

February 23, 2018

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Re: *Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act of 1965*

Dear Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray:

On behalf of our state associations and the 90,000 school board members who govern our country's 14,000 local school districts, thank you for working to strengthen the Higher Education Act (HEA). The National School Boards Association (NSBA) appreciates this opportunity to recommend ideas for ensuring that the next HEA focuses-on and better supports teachers and school leaders.

Attracting, supporting, and retaining effective educators is a priority for the nation's school boards. Many factors contribute to a student's academic performance, but research shows that among school-related factors, teachers and school leaders matter most. Attracting great teachers, especially in high need subjects and isolated and low-wealth areas, is a major challenge for school districts. As a result, the next HEA must do more to strengthen educator preparation and induction and encourage high performing students to enter the profession. Specifically, NSBA urges the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee to consider the following recommendations:

- **Title II – Teacher Quality Enhancement:**

NSBA urges the HELP Committee to retain and greatly expand Title II as a way to strengthen teacher and principal preparation programs. Title II is important to school districts across the nation as it helps with teacher recruitment efforts and also helps to ensure that educators have the skills they need to be successful in the classroom. The next HEA can do more, however, to

support local innovation, research and implementation of strategies designed to improve teacher and principal effectiveness, including emphasizing:

- Evidence-based preparation and professional development;
 - Evidence based evaluation systems that include, in part, student performance;
 - Alternative certification programs that meet workforce needs;
 - State and school district flexibility regarding credentials for small and/or rural schools; special education programs, English learners and specialized programs such as science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics; and
 - Locally-determined compensation and teacher and principal assignment policies
- **Title IV Student Assistance**
 - **Sec. 465 Cancellation for Public Service:** NSBA also urges the Committee to retain the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program (PSLFP). PSLFP is a valuable tool used to recruit high-quality educators into the field. Many rural and impoverished school districts rely on the PSLFP to attract effective teachers to their schools. Maintaining and updating this program will help to ensure that all students, regardless of their socioeconomic background, have effective teachers in their classrooms.
 - **Sec. 420L Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education (TEACH):** NSBA urges the Committee to maintain and make improvements to the TEACH grant program to incent high achieving college students to enter the teaching profession. The TEACH grant program could be strengthened by making the law's payback requirement proportional to the amount of the teaching service TEACH recipients completed. In addition, NSBA recommends adding early childhood education to the federal list of high-need fields to help school districts strengthen and expand high quality preschool opportunities.

NSBA was deeply disappointed by the House Education and the Workforce Committee's decision to eliminate these important educator investments through passage of H.R. 4508, the Promoting Real Opportunity, Success and Prosperity through Education Reform (PROSPER) Act. As a result, we oppose the PROSPER Act and urge the HELP Committee to retain and improve these important HEA investments in new educators. These federal investments will help school districts to ensure that students across the nation have access to the high-quality education that they deserve.

Thank you for your consideration of our recommendations.

Sincerely,



Thomas J. Gentzel
Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer