



*Written statement prepared by Monique Burns Thompson, President, Teach Plus
Submitted to the U.S. House of Representatives Education and Labor Committee
Hearing on “Supporting America’s Educators: The Importance of Quality Teachers and Leaders,” May 4, 2010*

Chairman Miller and Members of the Committee: Thank you very much for providing me with the opportunity to talk with you this afternoon about the importance of effective teachers and how to attract and retain them in the schools that need them the most. At Teach Plus, we work with experienced, effective teachers in years 3-10 of their careers. The ideas presented here are informed by those teachers.

Teachers: Our Most Valuable Resource

The research confirms what parents and educators have long known: Teachers are the most important factor in determining whether a child has a lifetime of choice or challenge.

We know that there are big differences among teachers—as much as one full year’s worth of learning between the most and least effective teachers.ⁱ Students in Los Angeles who were assigned to the most effective teachersⁱⁱ gained, on average, ten percentile points more than students in the classrooms of the least effective teachers.ⁱⁱⁱ The researchers conclude: “If the effects were to accumulate, having a top-quartile teacher rather than a bottom quartile teacher four years in a row would be enough to close the black-white test score gap.”^{iv}

Inequitable Access Persists: We Must Act with Courage and Conviction

Even though we know unequivocally how much teachers matter, harmful patterns of inequitable access to the strongest teachers continue to exist, especially for low-income and minority students:

- Recent analysis of the Schools and Staffing Survey Data—the only national dataset we have on teacher distribution and characteristics—reveals that core academic classes in high-poverty secondary schools are almost twice as likely as core academic classes in low-poverty schools to be taught by teachers with neither a major nor certification in their assigned subject (14 percent compared to 27 percent).^v
- Children in high-poverty schools are more than twice as



Monique Burns Thompson, President of the Teach Plus in Boston, testifies at a hearing about Supporting America’s Educators: The Importance of Quality Teachers and Leaders on May 4, 2010.

likely to receive an inexperienced teacher as children in low-poverty schools.^{vi}

- And when we look at the data on the distribution of teacher effectiveness, we find similar inequity. The Tennessee Department of Education recently analyzed state data on teacher effectiveness to see where the state’s most effective teachers are teaching.^{vii} They found: “Students in Tennessee’s high priority schools have less access to the state’s most effective teachers in reading/language arts and math than students in other schools across the state.”^{viii}

Recruiting and Retaining Effective Teachers in the Schools that Need Them Most: The Civil Rights Issue of this Generation

Clearly, we must design policies and practices to attract, support and retain our most effective teachers, and ensure they are working in schools with the students who need them the most.

This work is the civil rights issue of our time if we are to close the achievement gap that has held back generations of our citizens from participating in constructing a stronger future America. Thankfully, the teachers with whom we work in Massachusetts, Indiana, Illinois and Tennessee believe this as well.

A Pioneering Solution to Inequitable Distribution in Boston, MA: T3: Turnaround Teacher Teams

One such team of teachers is in our Boston Policy Fellowship program. As they read the research on teacher distribution, they became outraged. They and so many of their peers were motivated to teach by a commitment to social justice. The systematic breakdown in matching high-need students with high-quality teachers was a problem they believed to be solvable. These teachers developed a proposal to staff so-called “hard-to-staff” schools with experienced, effective teachers. They called it, “Ready for the Next Challenge” and it begins with a profound statement from the teachers themselves, “We believe that, given the right supports and conditions, there is no shortage of talented experienced teachers willing to teach in low-performing schools. The idea that no one wants to teach in a high-need school risks becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy. It must be replaced with, What can we do to attract, retain and develop teachers who want to teach in these schools?”

