

**Testimony in support of HB #5421**

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Good afternoon. My name is Edna Novak, and I am the Executive Director of Teach For America in Connecticut. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of House Bill 5421, which will enable the creation of alternate pathways to certification for school administrators in Connecticut. Not only will this bill help address ongoing leadership shortages in our state's schools and districts, but it will strengthen the diversity and quality of our principals and assistant principals, and improve Connecticut's eligibility for federal Race To The Top funding in our round two application this June.

As some of you may know, Teach For America is a national non-profit working to end educational inequity. We recruit, select, train, and support a corps of outstanding young teachers from all academic backgrounds and long-term career interests who commit to teach for two years or more in low-income urban and rural public schools, and through their experiences, become life-long leaders in the effort to expand educational opportunity. Our over 17,000 alumni today are a powerful force of teachers and leaders working both from inside education and from every other sector to effect the fundamental changes needed to ensure that all children have an equal chance in life.

We focus much of our energy at Teach For America on the development of highly effective teachers in our nation's highest poverty schools. Given our mission, however, we also focus on building pathways for leadership for Teach For America alumni, two-thirds of whom are continuing to work in education, not only as teachers but in many cases as assistant principals, principals, and district administrators in low-income public school districts. However, while there are over 350 Teach For America alumni serving as principals in low-income communities today, only 7 are currently doing so here in Connecticut, in part because of limited pathways into the profession. It is for this reason that I am testifying in support of HB 5421 today.

There is a significant body of research that tells us that the two primary factors that determine student achievement are, by far, (1) teacher quality and (2) principal quality. In fact, nearly 60% of a school's impact on student achievement is attributable to principal and teacher effectiveness, with principals accounting for 25% of a school's total impact on achievement.<sup>1</sup> Numerous studies have also demonstrated that principal quality is one of the most influential factors in the retention of teachers, especially the most effective teachers defined in terms of student achievement and growth. As New Leaders for New Schools put it in a recent summary

of research in this area, “In order for students to have high-quality learning gains year after year, *whole schools* must be high-functioning and led by effective principals with effective teachers across the school.”<sup>ii</sup>

To increase the number of highly effective principals in our state, research suggests that we implement exactly the kind of strategies that are outlined in House Bill 5421 – (1) granting certification authority to principal preparation programs that match state standards and meet requirements for tracking and learning from data (programs operated both within schools of education and by non-profits and district-based providers), and (2) by establishing rigorous principal selection criteria and processes based on definitions of effective and highly effective principals that are grounded in student achievement.<sup>iii</sup> At Teach For America, our focus on the latter – on selection criteria and processes that are informed and refined by years of analysis on student achievement data – has led to significant improvements in the effectiveness of our teachers over time.

In addition to strengthening and diversifying the pipeline for effective principals in Connecticut, at a time when there are ongoing principal shortages, principal quality shortages, and impending retirements among a significant proportion of current administrators, House Bill 5421 will also put Connecticut in a stronger position for our state’s second round Race To The Top application this June. Section (D)(1) of the Race To The Top guidelines calls for alternate routes for school leaders that are (a) offered by various types of qualified providers, including those operating independently from institutions of higher learning, (b) selective in accepting candidates, (c) provide supervised, school-based experiences and ongoing support, (d) significantly limit the amount of coursework required or have options to test out of courses, and (e) upon completion award the same level of certification that traditional preparation programs award upon completion. House Bill 5421 mandates that alternative routes to certification for principals in Connecticut meet these guidelines. Section 2(a) allows for various types of qualified providers. Section 2(b)(3) ensures that such alternate routes to certification are selective and only accept those participants who have demonstrated a record of effective teaching based on student achievement. Section 2(c) provides for one to have a supervised, school-based experience as an assistant principal, with the ongoing support and guidance of a certified school principal. Section 2(d) will limit the amount of coursework required to gain certification.

Connecticut has historically been a leader in education reform. We were among the first states in this country to recognize that there are different pathways to becoming a teacher by establishing one of our nation's first alternate routes to teacher certification. Now it is time to demonstrate our leadership by recognizing that there are different pathways to school leadership and allowing for the establishment of alternate routes to certification at the administrator level. Bill 5421 will enable such alternate routes to certification to exist in Connecticut in a way that will both strengthen the diversity and efficacy of principals and align with the criteria for Race To The Top. With that in mind, I urge you to support bill 5421.

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<sup>i</sup> Marzano, R.J., Waters, T., & McNulty, B. (2005) School leadership that works: From research to results. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

<sup>ii</sup> New Leaders for New Schools. (2009). Principal Effectiveness: A New Principalship to Drive Student Achievement, Teacher Effectiveness, and School Turnarounds. [www.nlms.org](http://www.nlms.org).

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid.

