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DOZENS OF GROUPS PROTEST LOWERING OF TEACHER STANDARDS
Organizations Join Forces in Urging Obama Administration, Congress to Reverse Course

Washington, D.C. – In an urgent letter sent Thursday to President Obama and key Congressional leaders, more than fifty organizations from across the country -- including civil rights, disability, parent, student, community and education groups -- criticized a provision signed into law last month lowering teaching standards required under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The provision allows thousands of underprepared and inexperienced teachers to continue to be assigned disproportionately to low-income, minority, special education, and English language learner students and denies parents notification of the teachers' underprepared status.

Intended to overturn a recent civil rights ruling won by low-income students and parents of color in the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals (*Renee v. Duncan*), the provision was quietly added by key Congressional leaders into the Continuing Resolution (CR) to fund the government the day before the CR was passed on December 21, 2010.

In *Renee v. Duncan*, the Ninth Circuit struck down a Bush-era regulation that labeled teachers who have not met the standards for full state credentials as “highly qualified” from the first moment they begin training in alternative route preparation programs. The court ruled that the regulation patently conflicted with the unambiguously expressed intent of Congress in NCLB that only teachers “who have *obtained*” full credentials be deemed “highly qualified.” The designation is important under NCLB as all non-highly qualified teachers must be reported to parents and the public and cannot be concentrated in low-income, high-minority schools.

Urging the President and Congress to reverse course, the letter notes that the CR provision “disproportionately impacts our most vulnerable populations: low-income students and students of color, English language learners, and students with disabilities who are most often assigned such underprepared teachers.” Further, the provision “hides this disparate reality from parents and the public by disingenuously labeling teachers-in-training as ‘highly qualified’ and hindering advocacy for better prepared teachers.”

Evidence in *Renee* shows that two-thirds of alternate route trainees in California teach in schools with 75 percent or greater minority students, while around half teach special education students.

“I don’t understand why Congress and the Administration are interfering with the victory we won in court,” said Maribel Heredia, a parent plaintiff in the *Renee* case. “I thought they supported equal access to experienced and fully-prepared teachers for the neediest students. We deserve at least the same quality of teachers as affluent communities.”

“It’s unacceptable that parents aren’t required to be notified when their child’s teacher is not qualified to teach school,” added Mark Halpert, parent leader with The National Center for Learning Disabilities. “We know that the academic needs of children with disabilities cannot be met by someone who is working to become a qualified teacher, but not there yet. When our children are not being taught by the highly qualified teachers they deserve, parents have a right to be told exactly why this is happening and when the situation will be rectified.”

League of United Latin American Citizens National President Margaret Moran echoed that sentiment with respect to English language learners. “These people have not yet been fully trained on how best to convey the subject matter, much less on how best to teach English and academic content to students who are still becoming proficient in English. Why are we continuing the status quo of allowing districts and states to send our students underprepared teachers while calling them ‘highly qualified?’”

“The civil rights community is highly disturbed by this effort to overturn a court victory won by community groups and low-income parents of color,” said Tanya Clay House, public policy director of the National Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights in Washington, D.C.. “Moreover, the fact that a major amendment of a primary federal education law being slipped into an appropriations bill at the eleventh hour is not how critical policies impacting our communities should be made.”

The groups are calling for repeal of the CR provision and development of a transparent definition of teacher quality, along with a set of policies that will allow the nation to put a well-prepared and effective teacher in every classroom.

The following are available for comment:

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Maribel Heredia, parent plaintiff in *Renee v. Duncan*, 510-342-6570

Tanya Clay House, Public Policy Director, National Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, 202-662-8330

Candice Johnson, student plaintiff in *Renee v. Duncan*, 323-244-1306

Laura Kaloi, Public Policy Director, National Center for Learning Disabilities, 703-476-4894

For more information see the following blog posts.

Congress approves weird definition of 'highly qualified' teachers, Valerie Strauss, Washington Post <http://voices.washingtonpost.com/answer-sheet/teachers/congress-passes-weird-definiti.html>

Congress Lowering Standards for Teachers; Hiding Truth from Poor, Minority Parents, John Affeldt, Huffington Post, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/john-affeldt/congress-lowering-standar_b_799523.html

Attachments:

Letter
List of Signatories

LETTER SIGNATORIES (as of 1:30pm PST, 1/26/11)

Action United	Latino Elected and Appointed Officials
Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment	National Taskforce on Education
Alliance for Multilingual Multicultural Education	Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education	Learning Disabilities Association of America
American Association of State Colleges and Universities	Los Angeles Educational Partnership
American Federation of Teachers	Movement Strategy Center
ASPIRA Association	NAACP
Association of University Centers on Disabilities	National Alliance of Black School Educators
Autistic Self Advocacy Network	National Center for Learning Disabilities
Bay Area Parent Leadership Action Network	National Council for Educating Black Children
California Association for Bilingual Education	National Council of Teachers of English
California Latino School Boards Association	National Disability Rights Network
Californians for Justice	National Down Syndrome Congress
Californians Together	National Down Syndrome Society
Campaign for Fiscal Equity	National Education Association
Campaign for Quality Education	National Latino/a Education Research and Policy Project
Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning	National League of United Latin American Citizens
Center for Teaching Quality	Parent-U-Turn
Citizens for Effective Schools	Parents for Unity
Coalition for Educational Justice	Philadelphia Education Fund
Council for Exceptional Children	Public Advocates Inc.
Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates	Public Education Network
Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund	Rural School and Community Trust
Easter Seals	RYSE Center
ELC, Education Law Center	School Social Work Association of America
FairTest, The National Center for Fair & Open Testing	Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children
Higher Education Consortium for Special Education	Texas Association for Chicanos and Higher Education
Justice Matters	United Church of Christ Justice & Witness Ministries
	Youth Together