September 12, 2013

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski  The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairwoman  Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations  Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate  United States Senate

The Honorable Tom Harkin  The Honorable Jerry Moran
Chairman  Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, Education, and
and Related Agencies  Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, Education,
and Related Agencies  Related Agencies
United States Senate  United States Senate

Dear Chairwoman Mikulski, Senator Shelby, Chairman Harkin, and Senator Moran:

The Coalition for Teaching Quality—comprised of over 90 civil rights, disability, 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 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 participants who have not yet completed teacher preparation programs or who are in alternative teacher preparation programs to be classified as “highly qualified” even though they are still in training.

During the FY 13 appropriations process the provision was extended once again through the 2014-2015 school year despite the opposition of over 90 organizations. This extension included a requirement for the U.S. Secretary of Education to submit a report to Congress by December 31, 2013 on the distribution of teachers participating in alternative route to certification programs, which has yet to be acted upon. While we look forward to receiving this report, the Coalition strongly opposes any further 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.” Extending this provision in any FY 14 appropriations bill will also undermine the work being done by Congress to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which is the proper place for the HQT issue to be considered, not the appropriations process.

Research shows that such teachers are disproportionately concentrated in schools and classrooms filled with our most vulnerable students. 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. And worse yet, parents are never notified that their children’s teachers are still in training and therefore not actually “highly qualified” according to the original definition of the term.
Every student, especially students from low-income homes, minority students who attend low-performing schools, students with disabilities and English Learners, deserves teachers who are fully prepared on day one. Federal policy must further this goal, not undermine it by permitting the current definition of “highly qualified” to have no basic standard for the 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 2013-2014 school year will give policymakers another opportunity to restore parents’ and policymakers’ ability to identify and monitor the inequitable distribution of teachers-in-training. Where legitimate shortages exist teachers-in-training in alternate route programs will still be able to be hired over even less well-prepared substitute or emergency permitted teachers.

We urge you to allow this provision to expire and not include it as an anomaly in any FY14 appropriations bill.

Sincerely,

Members of the Coalition for Teaching Quality
(listed on next page)

CC: Members, Senate Appropriations Committee
Coalition for Teaching Quality (92 Organizations)

National Organizations

Alliance for Multilingual Multicultural Education
American Council on Education
American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education
American Association of People with Disabilities
American Association of State Colleges and Universities
American Council for School Social Work
American Council on Rural Special Education
Association of University Centers on Disabilities
ASPIRA Association
Autistic Self Advocacy Network
Autism National Committee
Center for Teaching Quality
Citizens for Effective Schools
Coalition for Community Schools
Communities for Excellent Public 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
Latino Elected and Appointed Officials
National Taskforce on Education
Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
Leadership for the Common Good
League of United Latin American Citizens
Learning Disabilities Association of America
Movement Strategy Center
NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.
National Alliance of Black School Educators
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Association of State Directors of Special Education
National Center for Learning Disabilities
National Consortium on Deaf-Blindness
National Council for Educating Black Children
National Council of Teachers of English
National Council of Teachers 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 Opportunity to Learn Campaign
National PTA
Opportunity Action
Parents Across America
Partnership for 21st Century Skills
Public Advocates Inc.
Public Advocacy for Kids
Rural School and Community Trust
School Social Work Association of America
SEDL
South East Asia Resource Action Center
TASH - Equity, Opportunity, and Inclusion for People with Disabilities
Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children
TESOL International Association
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 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
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