29 August 2014

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman
Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Harkin:

Thank you for continued leadership and commitment to providing a high quality education to learners of all ages in the United States. On behalf of TESOL International Association (TESOL), a global education association representing approximately 13,000 English language educators in 150 countries, I am writing to provide you TESOL’s comments on the draft legislation, the Higher Education Affordability Act (HEAA).

With the implementation of college- and career-ready standards, including the Common Core State Standards, the implementation of the next generation of content-area assessments, and the development and forthcoming implementation of the next generation of English language proficiency assessments, the education system is undergoing an unparalleled amount of change. Unfortunately, as a recent report from Education Week has shown, today’s teachers do not feel they have been adequately prepared to meet these new challenges. As Title II of HEAA is focused on teacher preparation, the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act provides an opportunity to ensure that teacher preparation programs are meeting these new demands, as well as the demands of the future.

TESOL represents English language educators working across all education sectors, including many working in teacher preparation programs at postsecondary institutions in the United States. With this in mind, our comments will be limited to Title II of HEAA.

Comments and Recommendations

We appreciate that the specialized needs of English learners has been reflected throughout much of the language of the draft legislation, and support this emphasis on teacher preparation on for with this growing population of students. In addition, the recognition of teachers of English learners as high-need subject or skill is greatly appreciated. There are, however, several places where we recommend some revisions to the language in the draft legislation:

- On page 99, line 2, add “and English learners”

Rationale: The term ‘highly competent’ when used with respect to early childhood educator should include specialized education and training of young children from birth
until entry into kindergarten including children with disabilities and English learners.

- On page 119, line 2 add “teachers of English as a second language” after “general education” and before “and special education teachers,”

Rationale: Since a teacher of English learners is defined as a “Teacher in a High-Need Subject or Field” (Page 113, lines 3-9) it would only make sense that in the application to receive a grant to “Improve Educator Preparation and Support Educator Residencies” that the needs assessment conducted by the partners in the eligible entity take into account current efforts to train, support, and retain teachers of English learners. This will also help the eligible entity provide a description, as required in the grant application, of how they plan to prepare all educators to teach English learners.

- On page 131, line 25 add “and English learners” after “students with disabilities”

Rationale: Effective teacher residency programs should be prepared to provide training on effective teaching strategies for English learners in addition to students with disabilities.

- On page 137, line 4 add “teachers of English as a second language” after “general” and before “and “special educators”

Rationale: School leaders need to understand the varied roles and responsibilities of teachers of English as a second language in addition to general and special educators.

TESOL very much appreciates the opportunity to provide its comments on this discussion draft for reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, and looks forward to working with you and the Congress on this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Rosa Aronson, PhD, CAE

CC: Yilin Sun, President
    Andy Curtis, President-elect
    Deena Boraie, Past President