They proceeded to lay out the conditions that would motivate them to teach in a low-performing school, and for the next year, we at Teach Plus worked to enact their model in the Boston Public Schools. The initiative is called T3: Turnaround, Teach, Team Initiative. T3 was adopted by the Superintendent of the Boston Public Schools, Dr. Carol Johnson to recruit, select and support cohorts of effective teachers in three of Boston’s lowest achieving schools. The goal of T3 is to ensure that high-need students have significantly improved access to excellent teachers. T3 is a key piece of Dr. Johnson’s strategy to turn around chronically underperforming schools. In addition to running a national marketing campaign, Teach Plus has created a rigorous T3 selection process that is designed in partnership with Boston Public Schools to be a fair and comprehensive way of assessing a teacher’s readiness to be a turnaround leader.

The T3 selection process includes:

- A written application;
- An interview process that involves participation in a case-based challenge;
- Evidence of effective classroom teaching practice – in the form of an observation of submitted video.

So the logical next question is, “teachers have envisioned it, we have built it, will they come?” After just two weeks of marketing over 100 teachers have begun the application process including a Fulbright scholar, quite a few teachers from charter schools interested in working the traditional system, and a large number of experienced SPED and ELL teachers these schools desperately need. We are giving them reason to stay and a chance to reconnect to the core mission that brought them into teaching in the first place: social justice. They are showing all of us that they are ready for the next challenge, they are not afraid or hesitant to take on the heavy lifting of school reform and they are eager to serve the city’s children with the greatest need. We are inspired and motivated by these teachers every day, and we hope that this distinguished committee will be as well.



Primary Components of the T3 Initiative

T3 is selective. Teachers must apply to the T3 Initiative and demonstrate a minimum of three years of effective teaching in an urban setting.

T3 is a team-based strategy. A minimum of 25% of the school faculty will be selected through the T3 process, ensuring strong colleagues in the turnaround effort.

T3 Teachers will play central leadership roles in transforming the schools. T3 teachers will serve in lead teacher roles, such as grade level chairs, while continuing in the classroom. They will also be part of the school principal’s turnaround leadership council.

Pay differential. Additional compensations will range from \$6,000-8,000 depending on the amount of additional time worked.

The principals of these schools are highly effective. Each of these schools has a new principal with a turnaround track record and a commitment to teacher leadership.

Time for training and collaboration. T3 teachers will be trained together in the summer to take on the challenges of teacher leadership and school turnaround. They will also have the support of a team and data coach throughout the school year.

ⁱ Chait, Robin (2009). From Qualifications to Results: promoting Teacher Effectiveness Through Federal Policy. Washington, D.C.: Center for American Progress. Sources: Eric A. Hanushek and Steven G. Rivkin, “How to Improve the Supply of High Quality Teachers” (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2003); Rockoff, “The Impact of Individual Teachers on Student Achievement Evidence from Panel Data”; Steven G. Rivkin, Eric A. Hanushek, and John F. Kain, “Teachers, Schools, and Academic Achievement,” *Econometrica* 73 (2) (2005): 417-458.

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Most effective teachers are those teachers in the top quartile of performance, while very ineffective teachers are teachers in the bottom quartile of performance, using “value-added” to measure performance. Source: Gordon, R., Kane, T.J., and Staiger, D.O. (2006). Identifying Effective teachers Using Performance on the Job. Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution.

^{iv} Ibid.

^v Richard Ingersoll, 2007. Analysis of the 2003-2004 Schools and Staffing Survey Data for the Education Trust, “Core Problems: Out-of-Field Teaching Persists in Key Academic Courses and High-Poverty Schools.” Available: <http://www.edtrust.org/sites/edtrust.org/files/publications/files/SASSreportCoreProblem.pdf>

^{vi} Heather Peske and Kati Haycock, 2006. “Teaching Inequality: How Poor and Minority Students are Shortchanged on Teacher Quality.” Washington, DC: The Education Trust.

^{vii} These “most effective teachers” are producing at least one and a half year’s worth of growth with students.

^{viii} “Distribution of Effective Teachers in Tennessee Schools,” Tennessee Race to the Top Application Appendix D-3-2, page D-133. Available: <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/phase1-applications/appendixes/tennessee.pdf>