts, for example, should be encouraged to use Title II funds to provide recruitment incentives to effective teachers to teach in high-poverty schools, improve working conditions, or develop career ladder programs that pay teachers for taking on additional responsibilities.

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## Ensure all students have access to an effective teacher

Congress must hold states and districts accountable for ensuring students of color and low-income students have equal access to successful educators. We propose a series of six steps that will help states identify inequities and take the actions necessary to correct them.

First, using the Teacher Quality Index, states must monitor and publicly report within-district and between-district inequities by patterns of access. Specifically, states must examine distribution within each district by race and poverty and among districts by race and poverty. States should also look at elementary and secondary schools separately as well as examine the gap in average values between schools in the highest and lowest quartiles by concentrations of poverty and race.

Second, once a state has a new evaluation system in place, it must use the results to identify inequities within districts and among districts by looking at patterns of access within each district by race and poverty and among districts by race and poverty. States should also continue to monitor and publicly report inequities within districts and among districts by patterns of access using the Teacher Quality Index for two years following the implementation of the evaluation system.

Third, if a school's achievement on standardized tests is above the statewide average for students overall as well as for each of its student subgroups—even if there are issues of inequitable teacher distribution—then the district does not have to address any teacher inequity problems that may exist at that school.

Fourth, if a district has not significantly narrowed gaps in teacher quality between schools within two years, then the district shall use Title II funds for the sole purpose of eliminating those inequities.

Fifth, if a district has not significantly narrowed gaps in teacher quality between schools within four years, then the district shall receive only 50 percent of the Title II funds received in the prior year and shall be required to provide an equal match of state or local funds.

Sixth, if a district has not significantly narrowed gaps in teacher quality between schools within five years, then the district shall not receive any Title II funds.

In this way, we can ensure reforms to teacher and principal evaluation systems result in better education for all children across district, county, and state lines.

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## Introduce principal evaluation systems

States should also develop statewide guidelines for principal evaluation systems. States may choose to develop a model system that districts could modify or allow districts to develop their own principal evaluation systems, but states must have minimum quality standards.

States should also require that districts and schools use information from the evaluation system to inform human capital decisions about principals, such as certification, compensation, promotion, and dismissal. A detailed proposal is included in Appendix C, but following are the primary elements that we recommend Congress require of states.

First, achievement measures should account for a substantial percentage of a principal's evaluation. These evaluations should include a measure of schoolwide academic growth as well as attainment measures of achievement such as the percent of students reaching proficiency. In addition, student achievement measures for secondary schools should include other student outcomes besides tests such as cohort graduation rates.

Second, one of the primary ways a principal drives increases in student achievement is by recruiting, developing, and retaining effective teachers and other staff, which means principals should also be held accountable for effectively implementing teacher evaluations that differentiate among teachers and provide feedback to teachers to improve their practice. Therefore, principal evaluations should assess a principal's ability to improve teacher effectiveness as well as retain effective teachers at higher rates. This assessment could be based on qualitative information, such as principals' actions to develop and retain effective teachers, quantitative information about teachers' effectiveness, or both types of information.

Third, states should design research-based rubrics that assess whether principals are taking the actions they need to improve student learning and teacher practice. Districts could choose to adopt these rubrics, modify them, or develop their own, so long as they meet state guidelines. These rubrics should assess principal practice against a set of performance standards. Measures of school culture and climate, such as teacher and student attendance, indicators of school discipline, and parent, student, and staff perceptions, should also be considered by principal evaluators as part of the evaluation process.

Fourth, to ensure evaluation ratings are meaningful, states should require that evaluation systems differentiate principals into at least four groups of performance, with states determining the names of the categories and their precise cut-off points. States should require that evaluation systems are differentiated based on a school's performance and grade configuration. And since high-quality implementation of these systems is essential to their success, states should encourage districts to train and provide ongoing support to evaluators on the new evaluation system. For instance, states could create technical assistance teams that provide real-time support to superintendents or other designated evaluators and can train the trainers within districts.

