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May 7, 2010

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman
Committee on Health, Education, Labor
and Pensions
United States Senate
428 Senate Dirksen Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Michael Enzi
Ranking Member
Committee on Health, Education, Labor
and Pensions
United States Senate
835 Senate Hart Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Enzi:

I am writing on behalf of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), a presidential higher education association representing over 400 public colleges and universities located in 49 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam and the Virgin Islands. As you prepare to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act this year, I encourage you to engage public colleges and universities in developing a comprehensive proposal that supports strengthening the teacher workforce and improving student achievement. I will focus my comments on three areas: teacher education, college-and career-ready standards, and accountability. Common to these three areas of focus are the importance of strong, meaningful partnerships between institutions of higher education and state and local school districts.

Teacher Education. Central to AASCU's public policy agenda is supporting strong university-based teacher education programs, anchored in clinical practice and research-based pedagogy. We understand that developing college students into highly effective teachers requires a strong program, grounded in disciplinary knowledge and research that includes significant experiences in K-12 classrooms. Higher education continues to be in a unique and unparalleled position to deliver effective teacher preparation, bringing together the expertise of the arts and sciences and research-based pedagogy to ensure highly effective K-12 teachers. New teachers will fill hundreds of thousands of new teaching positions in the coming years, and the nation faces potentially serious teacher shortages in high-needs schools and in subject areas like science and math, that are vital to the future competitiveness of our students and economy. For this reason, it is imperative that any ESEA reauthorization proposal seeks to build capacity in the nation's public schools of education, which produce almost 85 percent of the teaching workforce, to serve the needs of local school districts and students.

AASCU institutions are eager to work collaboratively with other partners engaged in the preparation of teachers and leaders as we continue to transform our work in teacher preparation. While we support the Administration's efforts to address the nation's challenges in educator preparation, we do not support the recommended consolidation of the Teacher Quality Partnership grant program (TQP) program as proposed in the President's budget and the Administration's *Blueprint for Reform*. The TQP program is the only federally funded program that higher education is eligible to apply for to support innovative and effective teacher preparation programs. The reform in teacher preparation that this program seeks to promote mirrors the reforms that the Administration supports and that higher education embraced after many years of negotiation. We believe this consolidation would undermine the competitive edge in which higher education performs best and hamper the progress that is being made in reforming teacher preparation programs in schools of education. Under the current proposals, the role of higher education in partnership with local school districts is vague, at best. AASCU strongly recommends that a dedicated funding stream remain open to this program, and that institutions of higher education are eligible to apply for funds. AASCU also recommends that institutions of higher education play a leading role in partnerships between school districts and local education agencies.

Further, AASCU recommends that the set-aside for higher education in Title II of ESEA be increased to five percent in order to meet the critical need for high quality effective teachers. These funds are currently used to support intensive professional development programs for teachers, school leaders, and other school staff.

College- and Career-Ready Standards. AASCU supports the Administration's priority to raise academic standards so that all students, regardless of their zip code or income level, graduate from high school prepared to succeed in postsecondary education and the workforce. Approximately 30 percent of today's college students require non-credit remedial coursework, draining the financial and human capital resources of institutions and borrowing critical learning time from students' academic calendar. To support this movement towards rigorous standards, AASCU institutions are prepared to integrate strategies for teaching common standards into teacher preparation programs and support state and local school districts in the development of curricula and assessments aligned to the standards.

The Administration's *Blueprint* proposes that, in states that do not adopt a common set of academic standards, public institutions of higher education certify any new standards as sufficient for bypassing remedial education. AASCU institutions welcome the opportunity to work in partnership with states in this effort.

Accountability. AASCU fully supports the creation of state longitudinal data systems, which allow for data-driven decision-making and increased accountability. For eight years, AASCU has been recognizing innovative teacher preparation programs that exemplify superior K-12 learning outcomes and act as models for other institutions of higher education through the Christa McAuliffe Award. In this age of accountability, teacher preparation programs must be able to document their effectiveness in preparing teachers who can produce learning gains in their students.

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Meaningful partnerships between higher education and local and state education agencies can create the conditions for strengthening school districts, schools of education, and institutions of higher education. Universities and schools of education should be utilized as hubs of innovation and research, supporting the development of curriculum, assessments, and professional learning opportunities for in-service educators in local districts. These partnerships also have the potential to strengthen teacher preparation programs, as colleges of education use K-12 classrooms as rich hands-on resources for the next generation of teachers. Meaningful partnerships including collaboration among education partners representing K-12 and higher education should demonstrate evidence of substantive collaboration in the design and delivery of proposed outcomes.

Thank you in advance for considering these recommendations. I look forward to working with you in the months to come.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Muriel A. Howard".

Muriel A. Howard
President