

Testimony of Kentucky Commissioner of Education Terry Holliday
U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
January 27, 2015

Chairman Alexander, Senator Murray, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for inviting me to testify about the importance of Supporting Teachers and School Leaders through the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

First, I express my thanks to the Chairman, Ranking Member and Committee Members for their work on reauthorization. Please continue this important work. We must have a stable federal law to support our states and our schools. It is critical for us to have that certainty to move forward and make continued progress in our schools.

As a former teacher, principal, local superintendent, state superintendent and past president of the Council of Chief State School Officers, I am more certain today than ever before that the success of public education is directly related to the quality of teachers in every classroom and leaders in every school building. Over the last 43 years of doing this work, I offer three fundamental points for your consideration as you look to reauthorize ESEA.

Point 1: To adequately address teacher and leader development in our public schools, we must look at a systemic approach. We cannot look at trying to “fix” one part of the system without looking at addressing the entire system. This means we must address teacher and leader preparation programs, recruitment of teachers and leaders into the profession, professional development, evaluation, retention and working conditions. Here are just a few examples of how states are taking leadership in this systemic work:

- The Council of Chief State School Officers’ board has recently developed priorities for ESEA reauthorization that include the following measures of a quality system for supporting teachers and school leaders:
 - ✓ Multiple measures of teacher and leader performance;
 - ✓ Meaningful differentiation of performance; and
 - ✓ Actionable information to inform professional development and support.
- The Council of Chief State School Officers recently published a report titled “Our Responsibility: Our Promise,” which provided key recommendations to states on how to improve teacher and leader preparation programs. Kentucky and several other states are now working to implement those recommendations that focus on program approval, licensure, and data systems.
- As co-chair of the task force that developed the standards for the Commission on Accreditation of Educator Preparation Programs (CAEP), I can assure you that these national accreditation standards are very rigorous and will require significant improvements in teacher and leader preparation. Kentucky and other states are requiring preparation programs to gain national accreditation through CAEP.
- Several states, including Kentucky, require one- to two-year internships prior to teaching candidates receiving their teaching license.
- Kentucky worked with Learning Forward and five other states to establish best practice guidelines for professional development. These guidelines focus on customizing

professional development that moves toward professional learning to meet the needs of teachers. Also, these guidelines focus on measuring the impact of professional learning on student outcomes.

- Kentucky provides 24/7 online access to all teachers and leaders in Kentucky to thousands of hours of high-quality professional development. This access ensures teachers and leaders in our rural and poverty communities have equal access and opportunity to high-quality professional development.
- Kentucky has implemented a teacher and leader evaluation system that focuses on continuous professional growth and improving student learning. This evaluation system is housed electronically so the school, district and state can analyze and identify areas for improvement which in turn inform preparation programs on areas of improvement.
- Kentucky borrowed heavily from the great work in North Carolina with regard to National Board Certification and the Working Conditions Survey. We have learned that teacher retention is strongly correlated with the strength of leadership in the school building.
- Kentucky, like many other states, has been working to improve its low-performing schools and close achievement gaps. We have found a model that seems to work well in these schools. The model is an intensive diagnostic review of the instructional program in the school to identify areas for improvement. We then provide on-site math, literacy and principal coaches to provide just-in-time support and coaching to improve instruction. We have seen Kentucky schools move from the bottom 5% to the top 10% in the state using this model.
- Kentucky has worked with the Harvard Strategic Data Project to analyze current distribution of teachers across schools. Through this work, we have identified improvement areas and measures that we will use to hold schools and districts accountable for equitable distribution of effective teachers.
- Finally, Kentucky is working to develop specific career pathways to provide multiple pathways for teachers to become leaders. Many teachers want to gain leadership roles without giving up the ability to teach. Kentucky is working to model what the most successful systems in the world provide to teachers for career pathways.

Point 2: This systemic work must be done WITH teachers and leaders and not done TO teachers and leaders. In Kentucky, we have developed strong relationships with teachers' unions, leadership associations, and other key stakeholders. Our teacher and leader effectiveness systems took years to develop and we are continuing to improve the systems. As a former teacher, I am concerned that teachers across the country feel that they are under attack due to the current education reform efforts around teacher evaluation.

Point 3: In order to create a system of support for teachers and school leaders, we as state leaders in education, do not need review or approval from the U.S. Department of Education. In Kentucky, we have built a successful system because it was done by Kentuckians. It was our teachers, our school leaders and our community that decided what worked best for us. I want the same for my fellow state Chiefs.

If the federal government *does* play a role in evaluations, it should be to ensure these systems are strong and effective. Congress should reauthorize ESEA to give states the ability to use ESEA funds, such as Title IIA, more effectively to develop and implement state systems.

Through a state-led approach, we can accomplish several things:

- First, we will remain committed to ensuring that all students are taught by -- and all schools are led by -- excellent educators. But, we can do this in a way that makes the most sense for each state. Every state has a different timeline and method for implementation. It cannot be dictated by a federal timeline, but must be decided by stakeholders working together within a state.
- Second, we will remain committed to using information about teacher performance to determine how to support educators and ensure that disadvantaged students receive high-quality instruction. If this data remains in the control of states, and efforts to act on the data is led by states, we can better use this information to support teachers and principals. If we find it is not working well, we can quickly make mid-course corrections to better assist those in the field. If this is a part of federal law, I fear we will be working to meet reporting deadlines, rather than working to support teachers.
- Third, we will maintain state control in developing evaluation and support systems and in determining how it coordinates across districts. These systems will be designed by educators in each state, for educators in each state. We will determine the best systems to meet the needs of our educators and roll them out on a timeline that meets the needs of our teachers, principals and students.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak with the committee today and look forward to your questions.