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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Forum on Educational Accountability Successful in its Efforts to Improve the Higher Education Act, P.L. 110-315

Washington, D.C. – October 6 - With the recent passage of the Higher Education Act, P.L. 110-315, the broad coalition of organizations of the Forum on Educational Accountability (FEA) celebrated a victory with amendments in the new law that move teacher preparation institutions one step closer to the vision of ensuring that teachers are well-equipped to prepare students for the 21st century. FEA hopes that these amendments will help to dramatically improve teacher preparation not only for Title II grantees, but, as a model, for all teacher preparation programs nationwide.

FEA's advocacy efforts, led by Gary Ratner, Citizens for Effective Schools, and Reggie Felton, National School Boards Association, resulted in the inclusion of four key policy changes for recipients of Title II partnership grants for undergraduate teacher preparation programs:

1. Pre-service clinical programs must now extend to at least “a year-long”, as well as be “rigorous.” (Sec. 202(b)(6)(I)). Research indicates that to be effective, clinical programs must be extended beyond 1 term to as much as 3 terms. Extensive observation and assistance of regular teachers and student teaching are essential to give pre-service teachers the hands-on experience in instruction and classroom management, as well as self-confidence, that they need to be able to effectively teach diverse students on their own. Such rigorous clinical programs not only improve the quality and professionalism of the teacher force, but dramatically increase teacher retention, thereby reducing the cost of continually recruiting and preparing vast numbers of new teachers.
2. Clinical programs must “integrate pedagogy and classroom practice”. (Sec. 202(d)(2)(B)) Research shows that education programs that are successful in preparing students who effectively teach students with diverse needs are ones that closely integrate their theory and methods coursework into extensive clinical experience. Instruction in pedagogical theory is most relevant and useful to candidates when it helps them solve the actual problems they encounter in their practice teaching. Such integration of coursework with clinical practice needs to become the norm for all of our teacher training institutions.
3. Clinical programs must include “closely supervised interaction between prospective teachers and faculty, experienced teachers, principals, other administrators and school leaders”. (Sec. 202(d)(2)(A)(ii)). Research also reveals that extensive clinical programs which prepare students to be effective teachers provide close supervision of their students during the clinical placement. Close observation of candidates' classroom teaching, availability to answer their questions, modeling of effective teaching practices and provision of insightful guidance and advice – by skilled and experienced supervisors - are vital to equipping pre-service teachers to become effective on their own.

4. Programs to prepare prospective teachers must “effectively teach higher-order analytical, evaluation, problem-solving, and communication skills”. (Sec. 202(b)(2) and Sec. 200(23)(c). Given the ever-increasing complexity and competitiveness of the 21st century world, it is essential for American students to have higher-order thinking and communications skills not only for the workplace and higher education, but to serve as well-informed citizens. It is a critical responsibility of our schools to teach these skills. Yet, they can only do so if our teachers are themselves prepared to effectively teach at this level.

These new Title II requirements will help to ensure that our teacher preparation programs address these four vital needs. They may also signal Congress’ willingness to address these issues in the reauthorization of ESEA/NCLB.

The Forum on Educational Accountability (FEA) promotes positive changes to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and related federal law and policy, aimed at closing the achievement gaps and improving achievement for all students. To accomplish this goal, FEA works to further develop and then enact in the next reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act legislative changes based on the Joint Organizational Statement on No Child Left Behind, initially issued in October 2004, and now endorsed by nearly 150 national education, civil rights, religious, children’s, disability and civic organizations.

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