



Office of the President

June 7, 2017

Dear Member of Congress:

The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) is a national alliance of educator preparation programs dedicated to high-quality, evidence-based preparation that assures educators are profession-ready as they enter the classroom. The over 800 member institutions include public and private colleges and universities in every state, the District of Columbia, the Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, and Guam. Through advocacy and capacity building, AACTE promotes innovation and effective practices that strengthen educator preparation.

Given that research shows that the quality of teachers and principals is central to PK-12 student learning and achievement, AACTE member institutions are committed to continuous improvement, in partnership with our PK-12 colleagues and state and federal agencies, to help ensure that novice educators are profession-ready. As higher education institutions prepare the vast majority of all new teachers, the federal government's investment in strengthening and transforming university-based preparation and ongoing professional development for educators is crucial for enhancing academic success for the nation's learners.

I have attached AACTE's funding and legislative priorities for 2017 for your review and reference. AACTE is pleased that the Congress acted to rescind the regulations for teacher preparation programs, allowing the preparation profession to address critical challenges while meeting the strong accountability standards in place at the state and institutional levels, and those of their PK-12 partners.

Across the nation the profession faces persistent teacher shortages, a decline in enrollment in preparation programs, a diversity gap between educators and their students, as well as challenges in retaining effective teachers and school leaders. There is no more critical time than now for federal funds to be directed to supporting the pathways forward to address these challenges and ensure that each child has a profession-ready teacher in her or his classroom.

AACTE looks forward to working with you and your staff on these and other legislative priorities to improve education for all students. Please do not hesitate to contact our Director of Government Relations, Deborah Koolbeck, at dkoolbeck@aacte.org or 202-478-4506 for additional information on AACTE programs, data, and research as well as on our legislative and funding priorities.

Thank you for your time and energy in support of the profession and our work to prepare profession-ready educators for our nation's classrooms and schools.

Sincerely,

Lynn M. Gangone
President and CEO



AACTE 2017 Legislative Priorities

Appropriations

Repeal sequestration to ensure that non-defense discretionary funding, including that for education, is restored. If sequestration is not repealed, support parity between non-defense discretionary and discretionary funding changes.

Maintain FY17 funding levels for educator preparation programs, particularly:

- Teacher Quality Partnership grants at \$43.1 million (Title II, Part A of the Higher Education Act).
- Title II of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act at \$2.05 billion.
- School Leader Recruitment and Support Program (Title II, Part B, Subpart 4, Sec. 2243) at \$14.5 million.
- Special Education Personnel Preparation at \$83.7 million (Part D-2 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act).
- Institute of Education Sciences (IES) at \$605 million (ESRA, Title I of P.L. 107-279).

Higher Education Act

Complete a full reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, incorporating the *Educator Preparation Reform Act* to be reintroduced in the 115th Congress (formerly S. 2419 and H.R. 4471 in the 114th Congress), which does the following:

- Improves the Teacher Quality Partnership (TQP) grant program, which incorporates the best of what research and practice show to be essential for effective preparation programs: extensive clinical experiences, preparing all teacher candidates to work with students with disabilities and English language learners, preparing all candidates to teach literacy, and providing induction support in teachers' early years.
- Further improves the TQP program by expanding it to include principal residencies and to develop other educators needed by school districts, such as librarians, literacy specialists, and school counselors.
- Reforms the TEACH grants to target student eligibility to students at the junior and senior undergraduate levels or those in post-baccalaureate or graduate programs.
- Streamlines the data reporting requirements of indicators of program quality and performance for states as well as both institutions of higher education and other entities offering teacher preparation programs.
- Strengthens the state's role in not only identifying at-risk and low-performing teacher preparation programs, but also supplying technical assistance to low-performing programs and closing programs which, given technical assistance and time to implement change, fail to improve.

ACTION:

When reintroduced, please cosponsor the *Education Preparation Reform Act*.

TEACH Grants

TEACH grants support teacher candidates in both baccalaureate and post-baccalaureate programs at a level of \$4,000¹ per year who agree to teach high-need subjects in high-need schools for not less than 4 years within 8 years of graduation. If recipients fail to meet this required service component, the grant reverts to a loan. Students must attend an eligible institution of higher education and maintain a 3.25 GPA on a 4.0 scale.

TEACH grants support access to higher education for a diverse population of teacher candidates, including those seeking to teach in rural or urban environments. These grants are also utilized as a tool for recruitment of candidates into a teacher preparation program – again supporting access through financial support.

AACTE supports the modifications to the TEACH grants found in the *Educator Preparation Reform Act* (to be reintroduced in the 115th Congress) to address concerns and challenges with the grants.

The Equal Access to Quality Education Act (to be reintroduced in the 115th Congress)

Rep. Judy Chu (D-CA)

This bill requires the Department of Education to award competitive matching grants to partnerships between high-need local educational agencies (LEAs) and institutions of higher education (IHEs) to establish or support (1) teacher preparation programs and (2) teacher induction and retention programs.

