

February 21, 2018

Senator Lamar Alexander  
Chairman  
Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor  
and Pensions  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Patty Murray  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor  
and Pensions  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators,

On behalf of AASA, The School Superintendents Association, representing more than 13,000 public school superintendents across the country, I write to provide comments and suggestions for the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. I appreciate the opportunity to provide these comments and commend the bipartisan work of the committee in developing this reauthorization.

As leaders of the K-12 education system, superintendents are committed to providing all students the best educational opportunities possible, from pre-school through higher education. Critical to that commitment is the availability and quality of our schools' teaching force. Throughout the country, schools are facing increased shortages of teachers, especially in rural communities. Therefore, our biggest priority in the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act would be the preservation and improvement of federal investments in the current and future teaching force.

TEACH grants are a critical piece of many future teachers' financial package. They could, however, be strengthened to best serve schools and teachers. Because many students are not clear in their career options or path until later in college, we would support changing the eligibility to only the second half of a students' college career, with a commensurate doubling of the amount of the grant. We also believe the definitions of high-needs schools and subjects should be updated to better reflect current realities and the current ESEA statute. Finally, in order to increase the number of students choosing to participate in the TEACH grant program and cut down on students being forced to convert their TEACH grants to loans or transfer to another school, we believe that if a school is determined to be high-needs when a teacher starts teaching, that teacher should be able to stay at that school for the remainder of his or her required service, even if the school no longer carries the high-needs designation.

Public Service Loan Forgiveness is just beginning to pay off for teachers and other public servants and has already shown great promise in making teaching a financially realistic career for graduates with student loans. Because teachers are still paid below other most similarly-educated professionals, the opportunity to have loans forgiven helps motivate teachers to stay in the classroom and has the power to keep more high-quality veteran teachers in the classroom.

Teacher Loan Forgiveness Program currently serves, and, if funded, the Loan Forgiveness in Areas of National Need programs could both serve as important incentives for students to choose the teaching profession. We urge your committee to keep these programs in statute and to work with appropriators to ensure the Loan Forgiveness in Areas of National Need program is funded.

Another opportunity to invest in innovative models would be to make Pell Grants available to all students taking college-level courses. This would allow students to take and pay for college classes while in high school and ensure a smooth transition for students who graduate from high school before age 18.

I appreciate the opportunity to weigh in on this important piece of legislation and your committee's commitment to transparent and bipartisan work. I look forward to further conversations as you move forward. Please feel free to contact me about this issue at [lfinnan@aasa.org](mailto:lfinnan@aasa.org) or 703-203-3105.

Sincerely,



Leslie Finnan  
Senior Legislative Analyst