

# TEACHERS AND LEADERS: AMERICA'S ENGINEERS OF LEARNING AND GROWTH

"From the moment students enter a school, the most important factor in their success is not the color of their skin or the income of their parents, it's the person standing at the front of the classroom... America's future depends on its teachers."

– President Barack Obama, March 10, 2009

Research has consistently shown that the most important school-based factor impacting a child's academic success is the quality of the classroom teacher, followed closely by the strength of the school leader. To help prepare our students to be engaged citizens and meet the demands of the increasingly complex and global economy, we need better systems to recruit, prepare, support, retain, and reward outstanding teachers and leaders in America's schools.

## THE NEED

Every parent knows the difference a great teacher makes. And research bears out the enormous good that skilled, well-trained teachers can do. One excellent teacher can move a child ahead about half a year more than a low-skilled teacher; several strong teachers in a row can have impact that overwhelms racial and economic achievement gaps. Yet, too many students lack access to such excellent teachers, and too many good teachers leave the field. Nearly half of individuals who begin a career in teaching leave the profession within the first five years. This turnover rate costs the nation more than \$7 billion each year. Those who do remain in the field often struggle within an outdated, inflexible system that does little to differentiate between educators who are minimally effective and those who are highly effective. Too many students do not have access to the teachers and leaders who can best help them to break through the barriers of poverty and circumstance. Yet great teachers and outstanding principals can set students on a path of success—an impact that produces a lifetime of benefits for both individual students and our nation.

## THE GOAL

Throughout the country, great principals must lead every school and great teachers must lead each classroom. In advancing this goal, the President has sought to elevate teachers and leaders to focus on recognizing, encouraging, and rewarding excellence and to foster school environments where teachers and leaders have time to collaborate, and opportunities to lead and grow as professionals so that they can meet the needs of all students.

## THE PLAN

The President's plan continues and builds on significant investments in teaching and learning from the first term. The key elements of the plan include:

- **The RESPECT Project (\$5 billion):** Last year, the administration launched the RESPECT (Recognizing Educational Success, Professional Excellence, and Collaborative Teaching) Project, kicking off a national conversation to develop a shared vision for

## GREAT TEACHERS MATTER

Teachers in the top 20 percent of performance generate five to six more months of student learning each year than low-performing teachers.



transforming the teaching profession with teachers, principals, parents, and other stakeholders. The President continues to seek \$5 billion for a RESPECT grant competition that would award funds to states and consortia of districts with the most ambitious plans to reform the teaching profession. The reform areas proposed in the RESPECT initiative mirror those included in a landmark shared vision statement for transforming the teaching profession, co-written by leaders of national organizations representing teachers, district and state superintendents, and school boards in 2012.

- **Title II Grants (\$2.5 billion):** Greater returns on federal investments in teaching can be achieved by refocusing and improving the impact of Title II grants, which primarily fund educator professional development and class size reduction. Under the administration's *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* reauthorization proposal, states and districts that receive Title II grants would develop rigorous educator evaluation systems to inform professional development and personnel decisions. States and districts would also be held accountable for equitably distributing teachers deemed to be effective under those evaluation systems. In addition, the proposal would set aside 25 percent of Title II funds for competitive grants to support and expand high-quality teacher training programs, programs that effectively prepare principals to turn around low-performing schools, and state efforts to enhance the teaching profession.
- **School Leadership Program (\$98 million):** The President's plan would improve and more than triple the investment in the School Leadership Program (SLP), which provides funds for school leader preparation and professional development. In 2014, the SLP competition would place a priority on supporting projects that develop, evaluate and expand large-scale and evidence-based professional development for current school leaders.
- **Teacher and Leader Innovation Fund (\$400 million):** This program would provide competitive grants to states and districts to reform teacher and school leader

compensation and career advancement systems, enhance the use of evaluation systems, improve hiring and placement practices, and implement other innovative strategies to strengthen the teaching workforce.



- **Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) Teachers:** The Obama administration recognizes the importance of STEM education in the effort to secure the long-term competitiveness of this country. The President's plan strengthens the federal investment in STEM education, providing \$80 million for competitive grants to support the recruitment and preparation of effective STEM teachers for high-need schools. The plan also invests \$35 million to pilot a new STEM Master Teacher Corps. This initiative would recognize and reward the most accomplished STEM educators by offering them membership in an elite corps of outstanding STEM teachers, opportunities to serve as instructional leaders in their schools and communities, and additional pay in exchange for their leadership and service.
- **Presidential Teaching Fellows (\$190 million):** This initiative would finance scholarships of up to \$10,000 for talented students in the final year of an effective state teacher preparation program. Students would commit to teaching a high-need subject in a high-need school for at least three years.



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