

## Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

Testimony of Timothy Daly  
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“Teacher Preparation: Ensuring a Quality Teacher in Every Classroom”  
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Thank you Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee for having me here today.

My name is Tim Daly, and I am the president of TNTP, a national non-profit dedicated to ending the injustice of educational inequality. Founded in 1997 as The New Teacher Project, we work with schools, districts, and states to provide excellent teachers to the students who need them most and to advance policies and practices that ensure effective teaching in every classroom. Given our organizational mission and work, we are pleased to have the opportunity to share our expertise in preparing teachers for early career effectiveness, and to offer suggestions for how federal policy can encourage all programs to adopt policies that promote great teaching and enable successful programs to grow.

TNTP is one of the largest teacher preparation programs in the United States. To date, we have recruited or trained more than 50,000 teachers to work in some of the highest-need schools in the country. Through this experience and through research into teacher performance across several large districts, we have learned one thing above all: it is very difficult to predict in advance who will be successful in the classroom, but a teacher’s early track record is an exceptionally good predictor of his/her later effectiveness. Teachers who start strong are able to grow quickly with experience; new teachers who struggle with critical skills like classroom management rarely learn how to do it over time. This is true whether we looked at our own teachers or those prepared by other programs.

Given that evidence, all teacher preparation programs should focus on helping teacher candidates master the skills they need to create a positive learning environment from their very first day in the classroom. There is no standard program design that will guarantee excellence – teaching is too complex to follow a rote training model– but we are certain that the current measures that Congress requires to track programs under Title II do not tell us whether programs are succeeding in their missions, and don’t encourage states to set meaningful bars for quality in the preparation programs they approve.

We therefore recommend two major shifts as Congress considers reauthorization of the Higher Education Act:

1. Congress should redesign the accountability measures for teacher preparation providers, replacing the current focus on admission criteria and program completion to instead emphasize whether the candidates those programs prepare are effective once they are in the classroom, replacing current measures that focus on program admission and completion. The true measure of a program should be the performance of its graduates with real students in real schools.
2. Congress should embrace and support high-quality, non-university preparation providers – those with a track record of success and a commitment to diversifying the new teacher pool – by enabling participants in such programs to access federal student aid. At present, some of the most successful teacher pipelines available to districts face a permanent, structural disadvantage relative to traditional university programs.

### TNTP and its Teaching Fellows Programs

First, let me say a little about our organization and our history in teacher preparation. Since 2000, TNTP has operated teacher preparation programs in districts around the country. We began in New York City, where nearly a quarter of active math, science, and special education teachers started their careers through our Teaching Fellows program. We

currently operate in 12 states, plus the District of Columbia, recruiting over 2,000 teachers to hard-to-staff schools annually. In brief, we train more teachers each year than all but the largest state university schools of education.

Admittedly, we are different than most institutions that train teachers:

- *We are not an institute of higher education.* Instead, we have worked to develop our own program, TNTP Academy, to provide the training and support new teachers need. Our program is strong enough that we have secured approval to certify our own teachers in most of the states where we work, without a relationship to a college or university.
- *We do not focus on credits or seat time.* Our teacher candidates teach full-time during the day while earning their certificate during nights and weekends; as such, we have to make the most out of the limited time we have with each candidate. To do so, we prioritize practical skills that will help them succeed immediately.
- *We do not have a collection of permanent faculty with terminal degrees.* We hire effective classroom teachers from the communities we serve to share their knowledge and real-world teaching experience with our candidates; we believe that the people best suited to train and coach new teachers to become effective are those who have done it themselves and who have a track record of helping high-need students make significant learning gains.
- *We work at scale to prepare the teachers districts need.* All of our programs operate in partnership with districts and states to recruit and train teachers in hard-to-staff grades and subjects. We seek candidates who are eager to take on these challenging assignments and prepare them specifically to work in high-need schools.
- *We believe we are accountable for the results our teachers get in the classroom – and track it.* We do not train our teachers and send them out into schools, thinking our job is complete. Instead, we use a variety of evidence from their classrooms to assess the performance of our Fellows throughout their first year, ensuring that they are developing critical skills and getting results for their students they serve, and use multiple measures to assess their performance. If they are not developing into effective teachers, we do not grant them final certification.
- *We evolve our programs rapidly based on what we see in the field.* We are not content to train teachers who are middle of the pack. We use the data we collect on our teachers each year to make changes – some small, some large – to ensure that each cohort of teachers we recruit will be better prepared and capable of leading students in our partner districts to even greater success.

## Our Approach to Preparing Teachers

That last point – on evolving our programs – is how we learned that critical lesson about the importance of a teacher's first year. Our programs haven't always operated the way that they do now. Originally, our programs looked much like every other teacher preparation provider: we provided a broad, extensive pre-service training for our Fellows, and then assumed that while our graduates would struggle mightily at first, they would become effective with hard work and support from their peers and school leaders.

