



Washington, D.C. — October 6, 2014 — Large Countywide and Suburban District Consortium (the Consortium) Co-chairs J. Alvin Wilbanks and Joshua P. Starr sent a letter to Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA) with comments on the Higher Education Affordability Act (HEAA), the draft proposal for the upcoming reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. The letter specifically offered comments regarding Title II of HEAA, which outlines federal provisions for teacher preparation programs.

“World-class schools need world-class teachers and we must work closely with our partners in higher education to support and grow teacher preparation programs,” said Mr. Wilbanks, superintendent of Gwinnett County (Ga.) Public Schools. “Teacher quality is the key to improving education and the Higher Education Affordability Act can serve as launching point for a national conversation about how we can increase the number of well-prepared educators coming out of our colleges and universities.”

“Having a great teacher in every classroom is the only school reform that truly works and lasts,” said Dr. Starr, superintendent of Montgomery County (Md.) Public Schools. “It is our hope that HEAA reauthorization will support improvements to teacher preparation programs, creating a high-quality, diverse pool of educators that have the skills and knowledge they need to teach in the 21st century.”

Mr. Wilbanks and Dr. Starr believe that establishing and supporting a strong teaching force is a priority for all districts, particularly those comprising the Consortium. Essential first steps include the institution of high standards for admission of candidates into teacher preparation programs and the recruitment of more underrepresented minorities and non-traditional teachers. The Consortium's goals also call for the provision of rich, high-quality professional development to novice and more experienced teachers, as well as better equipping new educators to be successful during the first year of their career.

The key recommendations regarding the bill's teacher preparation provisions Mr. Wilbanks and Dr. Starr offered to Senator Harkin to strengthen HEAA, prior to the bill's formal introduction, focused on:

- Requiring increased program transparency and accountability.
- Promoting and supporting high quality induction and mentoring programs.
- Encouraging greater alignment between teacher candidates' capabilities and training and school districts' specific human capital needs.
- Providing support for the innovation and scale of successful preparation programs.

The full letter is available here: <http://successatscale.com/home>

About the Consortium

The Large Countywide and Suburban District Consortium is a unique network of some of the nation's most highly-regarded districts and district leaders, all of whom are committed to world-class learning for all students. Together, the 16 Consortium districts serve more than 1.46 million students. The make-up of Consortium districts is reflective of the make-up of communities across America. Most have no majority student group; racial minorities compose more than 60 percent of students; and, nearly 40

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percent of students qualify as free and reduced lunch eligible. Individually and collectively, Consortium districts have experienced significant success. Keys to this success include strong leadership, highly-functioning organizations, and deep investments in the continuous development of knowledge and expertise. These capacities have served them well to date and are providing the foundation for changes in teaching and learning that are essential to college- and career-readiness and civic engagement.

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