

February 21, 2009

Dear Secretary Duncan:

The proposed *Teachers at the Table Act* has a simple but profound goal: to involve current classroom teachers in shaping education policy. As Teachers of the Year from every state, we believe that the first step to dramatically improve our schools is to close the gap in *No Child Left Behind* between intention and implementation. We believe that the most effective way to do that is to invite those whose lives are directly impacted by policy to be partners in creating that policy.

In April 2007, we approached legislators in both the House and Senate to propose a partnership between America's exemplary teachers and America's lawmakers. We did not have any funding. We did not have the backing of any corporation, union, or lobbyist organization. We did have two things: our collective classroom experiences, and the conviction that our schools can be dramatically better. We knew that we can ensure accountability without demoralizing teachers. We can test literacy and numeracy without stripping creativity and the arts from the curriculum. We can implement a growth model that considers the difference in academic readiness between a kindergartner living in poverty and one who has grown up with affluence, while holding high expectations for all children. We can teach 21<sup>st</sup> century skills that will prepare a 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce, while ensuring mastery of basic skills as well.

We shared our experiences and our convictions with lawmakers from our respective states, and we listened to what they had to say. The result was the *Teachers at the Table Act*, introduced in the House by Congresswoman McCarthy and Congressman Terry as *H.R. 2896*, and in the Senate by Senator Feingold as *S. 2060*, with co-sponsors including President Obama as well as Senators Dodd, Lieberman, Lincoln, Collins, and Snowe. The bill will be re-introduced next week by Senator Feingold and Congresswoman McCarthy.

Under the proposed bill, you would appoint four exemplary educators who are current classroom teachers to work in partnership with both Congress and the Department of Education. We believe that drawing these educators from state Teachers of the Year makes sense for three primary reasons:

- Teachers of the Year have been found to exemplify excellence in teaching. The training we receive through CCSSO (The Council of Chief State School Officers) encourages us to think at a systemic policy level, and to provide constructive solutions rather than simply diagnosing the problems in America's schools.
- Senator Kennedy has articulated the need to triangulate standardized test data with the qualitative data that can only come from on-the-ground practitioners. Teachers of the Year are engaged in partnerships in every state with local and State Boards of Education, with unions, and with a variety of non-profits and foundations. These partnerships, combined with our classroom experiences and familiarity with assessment tools, put us in a unique position to provide our insights when it comes to interpreting achievement data and drawing implications for action.

- Collectively, we teach every age group from kindergarten through high school, in settings that range from rural to inner city. Our individual areas of expertise range from Special Education to English Learners, from literacy interventions to media literacy.

Throughout the program's fifty-five year history, we have learned to use our collective voice to improve the schools in our home states and districts, with no other agenda than helping to give America's children the schools they deserve. Due in large part to the integrity and leadership of President Obama, the proposed *Teachers at the Table Act* provides the opportunity to contribute our voice at a national level.

We hope to lend our insights, experiences, and expertise to your work as *Teachers at the Table*, which began as a good idea and now stands a strong chance of becoming a legislative reality. If we can be of service to you in any way, please do not hesitate to contact us through 2007 New York Teacher of the Year Marguerite Izzo at 516-668-1920 or Marguerite11565@aol.com.

Respectfully,

National State Teachers of the Year Policy Committee

Betty Amos Kansas 1984	Jessie Auger Massachusetts 2007	Tim Bailey Utah 2002	Joe Fatheree Illinois 2007
Maddie Fennell Nebraska 2007	Marguerite Izzo New York 2007	Terry Kaldhusdal Wisconsin 2007	Jan Keese Iowa 2007
Rich Mayorga Arizona 2003	Justin Minkel Arkansas 2007	Rich Ognibene New York 2008	Art Peekel Illinois 1992
Chris Poulos Connecticut 2007	Susan Ryder Colorado 2007	Mary Schlieder Nebraska 2008	Lee-Ann Stephens Minnesota 2007