

**Testimony of John D. Podesta
Before the House Education and Labor Committee
U.S. Congress**

Hearing on “ESEA Reauthorization: Boosting Quality in the Teaching Profession”

May 11th, 2007

Chairman Miller and members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to testify today. I am John Podesta, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Center for American Progress. I am also a Visiting Professor of Law at the Georgetown University Law Center.

I appreciate the opportunity to be with you today to discuss the growing problem of recruitment and retention of highly effective teachers and principals in our nation’s schools. As the Committee considers the reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act, it is important to consider ways to strengthen our education system—especially how to attract, train, equitably distribute, and retain the most effective teachers and principals, the very problems that the Teacher Excellence for All Children Act addresses.

This is Teacher Appreciation Week, and we should stop and consider how important effective teachers are to our education system. We appropriately spend a lot of time discussing what is wrong with the American education system, but it is also important to remember that across our country legions of dedicated teachers are doing nothing short of performing miracles in our schools. Teachers are the backbone of high-quality public education and strengthening the teacher workforce can lay the foundation for fruitful

investments in other areas of public education. Research demonstrates that the single most important factor determining how much students learn is the quality of their teachers. Teacher salaries and benefits are by far the largest education expenditure, but they are also the most critical resource for student learning. A very good teacher as opposed to a very bad one can make as much as one full year's difference in the achievement growth of students.¹ Studies also show that high-quality leadership directly affects school performance, as well as improves the working environment for teachers. Unfortunately, education leaders and public policymakers often fail to treat teachers and principals as our most valuable resources, and our current policies are not effectively addressing their needs.

Not only are we failing to attract new teachers to the field; we are also failing to retain them. One-third of new teachers leave within the first three years of teaching, and half are gone by the fifth.² In high-poverty schools with poor working conditions, rates of overall teacher attrition are disastrously high. Between 2000 and 2001, one out of five teachers in the nation's high-poverty schools either left to teach in another school or dropped out of teaching altogether.³

¹ Dan Goldhaber. *Teacher Pay Reforms: The Political Implications of Recent Research* (December 2006), Center for American Progress, at 1.

² Richard M. Ingersoll, *Why Do High-Poverty Schools Have Difficulty Staffing their Classrooms with Qualified Teachers?* Center for American Progress and the Institute for America's Future (2004), available at <http://www.americanprogress.org/kf/ingersoll-final.pdf> (last viewed May 7, 2007).

³ Richard M. Ingersoll, *Is There Really a Teacher Shortage?*, Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, University of Washington (2003), at 15; Richard M. Ingersoll, *Why Do High Poverty Schools Have Difficulty Staffing Their Classrooms with High Quality Teachers?*, Center for American Progress (2004) available at <http://www.americanprogress.org/kf/ingersoll-final.pdf> (last viewed May 7, 2007).

Shortages of highly effective teachers have a disproportionate effect on low-income and minority students; they are about twice as likely to be assigned to inexperienced teachers⁴ who on average make far smaller annual learning gains than more experienced teachers.⁵ As a result, low-income, African American, and Latino children consistently get less than their fair share of good teachers.

The impact of a lack of quality teachers is felt daily by our nation's students. Due to shortages of highly effective teachers, shortages of teachers in certain subject areas, and ineffective administrative practices in many schools, large numbers of secondary teachers are assigned to teach classes outside of their areas of preparation. For example, 37 percent of students in grades 7-12 are taught by a teacher who lacks a college major and state certification in the subject being taught.⁶ Rates of "out-of-field teaching" are especially high in middle schools, high-poverty schools, and shortage areas such as mathematics. Chancellor Joel Klein will speak more to this problem, but the bottom line is that the lack of retention and the distribution of qualified teachers are highly inequitable.

The current situation of teacher quality and effectiveness is deplorable, but the problem is not insurmountable. We have a window of opportunity to effect change in our public school system with the unprecedented number of teachers who will soon reach retirement

⁴ National Center for Education Statistics, *Monitoring School Quality: An Indicators Report*, December 2000, at 13-14.

