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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION PROPOSED RULE: TEACHER PREPARATION ISSUES

FORMAL COMMENTS FROM THE WOODROW WILSON NATIONAL FELLOWSHIP FOUNDATION

February 2, 2015

The Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation (www.woodrow.org) appreciates the opportunity to respond to proposed rules regarding teacher preparation issues in the Higher Education Act. For 70 years, the Woodrow Wilson Foundation has devoted itself to identifying and developing leaders and institutions to meet the nation's most critical challenges. Today, there is little question that effective teacher preparation is a critical national challenge, not only affecting student learning outcomes, but also having direct impact on our economy, our community, and our citizenry as a whole.

About the Woodrow Wilson Foundation

For the past 70 years, the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation has identified and developed the nation's best minds to meet its most critical challenges. This work began in 1945, as the Woodrow Wilson Foundation responded to the significant number of American GIs returning home from World War II with a promise of a higher education under the GI Bill. Then, the Woodrow Wilson Foundation helped recruit and prepare the generation of college professors necessary to meet post-war higher education needs. Now, the nation's greatest need for education leaders is at the secondary level, and particularly in the urban and rural schools that serve so many of America's low-income young people.

There is little question that effective teacher preparation is a critical challenge currently facing our nation. Through the Woodrow Wilson Teaching Fellowship, we are attracting, preparing, and placing talented, committed individuals into teaching in high-need secondary schools. With programs currently in Georgia, Indiana, Michigan, New Jersey, and Ohio, the Woodrow Wilson Foundation is working to change the way top teachers are prepared. The Foundation partners with colleges and universities to create a more effective teacher education program focused on a yearlong classroom experience, rigorous academic work, and ongoing mentoring. Woodrow Wilson Teaching Fellows will touch the lives of more than a million students over a 15-year teaching career.

Because principals are the second most important influence on teacher effectiveness, after high-quality preparation, the Woodrow Wilson Foundation now offers the Woodrow Wilson MBA Fellowship in Education Leadership, a new program that blends transformational education

coursework and a tailored business curriculum with intensive clinical experience in schools, corporations, and not-for-profit organizations, as well as involvement with innovative schools abroad. One of the first programs of its kind, the Woodrow Wilson MBA Fellowship is a model for next generation, results-focused school leader preparation. The program, currently offered in Indiana, New Mexico, and Wisconsin, is designed to prepare leaders who will drive innovation, expand the use of analytics and evidence-based practices, raise student performance to international standards, and improve the quality of school systems and teaching over time.

Overview of Woodrow Wilson Foundation Perspectives of Teacher Preparation Rules

The Woodrow Wilson Foundation strongly supports the new direction for teacher preparation proposed by the U.S. Department of Education. For more than seven years, the Foundation has worked to help transform teacher and leader education programs throughout the nation, recognizing that the vast majority of schools of education currently are not operating at the levels necessary to ensure a strong pipeline of well-prepared, excellent educators, particularly those becoming teachers of record in high-need schools.

Specifically, the Foundation asserts the following:

Student Outcomes

- One primary indicator of the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs is student outcomes;
- Particularly for those new to the profession, student learning outcomes can help identify the strong and weak in teacher preparation, while offering important data on how specific programs should be improved to meet student learning needs;
- School districts should hold schools of education and other preparation programs accountable for the quality and impact of their graduates;
- Available data from Woodrow Wilson Teaching Fellowship efforts in Georgia, Indiana, Michigan, New Jersey, and Ohio demonstrate that strong academic preparation, a rich clinical experience, and robust mentoring can boost teacher effectiveness and student achievement;
- Unfortunately, student outcome data collected in many states is woefully insufficient to successfully measure the success of teacher education programs; and
- ED should further incentivize states to identify, collect, and analyze student learning outcomes for all grades in all core subjects.

