

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 24<sup>th</sup>, 2009

The Honorable Daniel Inouye, Chairman  
The Honorable Thad Cochran, Vice-Chairman  
The Honorable Tom Harkin, Chairman  
Senate Appropriations Committee  
The Capitol S-128  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Chairmen and Vice-Chairman:

As you consider the Fiscal Year 2010 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill, we respectfully urge you to include \$487.3 million for the Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF), the level recommended by President Obama. We believe TIF is a critical component of the overall strategy to transform our future teacher workforce, improve teacher quality and raise student achievement throughout the country. The research confirms what our intuition tells us: nothing has a greater impact on outcomes in the classroom than the quality of our teachers. We must do more to recruit, prepare and reward outstanding teachers—and a step that will help us in all three areas is overhauling the way we compensate them.

Why should we be concerned about student achievement? The United States currently ranks 25th in the world in math among industrialized nations. Had the United States closed the gap in education achievement with better-performing nations like Finland, Iceland, and Poland, our GDP could have been up to \$2.3 trillion higher last year, according to a recent study. TIF's focus on differential pay to attract teachers in subjects with chronic shortages, like math and science, is particularly important in light of the increasingly competitive nature of the global economy. By 2016, four out of every 10 new American jobs will require at least some advanced education or training.

We cannot reverse these disturbing trends in achievement without a dramatic overhaul of the teaching profession. Most professions recognize and reward better performance with better pay. However, teacher compensation is based almost exclusively on degree attainment and years of service, and does not take student achievement into account. It is long past time that we reformed this antiquated system. It is unfair to teachers who set high expectations, engage their students and raise achievement. It represents a breach of faith with taxpayers who expect their tax dollars to be spent efficiently and effectively. Most importantly, it shortchanges our children by reducing the likelihood that they will have a high-quality teacher in their classroom.

The effort to reform teacher compensation is still in its infancy. As you know, TIF was created in 2005 to encourage states and districts to develop innovative teacher compensation systems that improve student achievement by increasing teacher and principal effectiveness. The primary goals of the program are to increase the number of effective teachers teaching poor, minority, and disadvantaged students in hard-to-staff subjects. TIF should be an important part of the strategy to improve equity in the distribution of effective teachers. Without a concerted effort to ensure that low-income students in high poverty schools have equal access to the strongest teachers, we will never close the achievement gap.

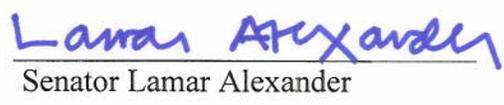
While we have seen promising models in a number of districts—Denver and Chicago for example—there have been nearly 150 applications for TIF grants but only 34 awards, and the vast majority of school districts still operate under the old system. Increasing resources for TIF will help kick-start new performance pay initiatives and help policymakers and administrators identify best practices so they can be replicated across the country. While teacher compensation reforms are carried out primarily at the state and local level, TIF is the federal government’s most direct way of incentivizing reform.

This kind of collaboration requires a willingness to move beyond the status quo, for all to work together in good faith and for the adults involved to never lose sight of that fact that our first and most important goal is to improve educational outcomes for our children. It is important to acknowledge that these compensation systems work best when teachers and principals are involved in their development and implementation.

We are aware of the challenges you face in light of the many important priorities before your committee. We note, however, that the success of most education programs is ultimately dependent on teacher quality. Important initiatives like those to reduce dropouts, prepare students for college and improve school safety, for instance, cannot succeed without effective teachers and other school-based professionals to carry them out. For this reason, and others, we request that the Senate agree to a level of no less than \$487.3 million for TIF in FY2010.

Sincerely,

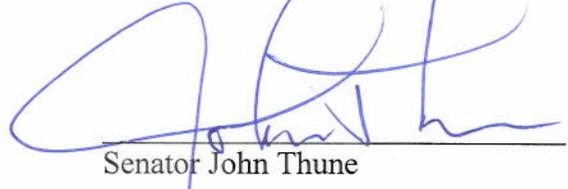
  
Senator Evan Bayh

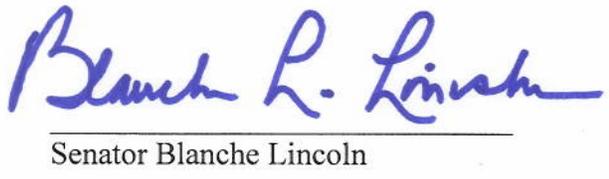
  
Senator Lamar Alexander

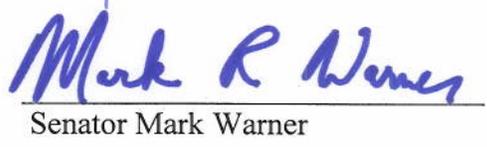
  
Senator Mary Landrieu

  
Senator Richard Burr

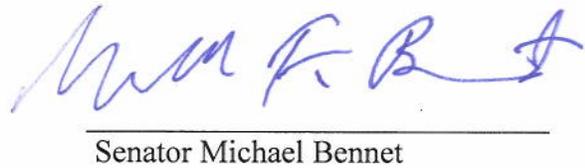
  
Senator Joe Lieberman

  
Senator John Thune

  
Senator Blanche Lincoln

  
Senator Mark Warner

  
Senator Bill Nelson

  
Senator Michael Bennet