

February 28, 2013

The Honorable Susan Davis
U.S. House of Representatives
1526 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jared Polis
U.S. House of Representatives
501 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Davis and Polis:

We write in support of your bill, H.R. 1368, the Securing Teacher Effectiveness, Leaders, Learning, and Results Act (STELLAR Act), which would modernize teacher and principal evaluation systems. Under this bill, states and districts receiving Title I funds would be required to provide more accurate information about the quality and effectiveness of each district's teachers and principals. It would also require states and districts to use the information produced by the new evaluations to inform personnel decisions related to hiring, firing, tenure, and compensation, among other things. Further, the bill would ensure that low-income and minority students are not disproportionately saddled by ineffective teachers.

Effective teachers and leaders are critically important to the effort to raise achievement and close long-standing achievement gaps between groups. Research now makes it abundantly clear: children who have three or four strong teachers in a row will soar academically, regardless of their racial or economic background, while those who have a sequence of weak teachers in a row simply fall further and further behind.

America has many wonderful teachers and principals. But, we know that effective teachers and principals are not evenly distributed across different schools and districts. Low-income and minority students—the very ones who could benefit most from our best teachers and leaders—are typically taught by a disproportionate share of our least-able teachers. They also are typically stuck in schools run by our least-able leaders. These gaps, especially the teacher quality gap, contribute mightily to our national achievement gap.

A more robust evaluation system would allow us to identify where our best teachers and principals are located, and to determine whether low-income and minority students have access to them. It would then enable districts and states to take actions to remedy any inequities that exist.

The newest and most comprehensive research on good instruction, which was recently released by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, provides unprecedented insights about effective ways to measure teaching. The Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) Project explored the work of over 3,000 teachers who agreed to have their teaching measured in multiple ways. The research found that multiple measures of teacher evaluation make a difference, as long as they are valid and reliable. While teacher evaluations that also include certain classroom observation tools and student surveys provide more reliable estimates of teachers' effectiveness than those based only on tests, test scores should always be a significant factor in evaluations.

On a professional level, the evaluation system called for in your bill would allow districts and schools to provide teachers and principals with development and enrichment opportunities that align more closely with their professional needs and goals. We support the STELLAR Act and thank you for your leadership

on this issue. We also look forward to working with Congress to help states and districts improve their evaluation systems and provide more equitable access to effective teachers for all students.

Sincerely,

Center for American Progress Action Fund
Democrats for Education Reform
The Education Trust
The New Teacher Project