Employment Outcomes

- Teachers' departure from the profession and their switching between schools are a significant impediment to student achievement, particularly in high-need schools;
- Teacher retention is an essential component to closing the achievement gaps and improving student learning outcomes;
- Teacher persistence is a top priority for the Woodrow Wilson Foundation, and its programs are focused on providing school districts a pipeline of teachers prepared in the needed subjects;

- Woodrow Wilson’s success in keeping its Fellows in high-need schools is a direct result of ensuring that potential educators gain the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed once they become teachers of record: and
- Long-term success in teacher retention demands educator preparation efforts that focus on a year-long master’s degree program, a rich clinical experience that places prospective teachers in high-need schools, and robust mentoring that continues for years after a Fellow has become a teacher of record.

Customer Satisfaction

- By surveying school principals, school district HR officials, and even parents, those involved in the hiring process can better understand which programs are producing teachers who are improving student outcomes and building a larger community of learning; and
- As with educator evaluations, surveys designed to measure the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs are best left to the states to administer, ensuring they are capturing information that best evaluates and compares those institutions of higher education in their respective states.

Program Review and Accreditation; Multiple Performance Levels

- The standards developed by the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) serve as a strong foundation for the Program Review and Accreditation goals called for by ED.

Flexibility to States

- The federal government makes policy through the Higher Education Act, ultimately relying on states to enact it;
- States’ willingness to innovate and lead when it comes to education policy is central to meaningful change and improvement;
- States should be encouraged to work directly with their school districts in efforts to strengthen teacher preparation programs, as local districts can provide valuable information on subject areas where they will most need teachers, programs that have been particularly helpful in filling vacancies in high-need schools, and areas for improvement;
- Under federal policies on teacher preparation, states can and should take bold steps to redesign their teacher preparation programs; and
- Woodrow Wilson Foundation successes in states such as Georgia, Indiana, Michigan, New Jersey, and Ohio clearly demonstrate that states are can bring teacher education into the 21st century, ensuring both improved inputs as part of the preparation process and improved outcomes resulting from it.

The views of the Woodrow Wilson Foundation are based on its ongoing experiences working with states to take specific steps to improve teacher education. The WW Foundation is currently working with five states to strengthen the pipelines to provide excellent teachers for high-need schools. During its past six years of work focused on teacher preparation, the Foundation has identified 15 components essential to improving teacher preparation efforts at the nation’s colleges and

universities. Based on our review of the U.S. Department of Education’s proposed rules changes, we believe these 15 recommendations are addressed in ED’s proposal and must be a part of all ongoing efforts to improve teacher education efforts, both nationally and in each state.

Specifically, these 15 principles include:

1. Focus on entire states;
2. Begin with the governor and build a statewide coalition;
3. Be selective, privileging relevant content knowledge and dispositions;
4. Invest in recruitment;
5. Focus on yearlong master’s-degree teacher education programs;
6. Be explicit in terms of program characteristics, assessment, and expectations;
7. Ensure the approach is research-driven;
8. Provide necessary resources for universities;
9. Require “skin in the game” from universities;
10. Foster strong partnerships between universities and school districts;
11. Give universities the time to create excellent teacher education programs;
12. Demand accountability;
13. Work with universities and school districts to develop and implement excellent programs, and mentor students once they become teachers;
14. Require third-party evidence-based assessment; and
15. Require achievable sustainability plans.

Woodrow Wilson Foundation Review of Key Topics in Teacher Prep Rules Changes

Topic One: Student Outcomes

Research makes all too clear that the single most important factor in student achievement is an effective teacher. It falls to teacher education programs—whether they be traditional education schools or alternative certification programs—to ensure that all prospective educators receive the academic preparation and classroom-based experiences necessary to ensure students are learning and to close the achievement gaps among disaggregated groups within the United States and between the United States and its peer nations.

One primary indicator of the effectiveness of academic and clinical preparation is student outcomes. Although the components of teacher education are important, there is no denying the value of student results. Particularly for those new to the profession, student learning outcomes can help identify strengths and weaknesses in teacher preparation, as well as offer important data on the specific ways in which programs should be improved to meet student learning needs.

