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Hearing on Supporting America's Educators: The Importance of Quality Teachers and Leaders
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Chairman Miller, Ranking Member Kline, members of the Committee. It is an honor to be invited to testify before you today on a topic of utmost importance: educational leadership. I am Pamela S. Salazar, an associate professor of practice in the Department of Educational Leadership at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. I am the coordinator of the Collaborative Principal Preparation Program, which is a joint venture between the Clark County School District and the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, designed to prepare future administrators for positions within the Clark County Schools. I am a retired high school principal and a former physics, math, and computer science teacher. Additionally, I recently authored a book titled *High-Impact Leadership for High-Impact Schools* which has been adopted by numerous school districts across the country for both new principal induction programs and practicing principal leadership academies. I applaud the Committee for including this critical issue as part of the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

Research documents what educators inherently know—a strong principal is second only to a highly effective teacher in impacting student learning and achievement. The renewed emphasis on school-level outcomes and student achievement places the school leader at the center of all school reform efforts. Today's principals and assistant principals are expected to be visionary leaders, instructional experts, building managers, assessment specialists, disciplinarians, community builders, and more; they are also the ones ultimately held responsible for student achievement. Research also shows that it is imperative that we do a better job of preparing principals and other school leaders to be able to meet the needs of teachers and students.

Effective principals must possess strong coping skills, high cognitive functioning, emotional intelligence and a thorough understanding of the complex nature of the job. They understand that their expectations and actions set the tone for the school culture. The most effective principals set a vision and create a school culture that positively influences student outcomes. These attributes are most important in those dedicated educational leaders taking on the challenge of turning around the lowest-performing schools where they potentially have the greatest impact.

To create a consistently reliable process to develop, recognize and retain effective principals, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) has launched the development of a voluntary national certification for successful, experienced principals, assistant principals, and teacher leaders known as National Board Certification for Educational Leaders. Assisting in this

effort are the National Association of Elementary School Principals, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, National Middle School Association, American Association of School Administrators and representatives from higher education, district and state administration and professional associations.

I had the honor of serving as co-chair of the committee that developed the National Board Standards for Accomplished Principals. These standards represent a professional consensus on the unique practices that distinguish accomplished principals. They are cast in terms of the collaborative actions that accomplished principals take to advance learning to the highest level for every child: to recruit, promote and retain accomplished teachers; to improve school culture and performance; to advocate for the profession and the needs of their school; and to purposefully engage families and the broader community in the school's vision and mission. We are now working on the development of the assessment. This assessment will form the foundation for the rich amalgam of knowledge, skills and dispositions that will characterize National Board Certified Principals.

Having standards that define best practices allows for the development of professional education targeted for the continuum of practice. As school leaders engage and reflect on their level of practice and for those who hold the responsibility for preparing leaders, the standards continuum offers the profession a much clearer view of the requirements of successful practice. As school districts seek to select and develop principals, assistant principals, and teacher leaders that can lead the transformation of schools, the existence of a continuum of standards to assist and identify accomplished practice is hugely beneficial in the selection, training, and development of aspiring and practicing principals, assistant principals, and teacher leaders.

National Board Certification for Principals will define and validate the requirements that identify an accomplished, effective and results-oriented principal. As in medicine, law and other fields, it will support excellence, motivation and prestige within the profession. The National Board's analysis shows that principals support the prospect of advanced certification that recognizes the importance of instructional leadership, organizational change and community involvement—as well as the principal's essential role in school management. An NBPTS survey found that 83 percent of school leader respondents and 69 percent of district leaders respondents expressed interest in advanced principal certification. Both groups were most interested in a certification that would better prepare principals to lead systemic instructional improvement.

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards envisions the highly effective and accomplished principal as one who has had a positive impact on student learning and achievement by creating a professional learning community that focuses on student needs, teacher retention and professional development as well as the incorporation of community and business groups in ensuring the success of every student.

Though the diversity of environments and students throughout our nation make it naive to suggest that these principals will be lock-step to follow a single play book of “do’s” and “don’ts”, it is certain that they will all display the same characteristics critical to outstanding school leadership.

Principals possessing these characteristics:

Lead with a sense of urgency to achieve the highest results for all students and staff in their schools and build organizational capacity by developing leadership in others.

Inspire their school to evolve into a learning community where teachers, community leaders and local businesses share a steadfast commitment to high achievement in student learning and strong instructional practice.

Ensure that strategic management systems and processes are designed and implemented so that the primary focus of their school is teaching and learning.

Most importantly, these principals will be ethical leaders, whose continuous advocacy for equitable learning conditions and opportunities is matched only by a humility which guides them to continually reflect on their practice. In this manner, these principals will not only continue to grow personally and professionally, but also they will serve as an example to other principals striving to improve their own practice and schools.

Indeed, principals that meet these standards will have made a commitment to excellence in their schools and throughout their school districts. They will help refine and develop new systems by which we measure, evaluate and reward principals.

If principals and assistant principals are to meet the growing, ever-changing expectations of this demanding position, they require continual professional development personalized to meet their individual needs. This is true for all school leaders, regardless of their initial preparation or their length of service. Today’s educational environment of standards-based education and high accountability demands that principals are knowledgeable and skilled in instructional leadership, organizational development, community relations, and change management. Ongoing, job-embedded professional development is the key to developing this capacity in all school leaders.

Although there is growing consensus on the attributes of highly effective principals, there is currently no reliable way to measure the performance of school leaders—or to recognize and reward them for their accomplishments. School districts should examine quantitative and qualitative data pertaining to both academic and nonacademic indicators in their evaluation of principals. The following measurements, in addition to student indicators, are recommended for assessing principal performance: self assessments; supervisor site visits; school documentation of classroom observations and faculty meeting agendas; climate surveys; teacher, other school staff, parent, and student evaluations; teacher retention and transfer rates; teacher and student

attendance rates, and opportunities for student engagement through co-curricular and extracurricular activities and rates of participation.

In measuring a principal's performance based on student indicators, States should use multiple assessments that are aligned with common standards, include performance-based measures, and measure individual student growth from year to year, including State assessments; portfolios, performance tasks, and other examples of a student's accomplishments; traditional quizzes and tests; interviews, questionnaires, and conferences; end-of-course exams; comprehensive personal academic or graduation plans; assessments aligned with high school and college entrance requirements; and senior projects.

But while effective principals are key to a school's success, they are not the whole story and cannot be solely held accountable for a school's performance. Schools are a sum of many parts, each being integral to the whole. Changing one or two of the parts, even one as crucial as the principal will not guarantee the desired result. The lowest performing schools need whole school improvement, not piecemeal applications. The Administration's approach in its School Improvement Grants and in "*A Blueprint for Reform*", requires the removal of a principal in perennially low-performing schools as part of the improvement process. This will not automatically result in dramatic, sustainable reform. Turning around low-performing schools and significantly improving student achievement requires, among other factors, a principal that has received appropriate training and mentoring to understand what principal and school leader should know and be able to do to effectively lead a school. Even more, it requires that the principal have access to appropriate data, a well-training workforce, and the authority and autonomy to place resources where they are needed most. Yes, it is important to be able to remove principals who cannot effectively lead, but we should not adopt policies that assume the incompetency of every principal in our lowest-performing schools.

Successful students and teachers need the support of effective principals and school leadership. The most accomplished principals create a school-based learning community that involves teachers, students, parents and the community. Additionally, the demands and complexity of 21st century education requires more than ever from these leaders. It is essential that we attract, develop and retain the best and brightest educational leaders to the profession to prepare students for the expectations of a global economy.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.