Finally, the evaluation systems would provide important information for ensuring every student has access to an effective principal. States should report out at the

district level the percentages of principals in each rating category each year. The data should be made available in a way that makes it easy to compare principal effectiveness between high- and low-poverty schools.

As with new teacher evaluation systems, these initiatives aimed at principals have the potential to dramatically change the nation's education system. Once a state has a new school leader evaluation system in place, it should use the results to inform critical human resources decisions, inform professional development for principals, and hold principal preparation programs accountable. And while Title II already requires districts to conduct a needs assessment, we recommend that the professional development be tied to information generated by principal evaluation systems.

## Recommendation No. 4: Improve effectiveness by boosting capacity and consolidating programs

Federal education funds could be spent far more wisely. For instance, districts currently use the bulk of their Title II funds to support professional development and class size reduction.<sup>16</sup> Although some of the professional development supported through Title II is spent effectively, there is little evidence that the way most districts use the professional development dollars produces a positive impact on student achievement.<sup>17</sup> Class size reduction is popular with teachers and parents but it is very costly. Moreover, there are a number of programs within the law that are too small to have much of an impact or could be consolidated to better leverage the funds and allow states and districts greater flexibility in how they are used.

This is why we recommend that Congress hold the line on formula funding while increasing competitive funding for programs in order to make the greatest use of ESEA dollars. The reauthorized law should also eliminate or consolidate the programs within Title II of ESEA that are too small to have much of an impact.<sup>18</sup> The Obama administration has wisely proposed consolidating a number of programs in its fiscal year 2011 budget and blueprint for reauthorizing of ESEA, including the Academies for American History and Civics and the Cooperative Education Exchange.

Of all of the Title II programs in ESEA, current Part A provides the largest pot of money to states and districts. In 2010, for instance, it provided about \$2.9 billion in formula funding to be used for a wide array of activities to improve teacher and principal quality.<sup>19</sup> Most of the funding (95 percent) supports district-level activities that are funded by subgrants from states to districts.<sup>20</sup> Of the remaining funds, State Education Agencies keep 2.5 percent for program administration and State Higher Education Executive Officers keep 2.5 percent.

We believe that states should receive an additional 2.5 percent share of these funds so they can develop and implement improved evaluation systems. Allowable uses of funds include supporting recruitment and retention activities, providing financial incentives to recruit teachers for subject shortage areas or

high-need schools, providing teacher preparation and alternative certification programs, providing professional development, and hiring highly qualified teachers to reduce class size.<sup>21</sup>

Congress should also strengthen the requirements around the use of funds for class size reduction. In particular, Congress should require that class size reduction funds go to classrooms that meet one of the following four research-based priority areas:

- Have high concentrations of English language learners
- Have high concentrations of students from low-income backgrounds
- Are in grades kindergarten through third grade
- Have a teacher with less than three years of experience

If a district chooses to spend class size reduction funds in classrooms that do not meet these four research-based priority areas above, then the district should submit a request to the state agency explaining why.

Finally, the federal government must do a far better job collecting data on the nation's teachers in order to allow researchers and educators to keep better tabs on reforms in the teaching force. Specifically, Congress should direct the commissioner of education statistics to craft a plan for administering the U.S. Schools and Staffing Survey biennially rather than every four years, and to release the results within one year of final data collection. The federal Schools and Staffing Survey is an invaluable source of comparable, objective information on teacher quality across the states and can become even more valuable as an independent check on information states must report under ESEA.

# Conclusion

The upcoming reauthorization of ESEA offers an important opportunity to improve teacher and principal effectiveness. The federal government spends billions of dollars each year on education and it's important that those funds are spent strategically so all students have access to strong teachers. It's time for Congress to act and reauthorize ESEA, making greater use of the law as a lever for important and much-needed reforms.

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