While there is much disagreement on the role of student outcomes in the evaluation of individual teachers, there is increasing clarity as to how that data can be used to evaluate the success of teacher education programs. In today’s accountability-focused environment, anecdotes and reassurances no longer suffice as proof of success. Just as parents hold school districts accountable for student

achievement, so too should those same districts and the government hold schools of education and other preparation programs accountable for the quality and impact of their graduates.

The Woodrow Wilson Foundation applies this standard to its own teacher preparation efforts. As part of our Woodrow Wilson Teaching Fellowship efforts in Georgia, Indiana, Michigan, New Jersey, and Ohio, student performance in the classrooms of our Fellows is a central metric to determining our own effectiveness. In a recent American Institutes for Research/CALDER evaluation of the Woodrow Wilson Michigan Teaching Fellowship program, two key findings emerged:

- Woodrow Wilson Fellows outperformed inexperienced non-Fellows, equivalent to three to four additional months of pupil growth in middle school science and math; and
- Woodrow Wilson Fellows outperformed same district non-Fellows, same-district inexperienced, and non-Fellows from partner universities in high school math.

In making student outcomes a key component in determining the efficacy of the Woodrow Wilson Teaching Fellowships, it is important to note that student outcome data collected in many states is woefully insufficient to measure the success of teacher education programs. Limiting student assessments to just English/language arts and mathematics, even if measured in all grades, simply does not provide adequate data to measure the majority of teachers, particularly those new to the classroom. This is particularly true in the STEM subjects. ED has been active in calling for greater investment in STEM educators and STEM education. But in most states, student outcome data in the STEM subjects is not available beyond math, biology, and general science, and it is not available from enough grade levels to provide meaningful information about student learning to parents, schools, or teacher preparation programs.

Moving forward, ED should further empower states to identify, collect, and analyze student learning outcomes for all grades in all core subjects, particularly those beyond English-language arts and math that new state assessments are measuring. States such as Georgia, which is already exploring ways to better assess student achievement in all STEM subjects, could serve as a potential model moving forward.

The Woodrow Wilson Foundation agrees that student learning outcomes should serve as a primary measure of the effectiveness of teacher education programs. But the Foundation is concerned that too few states currently possess the comprehensive data systems necessary to fully implement this recommendation.

Topic Two: Employment Outcomes

Those students who complete teacher education programs do so with the intention of making teaching their careers. According to the most recent data from the National Center for Education Statistics, though, we see a significant number of teachers, particularly those with less than 10 years' experience, leave the classroom each year. And an even higher percentage of teachers choose to switch schools, meaning that up to 20 percent of teachers leave their classrooms each year, either by moving schools or leaving the profession all together.

This kind of ongoing transition has a direct impact on students, particularly those in high-need schools. Too often, excellent teachers choose to depart from high-need classrooms, leaving the students who need the best teachers the most with the lowest odds of learning from such teachers.

Teacher retention is an essential component of closing the achievement gaps and improving student learning outcomes. As part of its Teaching Fellowship program, the Woodrow Wilson Foundation makes clear to all prospective educators, as well as the school districts that employ them, that teacher persistence is a top priority. It is why the program is focused on providing school districts a pipeline of teachers prepared in the needed subjects and why all Fellows make a commitment to stay in the classroom for three years following the yearlong master's program. And it is why the program provides three additional years of mentoring once that Fellow becomes teacher of record.

In Indiana, the placement rate of teachers certified in the Woodrow Wilson Indiana Teaching Fellowship program is 100 percent. Eighty percent of WW Indiana Teaching Fellows who began in 2009 remained in classrooms in high-need schools in their fourth year on the job—the year after their three-year commitment. That is four in five WW Teaching Fellows remaining in the classroom, compared to national statistics that most put at just one in two.

Additionally, the Woodrow Wilson Foundation has found that its Indiana Teaching Fellows are significantly more likely, 1.9 times, to persist in Indiana's public high-need schools compared to non-Fellow teachers (based on 2009-2012 cohort data).

Again, these teacher retention rates result from the kind of teacher education that aims to prepare teachers to succeed and stay in the profession once they become teachers of record. Through an academically rigorous, yearlong master's degree program, a rich clinical experience that places prospective teachers in high-need schools, and robust mentoring that continues for years after a Fellow has become a teacher of record, the Woodrow Wilson Foundation prepares teacher for success. As a result, they remain in the classroom, providing students attending at-risk schools with the continuity and excellent educators they both need and deserve.

Just as ED is rightly focused on teacher retention, efforts to improve educator preparation should also emphasize teacher placement. Currently, education schools underproduce high-need, high-vacancy teachers in subjects such as STEM, special education, and English-language learners while greatly overproducing in areas such as elementary education. Preparing educators to teach in-demand subjects and at high-need schools is as a big a concern as teacher persistence in general.

The Woodrow Wilson Foundation supports the need to include employment outcomes in measuring the efficacy of teacher education programs and recommends calling on each state to demand a 65-percent retention rate after five years from its accredited programs.

Topic Three: Customer Satisfaction

Using the available quantitative data on student outcomes and teacher retention, qualitative research on “customer satisfaction” helps provide additional information necessary to improve existing teacher education programs. By surveying school principals, school district HR officials, and even parents and students, those involved in the hiring and preparation processes can better understand which

programs are producing teachers that are improving student outcomes and building a larger community of learning.

Too often, school districts simply hire their teachers from the local teachers' college. There is little incentive for schools of education to improve the quality of their programs because there is always demand from local school districts to hire their graduates. As alternative certification programs continue to grow, and as more and more states export more teachers than they import, schools of education must make careful examination of the quality of their graduates and how those graduates are both performing and are perceived in their schools. Customer satisfaction surveys can help achieve that goal.

The Woodrow Wilson Foundation is encouraged by ED's call for customer satisfaction data in the evaluation of teacher preparation programs, particularly satisfaction data coming from school principals and district human resource officers.

Topic Four and Five: Program Review and Accreditation; Multiple Performance Levels

The Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) recently developed comprehensive standards for educator preparation providers (EPPs). Under CAEP's recommendations, all EPPs "seeking accreditation [would] complete a self study and host a site visit, during which site visitors determine whether or not the providers meet CAEP standards based on evidence of candidate performance, use of data in program self-improvement, and EPP capacity and commitment to quality."

As part of this process, CAEP identified five key standards: 1) content and pedagogical knowledge; 2) clinical partnerships and practice; 3) candidate quality, recruitment, and selectivity; 4) program impact; and 5) provider quality assurance and continuous improvement.

The Woodrow Wilson Foundation believes that stronger standards are essential to improving teacher preparation programs. Recently proposed CAEP standards will meet that need.

Topic Six: Flexibility to States

The federal government can and should make policy through the Higher Education Act, while ultimately relying on states to enact such policy, including these proposed rules changes. States' willingness to innovate and lead when it comes to education policy is central to meaningful change and improvement, and it is such state-led innovation that has helped drive transformation through the Woodrow Wilson Teaching Fellowships.

At the core of the Woodrow Wilson Teaching Fellowship model is the role of the state in relation to guiding federal policy. State leadership—including the governor, legislature, state higher education executive officer, and chief state school officer—is essential to strengthening our schools of education and ensuring excellent educators in all schools, particularly high-need ones.

States must take real ownership in the effort to improve the teacher preparation process, taking full advantage of already-provided flexibility to make change that aligns with the needs and expectations

of the individual state and its localities. What may be needed to strengthen teacher education in Massachusetts will be different from what is needed to improve educator preparation in Minnesota or Mississippi. Under the governing policy set forward by ED, states can take different approaches to teacher education, with their work informing efforts in demographically similar states or those jurisdictions with similar staffing needs or challenges.

As part of this state flexibility, states should be encouraged to work directly with their school districts in efforts to strengthen teacher preparation programs. Local districts can provide valuable information on subject areas in which they will most need teachers, programs that have been particularly helpful in filling vacancies in high-need schools, and areas of improvement on which the state should really focus. The partnership between the state and its school districts is key to driving the improvement process.

It is important to note that states do not need specific changes to the Higher Education Act to take bold steps to redesign its teacher preparation programs. We are already seeing states—including Georgia, Indiana, Michigan, New Jersey, and Ohio—evolve their teacher preparation programs to meet their own needs. States do not need to wait for federal action before acting. But the rules changes proposed by ED help motivate states to act quickly. With a set of shared principles offered by ED, each state and its institutions of higher education can bring teacher education into the 21st century, ensuring both improved inputs as part of the preparation process and improved outcomes resulting from it.

The Woodrow Wilson Foundation believes success of these proposed federal rules changes ultimately requires states to take immediate and strong action to improve teacher preparation programs in their jurisdictions and to hold all programs to a higher standard focused on meeting the needs of both the community and the learner.

Conclusion

On November 25, 2014, Woodrow Wilson Foundation President Arthur Levine spoke at length on the importance of these proposed changes and the need to improve our teacher education systems. As the president of Teachers College, Columbia University from 1994 to 2006, Dr. Levine has written extensively on the strengths and weaknesses of our nation's teachers colleges. His series of reports for the Education Schools Project serves as the foundation for many of today's discussions on how to improve teacher education to meet the needs of the 21st century.

The Woodrow Wilson Foundation recognizes that the job of teacher is vastly different today from a decade or a generation ago. School districts, schools, and communities have had to adjust and adapt to new educational demands and new expectations. Despite this, teacher preparation today is still largely the same as the preparation teachers have received for generations.

This is a disservice to schools, students, and teachers themselves. The research is clear that having a great teacher is the single-most important element of learning for children, particularly those in high-need schools. Yet we have resisted making the changes needed to ensure that prospective teachers have the academic preparation, clinical experiences, and mentoring necessary to become those excellent teachers.

The regulatory changes proposed by ED are an important step toward addressing many of the deficiencies in current teacher education programs. The priorities they outline largely reflect lessons

learned by the Woodrow Wilson Foundation in working to transform teacher preparation in states across the nation. And these priorities are essential to strengthening teacher education programs to meet the future needs of schools and students alike.

From its work in states like Georgia, Indiana, Michigan, New Jersey, and Ohio, the Woodrow Wilson Foundation knows that such change must come at the state level. From the governor's office to the legislature, the SHEEO to the state board, improvement requires full buy-in at the state level, with leaders owning the process.

Transformation also requires meaningful data collection and application. It means data on what programs teachers come from and how long teachers stay in the profession. It means data on how novice educators view their preparation once they become teachers of record. It means data from employers on whether new teachers are meeting expectations. And it means data on student learning outcomes, data that can accurately show which teacher prep programs are most effective and what they are doing to ensure student learning and academic progress.

From our experiences over the past seven years, such transformation is not easy, but it is well worth the investment of time and effort. Today, the Woodrow Wilson Foundation partners with 28 universities to ensure a strong pipeline of excellent teachers for tomorrow's high-need classrooms. Those who have already been named Woodrow Wilson Teaching Fellows will touch the lives of more than 1.5 million students over a 15-year teaching career. And as shown in states like Indiana, the vast majority of our teachers—more than 70 percent—stay in the profession past five years.

All of us involved in teacher education should look for incremental ways to strengthen these regulations and improve the teacher preparation process. But let us be clear: we need real action now. Our colleges and universities have waited far too long to transform these programs to meet the needs of both today and tomorrow. We cannot afford to wait as another generation of teachers passes through programs that are lacking. In the states where Woodrow Wilson has worked, we have seen a real hunger—from state leaders, from school districts, and from colleges themselves—to enact the sort of changes needed. We must act together, and swiftly, to change the very fabric of teacher education nationwide. These regulations are the first step toward achieving that.

The Woodrow Wilson Foundation supports the general approach and specific recommendations made by the U.S. Department of Education. We look forward to working with ED, state leadership, and institutions of higher education to overcome any potential challenges that may result from these changes, and to ensure that high-quality teacher education programs, focused on both pedagogical inputs and student learning outcomes, will become the new normal in teacher preparation.

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