Teacher preparation programs must (1) require participants to complete at least one year of residency followed by at least three years of teaching at the LEA's high-need schools and (2) award participants a teaching credential or degree that meets state requirements for a teaching license or certification upon completion of the program.

Teacher induction and retention programs must use high-quality mentoring, teacher collaboration, and research-based instructional practices to (1) support and advance the retention of beginning teachers and principals and (2) promote effective teaching and leadership skills. Grants may be used for certain other activities designed to improve the quality of education in high-need areas.

Grant priority is given to partnerships that (1) use a valid and reliable teacher performance assessment and have a plan to recruit teachers from among minority and local candidates and the disabled or (2) use that assessment and include an IHE that is eligible to participate in the TEACH grant program, a Tribal College or University, an Asian American and Native American/Pacific Islander-serving institution, a Hispanic-serving institution, or a historically Black college and university.

ACTION:

When reintroduced, please cosponsor The Equal Access to Quality Education Act.

¹ As a result of sequestration, the maximum award amount has been reduced to \$3,724 for the 2016-17 school year.

The Rural Educator Support and Training Act (REST Act) – S. 457

Sen. Jon Tester (D-MT)

This bill amends the Higher Education Act of 1965 and the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965 to (1) establish several new grant programs for students training to become educators in rural schools and (2) enhance federal student loan forgiveness for rural educators.

The Department of Education (ED) shall award undergraduate scholarships and graduate fellowships to students who are studying to become educators in rural schools. To be eligible, a recipient must maintain acceptable academic standing and shall agree to fulfill a service obligation of three or more years, depending on the number of years for which funding is provided.

ED may also award grants to eligible educational agencies for the purpose of (1) reimbursing eligible rural educators for out-of-pocket costs associated with obtaining National Board certification and (2) increasing annual compensation for eligible rural educators who have become certified.

Rural educators shall also be eligible for additional student loan forgiveness. Specifically, a teacher who is employed for five consecutive years in a rural school shall be eligible for up to \$17,500 in federal student loan forgiveness. (Under current law, a highly qualified teacher who is employed for five consecutive years in a high-poverty school is eligible for up to \$5,000 in federal student loan forgiveness; such a teacher who teaches mathematics, science, or special education is eligible for up to \$17,500.)

ACTION:

Please cosponsor the Rural Educator Support and Training Act (REST Act), S. 457.

The Native Educator Support and Training Act (NEST ACT) – S. 458

Sen. Jon Tester (D-MT)

This bill amends the Higher Education Act of 1965 to establish scholarships, loan forgiveness plans, and training programs for educators who commit to teaching in Native American or Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools.

This bill establishes three scholarship programs for students who are seeking degrees in education or in school administration at institutions of higher education and who commit to teaching in Native American or BIE schools:

- The Indian Student Educator Scholarship Program for students seeking degrees
- The Indian Educator Scholarship Program for Indian students seeking degrees
- The Indian Educator Graduate Fellowship Program for Indian students seeking graduate degrees

Recipients of the scholarships must commit to working for a BIE school, a school serving Native Americans, or other specified schools and agencies for the greater of 3 years or the number of school years that the scholarship funded.

The bill establishes loan forgiveness programs for educators and Native Americans who have taught for at least 5 consecutive years at BIE schools or local educational agencies with high percentages of Native American students.

The bill extends the federal Perkins Loan Cancellation Program to educators teaching in BIE schools or in Native American language immersion programs.

National Board Certification Grants

This bill would reimburse educators and Native Americans teaching in BIE schools or local educational agencies with high percentages of Native American students for out-of-pocket expenses associated with becoming National Board certified. In addition, this measure would offer \$5,000-\$10,000 in increased compensation for each year the recipient of National Board certification remains at the school where the recipient was teaching when National Board certification was received under this grant.

The bill establishes the Native American Language Teacher Training Program to provide grants for institutions of higher education to develop training programs for Native American immersion and language teachers.

ACTION:

Please cosponsor the Native Educator Support and Training Act (NEST Act), S. 458.

The Teacher Health and Wellness Act – H.R. 2544

This bill provides support for the profession by creating a five-year pilot study at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) aimed at reducing teacher stress, increasing teacher health, increasing teacher retention, and ultimately boosting student achievement. The bill asks NIH to study the following:

- Workplace wellness programs that are designed to improve teacher health, attendance, and engagement.
- Social emotional learning programs that help teachers improve student engagement in the classroom.
- Teacher stress management programs that improve teacher performance.
- Mentoring and induction programs that improve teacher retention.
- Organizational interventions such as principal training programs that reduce stress through supervisor/peer support.
- Teacher residency programs that provide mental health and psychological support.
- Complementary health approaches, such as mindfulness meditation, that improve teacher performance.
- Other innovative evidence-based approaches that reduce stress and increase well-being.

A report of the findings will be submitted to the committees of jurisdiction and made available to the public.

ACTION:

Please cosponsor the Teacher Health and Wellness Act, H.R. 2544.