As increasingly rigorous evaluations of teachers were completed, however, we found that our Fellows were generally matching – but not consistently outpacing – the performance of other new teachers (whether from traditional or alternative routes). That wasn't good enough for us. We knew that average performance was not sufficient to train *great* teachers.

Using the latest research and our own experiences, we sought to rebuild our pre-service training program from the ground up to ensure that teachers master the most essential instructional skills first. With that foundation in place, they are prepared to make a difference on day one and poised to rapidly develop advanced teaching skills during their first year. We call this approach Fast Start. It is grounded in three key principles: a clear curriculum focused only

on the most essential skills; intensive practice of these skills, and; specific feedback on what teachers should do differently the very next lesson.

- **Focus:** Fast Start focuses on four critical skills most closely linked to first-year success: delivering lessons clearly, maintaining high academic standards, maintaining high behavioral standards and maximizing instructional time.
- **Practice:** Like athletes or musicians, teachers need to learn by doing—but most programs spend too much time on theories about teaching. In Fast Start, teachers spend 26 hours in intensive, hands-on practice activities beyond the time they spend actually teaching in real, summer school classrooms.
- **Feedback:** Every Fast Start participant benefits from 32 hours of one-on-one and group coaching to help them constantly fine-tune their use of essential instructional techniques.

Once in the classroom, we offer coaching and support that is tailored to the individual needs of each Fellow as they advance towards mastery-level skills. We also embed practice of those advanced skills into the content-oriented seminars Fellows must complete during their first year so that they can practice new teaching techniques at the same time as they bolster their pedagogical expertise in their particular teaching subject.

What we've learned so far is promising.

1. First, teachers can improve rapidly during even a five-week pre-service training program if given enough opportunities to practice. In each of our four critical focus competency areas, participants were more than twice as likely to demonstrate proficiency by the end of training as they were at the outset of training.
2. Second, teachers who master these essential skills during pre-service training are more likely to be successful in their first full year in the classroom. Teachers who performed better during Fast Start were more likely to meet our standards for first-year success at the end of the year.
3. Finally, preparation programs should view pre-service training like a training camp where not everyone will make the cut, because actual classroom performance is a powerful predictor of future success. In the summer of 2012, we only recommended around two thirds of our Fast Start participants to begin teaching.

## The First Year is the Most Important

Why do we place so much emphasis on teacher's performance in the first year? Because our experience, and the best research in the field, suggests that a teacher's first year is the most important year of their career. As we detailed last year in our report *Leap Year*<sup>1</sup>, not all new teachers struggle; they perform at different levels and improve at different rates. We also learned that teachers' initial performance predicts their future performance; teachers with higher observation scores at the beginning of the year were more likely to be strong performers at the end of the year as well. Most importantly, first-year teachers who are purposeful in their growth, responsive to feedback, and focused on student understanding develop the fastest, while those who struggle may even regress in their performance over the course of the first year.

Using Fast Start, we have become one of the first teacher preparation programs in the country to recommend teachers for certification based mainly on their performance in the classroom. Our evaluation model, the Assessment of Classroom Effectiveness (ACE), considers a wide variety of evidence – classroom observations, student surveys, principal ratings, and student achievement data (where available) – to create the fullest-possible picture of teacher performance. Our teachers receive ACE observations throughout the year and the model is designed to spur rapid growth by ensuring that teachers always know how they are doing and what they need to do to improve.

As with Fast Start, teachers must reach a rigorous performance standard before we will recommend them for certification. In 2012, only 82% of our Fellows received certification; the others were either extended with the opportunity to continue building skills, or denied certification and removed.

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<sup>1</sup> "Leap Year: Assessing and Supporting First-Year Teachers," TNTP, 2013.

What's important, though, is that early success is remarkably predictive of success in future years. A study<sup>2</sup> released last year by researchers at the University of Virginia and Stanford found that for both math and English Language Arts teachers, those who performed well in their first year were likely to continue to have higher student outcomes than their peers for each of the next four years. Conversely, teachers whose results were in the lowest quintile in their first year were likely to remain there for the next four years as well.

As a result, we think that policymakers should encourage programs to help first-year teachers focus on mastering essential skills first. Although most of this will need to be done by states, who are responsible for approving programs, the federal government can play an important role by encouraging states (through language in the Higher Education Act as well as via competitive grants) to adopt expectations for first-year teaching performance. Programs that are accountable for the eventual performance of their graduates will attend to it more carefully.

Policymakers at any level should not dictate how programs help their teacher candidates meet those high expectations. The best research currently available suggests there are typically few meaningful differences between preparation programs or routes to the classroom in terms of future student achievement – the biggest differences in effectiveness are found within programs rather than between them<sup>3</sup>. Teaching is a complex profession, and there is no one-size-fits-all model for teacher preparation in which all potential teacher candidates will thrive. Candidates should have the freedom to choose programs they believe are best for their professional growth, so long as states hold all programs – traditional or alternative – to a common bar of quality.