⁵ Eric A. Hanushek & Steven G. Rivkin, *How to Improve the Supply of High-Quality Teachers*, Brookings Papers on Education Policy: 2004, at 16.

⁶ Education Week, *Quality Counts 2003*, Editorial Projects in Education, Jan. 9, 2003, available at <http://counts.edweek.org/sreports/qc03/templates/article.cfm?slug=17divide.h22> (last viewed May 6, 2007).

age. According to the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2 million teachers will leave their jobs within the next decade. Replacing so many teachers is a daunting task, but it also presents us with an opportunity to overhaul the current system. With such a large number of teachers leaving in the next decade, efforts to attract new candidates must be renewed. Simply put, it is imperative that we experiment with innovative initiatives that will increase the supply of quality teachers and principals.

The TEACH Act proposal introduced by Chairman Miller and Senator Kennedy would put money behind programs designed to experiment with new ways of preparing and compensating teachers as well as principals. This legislation would help address the problem of teacher and principal quality by taking several of the necessary steps to equip each classroom with a highly qualified teacher and each school with a properly trained principal. We should implement its recommendations and also seize the opportunity for change by moving forward with bold new ideas to address the challenge of employing an effective teacher workforce in our schools. The three ideas I would like to discuss with you today are: collecting and using data for decision-making, offering more competitive compensation for our teachers and principals, and using our teacher workforce as a go-to resource.

We need to increase the amount and improve the quality of information we gather about America's teacher workforce and at the same time encourage the use of such data for greater accountability and smarter decision-making. The Center for American Progress and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce recently worked together to examine state-by-state

educational effectiveness. One of the major findings in our joint report titled “Leaders and Laggards: A State-by-State Report Card on Educational Effectiveness” was that America’s K–12 schools are failing their students and putting America’s future economic competitiveness at risk. In completing this report, however, we also found that state education systems suffer from a severe lack of meaningful data on performance.⁷

Without reliable information, we simply cannot evaluate results or properly assess school performance, so the lack of meaningful, reliable data on our nation’s schools is alarming. Improved data with respect to teacher and principal performance can be used to improve instruction and to help rectify inequities in student opportunities for learning. Better data can also help measure the effectiveness of preparation programs for teachers and principals, lead to the development of more sophisticated career advancement systems, and more effective and equitable deployment of our teacher workforce. Furthermore, data can help build the case for larger investments in professional development programs for both teachers and principals.

Data systems being pioneered in a few states offer an important new opportunity to produce information about the performance of individual classroom teachers and school principals measured in terms of how much progress students and schools are making academically.

⁷ Center for American Progress and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Leaders and Laggards: A State-by-State Report Card on Educational Effectiveness, at 7 (February 2007), *available at* http://www.uschamber.com/icw/reportcard/major_findings.htm (last viewed May 7, 2007).

To offer some examples: Chattanooga, Tennessee uses value-added data to identify highly effective teachers and then provides them with economic incentives to teach in the highest-need schools.⁸ Meanwhile, in Maryland, Gov. Martin O'Malley is encouraging school districts to implement his data-tracking system, CitiStat, to collect and track information on student performance. When student and teacher data are linked, these data collection programs can be used to identify teachers' weaknesses so professional development can be provided in those areas, and to identify teachers' strengths so they can be used as a resource for other teachers in need of mentoring in those areas.

Informational gaps on America's teacher workforce must be identified and systematically addressed. Otherwise, problems and underperformance may be missed and allowed to persist. The federal government is uniquely positioned to lead in this data-gathering revolution and should adopt measures that encourage adequate data collection. Additional expenditures may be required to fill in information gaps, but this should be regarded as an investment that will pay off in the long run.⁹

In order to attract and retain highly effective teachers and principals, we also need to make targeted investments to incentivize change in our public education system. We need to begin by acknowledging that job structure and financial rewards are important motivators for employees no matter what their profession. Currently, too little attention is

⁸ Kevin Cary, *The Real Value of Teachers*, The Education Trust, Winter 2004. available at <http://www2.edtrust.org/NR/rdonlyres/5704CBA6-CE12-46D0-A852-D2E2B4638885/0/Spring04.pdf> (last viewed May 7, 2007).

