



National School Boards Association  
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February 21, 2019

The Honorable Bobby Scott  
Chairman  
House Education and Labor Committee  
House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Virginia Foxx  
Ranking Member  
House Education and Labor Committee  
House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

**RE: USE THE HIGHER EDUCATION ACT TO EXPAND THE NEW EDUCATOR PIPELINE**

Dear Chairman Scott and Ranking Member Foxx:

On behalf of our state associations and the 90,000 school board members who govern our country's 14,000 local school districts, the National School Boards Association (NSBA) recognizes your leadership in reauthorizing the Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965 and appreciates the opportunity to share our views on policies that should be included in the next reauthorization of this important legislation.

Specifically, the National School Boards Association (NSBA) urges you to improve and expand the Higher Education Act's (HEA) focus on educator recruitment, preparation, and induction. Growing student populations, high educator attrition levels, and declining participation in teacher preparation enrollments are threatening to undermine the quality of the nation's schools. School boards are working hard to identify ways to address these trends, but the country needs a national strategy to attract high performing students to teaching, strengthen educator preparation programs, and establish induction programs that set new educators on a path to long term success in the classroom. The HEA reauthorization debate provides a forum for a critically needed national discussion about how to address this need, and NSBA hopes the Education and Labor Committee will not miss this timely opportunity to re-envision and expand the law's focus on educator preparation and the broader profession.

School board members from across the United States report to NSBA that they need greater access to highly effective educators and help with retaining them. Board members frequently tell us that shortages are not only pronounced in rural and low-income communities, but across many communities in high need subjects and areas, such as special education. NSBA's 2018 Survey of school board members revealed that "addressing potential teacher shortages" is among their top priorities in preparing the class of 2030. The survey, and our members' community level stories, are part of national trend highlighted by researchers, including a 2016 Learning Policy Institute

  
*The leading advocate for public education*

(LPI) report, *A Coming Crisis in Teaching? Teacher Supply, Demand, and Shortages in the U.S.*, that shows that the nation is experiencing very high educator attrition rates, declining educator preparation program enrollments, and specific shortfalls in high need areas such as special education. In a related 2017 LPI report, *Teacher Turnover: Why It Matters and What We Can Do About*, they note that students are learning in “100,000 classrooms across the country staffed by an instructor who is not fully qualified to teach.”

NSBA is particularly concerned about how this crisis within the education profession is affecting students with disabilities. Earlier this year, over seven hundred NSBA members came to Washington, D.C. to talk with Members of Congress about ideas for helping school districts better serve students with disabilities. Our members noted that the success of students with disabilities depends on access to effective teachers and other special education professionals. Unfortunately, many of their communities face a troubling shortage of special education teachers and other specialized instructional support personnel. The Education Week Research Center recently published data showing that the number of special education teachers dropped 17% from 420,817 in 2005-06 to 347,739 in 2015-16 (the most recently available data). Given this shortfall, NSBA believes that the next HEA must:

- Focus on creating, at scale, a national cadre of highly effective educators to serve students with disabilities;
- Provide incentives to attract high performing students to the profession;
- Ensure educator preparation programs deliver more sophisticated training in special education; and
- Promote partnerships with school districts to provide targeted professional development and other supports to help special education teachers and professionals succeed at their unique and challenging positions.

NSBA encourages the committee to consider these ideas and reimagine the HEA as an engine for supporting educators, including by establishing a national vision and specific goals for helping school district’s address their educator workforce needs. The HEA’s current approach and modest investments are shortchanging the nation’s students. Specifically, we urge the committee to work closely with school district leaders, state leaders, higher education leaders, teachers, principals and other stakeholders to develop a plan for using the HEA to address this need. This work should include hearings focused specifically on how the HEA can prompt a national movement to meet this challenge.

Our initial work in this area suggests that this should include federal investments in partnerships among districts, state agencies, and educator preparation programs focused on extremely high need areas, such as special education, and more powerful incentives and requirements for educator preparation programs to respond to local and regional educator workforce needs. Further, this work must be underpinned by greater data connectivity between school districts and higher education programs, so that educator preparation programs understand how their graduates are performing and ways they can be better prepared and transitioned into classrooms.

Thank you for making reauthorization of the Higher Education Act a 2019 priority and for recognizing the urgency of the educator workforce challenges facing the nation's school boards. NSBA would welcome an opportunity to work with you and other education stakeholders to identify a bipartisan educator workforce strategy that can help school board members hire the teachers and school leaders their students need and deserve.

Thank you for your consideration of our recommendations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas J. Gentzel". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "T".

Thomas J. Gentzel  
Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer