

November 9, 2011

Senator Bernie Sanders
United States Senate
332 Dirksen Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

**RE: SUPPORT FOR S. 1716, ASSURING SUCCESSFUL STUDENTS THROUGH EFFECTIVE
TEACHING ACT OF 2011**

Dear Senator Sanders:

On behalf of the nation's 50 million elementary and secondary students, we are pleased to offer our support for S. 1716, the Assuring Successful Students Through Effective Teaching Act of 2011. As a coalition of 82 supporting S.1716 and concerned with promoting educational quality and equity, particularly for students who have traditionally been least well served by our educational system, we are deeply committed to the development of well-prepared and effective teachers for all communities, and to the equitable distribution of these teachers to all students. We believe S. 1716 embodies these goals.

This important legislation addresses a critical problem in our nation's school system, in which low-income students, minority students, English language learners, and students with disabilities are disproportionately taught by novice teachers who have not yet completed their teacher training and who have high rates of attrition. To address this inequity, this bill provides that all students—but particularly these students—be taught by teachers who are fully-prepared to teach on their first day in the classroom and who, once there, prove themselves effective.

If enacted, the proposed legislation would define the term “highly qualified teacher” to include only teachers who have completed a traditional or alternative teacher preparation program or have demonstrated basic teaching competency by passing a rigorous state-approved teacher performance assessment. Whereas Department of Education regulations and a later Congressional amendment weakened No Child Left Behind's definition of “highly qualified” to include teachers-in-training who had met no teaching proficiency standards, under your bill, the “highly qualified” standard will finally mean something.

Equally important, the bill looks beyond teachers' initial qualifications to also focus on teacher effectiveness, requiring that states and districts implement plans to equitably distribute both highly-qualified and effective teachers. The bill requires that teacher effectiveness be measured by a comprehensive teacher evaluation and support system that is based on professional teaching standards and that assesses both contributions to individual student learning as well as teaching practice. Although some of your colleagues in the Senate have argued that federal policy should focus solely on measuring teacher effectiveness rather than setting any baseline qualification criteria, this “effectiveness only” approach ignores the reality that rigorous teacher evaluation systems won't be up and running for at least a few years, and, once implemented, will require a few years of classroom data from which to determine an individual teacher's effectiveness. Your bill soundly recognizes that students with the greatest need should not be forced to bear the brunt

of being disproportionately taught by untrained teachers for 2-3 years, at the end of which their teacher may have left the classroom without ever completing their training and/or been deemed ineffective.

Finally, your bill recognizes that there may be instances where a fully-prepared, highly qualified teacher is unavailable. In those cases where districts must hire a teacher who is not yet highly qualified, the bill provides basic safeguards for students who are taught by these teachers by providing that any non-highly qualified teachers must be adequately supervised and equitably distributed, and that parents be informed when their child is being taught by such a teacher.

We applaud you for your leadership on legislation that is poised to finally deliver on our nation's promise to provide all students with equal access to great teachers. Whether as part of the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act or as independent legislation, we offer our support for the Assuring Successful Students Through Effective Teaching Act of 2011.

Sincerely,

National Coalition for Teaching Quality

(Please see signatories on next page)

cc: Members, U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions
Members, U.S. House Committee on Education and the Workforce
U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan

Signatories for S.1716 (Sanders)

National Organizations

Alliance for Multilingual Multicultural Education
American Council on Education
American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education
American Association of People with Disabilities
American Association of State Colleges and Universities
American Council for School Social Work
Association of University Centers on Disabilities
ASPIRA Association
Autistic Self Advocacy Network
Autism National Committee
Center for Teaching Quality
Citizens for Effective Schools
Communities for Excellent Public Schools
Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates
Disability Policy Collaboration, A Partnership of The Arc and UCP
Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund Inc
Easter Seals
Education Law Center
FairTest, The National Center for Fair & Open Testing
First Focus Campaign for Children
Gamaliel Foundation
Helen Keller National Center
Higher Education Consortium for Special Education
Latino Elected and Appointed Officials National Taskforce on Education
Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
Learning Disabilities Association of America
Movement Strategy Center
NAACP
NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.
National Alliance of Black School Educators
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of State Directors of Special Education
National Center for Learning Disabilities
National Consortium on Deaf-Blindness
National Council for Educating Black Children
National Council of Teachers of English
National Council of Teachers of Mathematics
National Disability Rights Network
National Down Syndrome Congress
National Down Syndrome Society
National Education Association
National Indian Education Association
National Latino Education Research & Policy Project
National PTA
National Urban League
League of United Latin American Citizens
Parents Across America
Public Advocates Inc.
Public Education Network
Rural School and Community Trust
School Social Work Association of America
South East Asia Resource Action Center
TASH - Equity, Opportunity, and Inclusion for People with Disabilities
Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children
United Church of Christ Justice & Witness Ministries

State and Local Organizations

Action Now – Illinois
Action Now– North Carolina
ACTION United
Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment (ACCE)
Arkansas Community Organizations
Bay Area Parent Leadership Action Network
Brighton Park Neighborhood Council – Chicago
California Association for Bilingual Education
Californians for Justice
Californians Together
California Latino School Boards Association
Campaign for Quality Education
Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning
Coalition for Educational Justice
Delawareans for Social and Economic Justice
Grow Your Own Illinois
Inner City Struggle
Justice Matters
Legal Advocates for Children and Youth
Parent-U-Turn
Parents for Unity
RYSE Center
San Francisco Teacher Residency
Texas Association of Chicanos in Higher Education
Youth On Board – Somerville, MA
Youth Together