⁹ Teresita Perez and Reece Rushing, *The CitiStat Model: How Data-Driven Government Can Increase Efficiency & Effectiveness* (April 2007) at 10, available at http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2007/04/pdf/citistat_report.pdf (last viewed May 7, 2007).

paid to creating the financial incentives necessary to recruit and retain an effective teacher workforce. We need to change that by offering competitive compensation that recognizes and rewards different roles, responsibilities, and results.

In the “Leaders and Laggards” report, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the Center for American Progress agreed that states and districts need to reform pay and performance structures to improve starting salaries. Offering competitive salaries and up-front tuition assistance can help attract talented mid-careerists and young people committed to a career in education.

Our teacher workforce should also receive greater compensation for positive results and a willingness to take on more responsibilities. If a teacher or a principal is taking on more challenging subjects, teaching in tougher schools, or delivering positive results, we should create rewards for them.

In the classroom, teachers often find too few opportunities to engage in ongoing professional development that is closely aligned with what they teach. That is why we need new avenues of advancement that offer expert teachers the opportunity to pursue a variety of positions throughout their careers without having to leave classroom teaching altogether. These efforts can be particularly helpful in high-poverty schools where new teachers often need additional support and experienced teachers need incentives to stay. Commensurate with the responsibilities of mentor teaching, master teaching, and any

other advanced categories that are created, there should be significant increases in compensation as well.

Compensation systems that recognize the value of our teacher workforce coupled with career advancement systems that more effectively reward good performance, draw effective educators to high-need schools, and respond to poor performance, including fairly and effectively removing ineffective educators, will make larger investments in teacher and principal salaries more politically viable and maximize the returns on such investments. To effectively determine advancements, expanded compensation for teachers and principals should be coupled with a meaningful evaluation system for them. This would serve a two-fold purpose as it would help determine pay based on performance, while at the same time add hard data to help measure education performance and effectiveness.

The president and the Congress need to act on the premise that teachers and principals are public education's most valuable assets. We need to start treating them as our most valuable resource and include them in the decision-making process. To do so, we first need to seek direct input from them on issues such the quality of development programs, school conditions, administrative support, and other issues.¹⁰ Moreover, they must be consulted as compensation systems are redesigned.

¹⁰ O'Malley and Brown, "New Ideas to Improve Teacher Working Conditions," 2006, *available at* http://omalley.3cdn.net/9debebb3ca354efd54_31m6b9q13.pdf (last viewed May 7, 2007).

In Maryland, Gov. Martin O'Malley plans to carry out a survey among school teachers every two years called the Teacher Working Conditions Survey to quickly identify and address areas pertaining to the "quality of school leadership, administrative support, professional development, and facility conditions."¹¹ The survey information will be used to identify problem areas, evaluate the effectiveness of education initiatives, track progress and results, and efficiently direct resources based on need.¹² As our most valuable resources within the school system, it is imperative that teachers and principals get a say in what happens within the classroom. Therefore, we should consider implementing similar surveys in schools nation-wide.

We have an opportunity to implement highly transformative measures. With so many teachers leaving the classroom in the next decade, there is an increased sense of urgency to recruit the next generation of teachers and principals and to experiment with more innovative programs. Our nation's future depends on our efforts to find alternatives to the current system and to attract and retain highly effective teachers and principals.

The TEACH Act's several programs can help improve recruitment, preparation, distribution, and retention of a highly effective teacher workforce. I strongly encourage the Committee to move this bill forward and also to consider the other issues I discussed with you today.

¹¹ O'Malley and Brown, "New Ideas to Improve Teacher Working Conditions," 2006, available at http://omalley.3cdn.net/9debebb3ca354efd54_31m6b9q13.pdf (last viewed May 7, 2007).

¹² Teresita Perez and Reece Rushing, *The CitiStat Model: How Data-Driven Government Can Increase Efficiency & Effectiveness* (April 2007) at 9, available at http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2007/04/pdf/citistat_report.pdf (last viewed May 7, 2007).

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee for inviting me today. I'd be happy to take any questions you may have.