## A New Vision for Title II

If a state were to set such standards today, however, they would likely not be meaningful. In the absence of robust state data systems, the only common set of data collected across all teacher preparation programs comes via the reporting requirements in Title II of the Higher Education Act<sup>4</sup>. These provisions require teacher preparation providers and states to report a wide range of data on an annual basis – mostly related to program admission or completion requirements and examination pass rates.

This data, however, does little to describe whether graduates of a preparation program are effective once in the classroom, or whether their provider had anything to do with their success. For example, Title II reports do nothing to capture efforts by programs to ensure quality of their candidates. TNTP's Fellows programs and other alternative preparation pathways, such as rigorous residency programs, will proactively exit candidates who cannot demonstrate effectiveness. Title II reporting requirements do not capture this nuance.

Most importantly, though, the Title II reporting requirements fail to focus the attention of both providers and teacher candidates on what matters most: effectiveness in the classroom. Congress should revise the Title II reporting requirements to require states and providers to track and report the evaluation ratings of teachers during their first years of teaching after program completion. Where such systems use multiple measures of teacher effectiveness, the most granular level of data should be shared wherever possible. Where feasible, states should also share teacher retention data with programs, including the cause for separation where warranted so programs know whether separation was voluntary, layoff-related, or performance-related.

Such transparency, combined with rigorous implementation of a meaningful evaluation system, provides a rare win for nearly all parties:

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<sup>2</sup> Atteberry, A. Loeb, S., & Wyckoff, J. (2013). Do first impressions matter? Improvement in early career teacher effectiveness. *Calder Working Paper 90*. Washington, DC: National Center for the Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research (CALDER).

<sup>3</sup> Gordon, R. Kane, T., & Staiger, D. (2006). Identifying effective teachers using performance on the job. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.

<sup>4</sup> Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA) § 205-208, 29 U.S.C. §1022d-g (2008).

- Teacher preparation providers will collect information that can more meaningfully inform how they prepare and support their candidates, encouraging improvement over time;
- Teacher candidates who have options on where they obtain their preparation will have useful comparison data to select their program;
- District officials and school leaders can use the comparison data to identify which program pipelines they should pursue for new teachers, and;
- Congress and the states will benefit from improved information to guide further policymaking, and – as warranted – prioritize funding for programs with a successful track record of teacher preparation over providers who fail to consistently prepare candidates for success.

## Enabling Program Choice via Title IV

For teacher candidates to have meaningful choices in where they receive their preparation, however, providers need to be on an equal playing field. This is the other significant step Congress can take to enable strong teacher preparation providers to thrive – Congress should allow all programs with a track record of success to participate in federal student aid programs.

Presently, the Higher Education Act treats programs based at institutes of higher education and those operated outside of such institutions very differently. Though all programs that operate their own certification program must comply with the reporting requirements of Title II, only accredited institutions of higher education may offer federal student assistance under Title IV. This places an unreasonable limitation on the choices available to teacher candidates with no clear justification. Non-university based programs are often cost-effective for candidates who need to continue to work while pursuing their teaching credential, especially if they want to begin teaching immediately. Allowing such programs to participate in Title IV programs – including both grants under Part A and federal loans under Parts B, D, E, and F– would enable candidates to choose the program that best suits their overall interests and not just their immediate financial limitations.

This limit on eligibility also counteracts the purpose of some of stated goal of Title IV’s grant programs. For example, Congress specifically states that students with demonstrated financial need who have already earned a bachelor’s degree may use a Pell Grant for a teacher certification program that does not lead to a graduate degree but does meet a state’s requirements for preparation that leads to certification<sup>5</sup>. Similar provisions are in place around TEACH grants, which are available to any candidate with a undergraduate track record of academic success willing to commit to teaching for four years in a high-need school<sup>6</sup>. In other words – programs like ours, and candidates like ours. However, because Title IV places a blanket limitation on the use of Title IV grant funds to institutes of higher education, candidates cannot use grants from either of those programs to complete a non-university preparation program.

## In Summary

We believe that we – and other innovative teacher preparation programs, traditional and alternative – are rapidly discovering new approaches to better prepare teachers for success early in their careers. As Congress considers reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, it should take this moment to reset expectations for all programs to account for these new discoveries: demanding data that focuses on the outcomes that really matter – student success – and enabling teacher candidates to access the same set of financing tools regardless of where they seek their preparation. We look forward to helping Congress in any way to make such changes, and I look forward to your questions today.

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<sup>5</sup> HEA § 401(c)(4)(B), 20 U.S.C. 1070a(c)(4)(B) (2008).

<sup>6</sup> HEA § 412, 20 U.S.C. 1070g et seq. (2008).