



American Federation  
of Teachers, AFL-CIO

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AFT Teachers  
AFT PSRP  
AFT Higher Education  
AFT Public Employees  
AFT Healthcare

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December 30, 2002

The Honorable John A. Boehner  
Chairman  
Committee on Education and the Workforce  
U. S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Boehner:

On behalf of the more than 1.2 million members of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) I write to provide you with our initial concerns and priorities on the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA). We appreciate the opportunity to present our views.

Specific issues that are of interest to the AFT include: student access and financial aid; teacher education; technology and distance education; institutional aid; and child care.

#### Student Access and Financial Aid

Over the past few decades the HEA has successfully helped millions of financially-pressed students attain access to postsecondary education. Challenges remain, particularly because of rising costs at institutions of higher education, reductions in state funding, and level funding in federal programs. Further, because of the growing reliance on loans, many students incur massive debts upon completion of their postsecondary education. Student aid is an investment in our nation's future and deserves a major federal commitment. With that in mind, the AFT proposes improvements in federal student aid programs as follows:

#### *Pell Grants*

The Pell Grant program is a top priority for the AFT. We believe that students with the greatest financial need are not receiving sufficient Pell Grant aid to attend college. The maximum Pell Grant should increase significantly to better reflect today's college costs.

The AFT is also concerned about the yearly shortfall in the Pell Grant program and its effects on other domestic discretionary spending, particularly for education. We strongly urge the Committee to make the Pell Grant program an entitlement to avoid the large shortfalls in Pell appropriations we have experienced under the current funding mechanism. Students receiving Pell Grants would also have a predictable amount of aid, for the duration of their undergraduate education.

We would also urge you to oppose front-loading Pell Grants in the first two years of college. Students should have equal access to grants for four-year as well as two-year institutions and not have grant eligibility affect their choice of schools or degree programs.

In addition, the AFT believes the federal government should not discourage needy students from attending low-tuition, open access institutions because of the structure of need analysis. The maximum Pell Grant should be awarded to the neediest students regardless of their institution of choice. Need analysis should be changed to disregard tuition as a factor in the formula.

#### *Loans*

The AFT urges the Committee to make every effort to reduce the reliance on loans under Title IV. The high debt burden of undergraduate and graduate students who must rely on federal student aid programs limits their career choices and discourages them from pursuing lower paying careers such as teaching and public service.

Additionally, we believe efforts should be made to curtail added costs that have been imposed on federal loan applicants such as origination fees.

#### *Campus-based aid programs and student support*

Congress should maintain the campus-based aid programs, which provide institutions with flexibility to meet student needs that are not filled by other sources. Additionally, we support expanding the TRIO and GEAR-UP programs that are providing an important resource to encourage students from underrepresented groups to attend college.

#### Teacher Education

The AFT supports the use of Title II of the HEA to strengthen teacher preparation programs, build partnerships and provide accountability. We have carefully examined what we believe to be essentials for high quality teacher preparation and provided a number of recommendations in the report, *Building A Profession: Strengthening Teacher Preparation and Induction*. Based on this report, the AFT would like to make the following recommendations with respect to Title II.

#### *Teacher Internship and Induction*

The AFT believes that teacher preparation programs should include an induction period. Support from institutions of higher education for new teachers should not end at pre-service but rather continue on through the transition into the classroom.

There could be several legislative alternatives to encourage induction activities. One would be to encourage the identification and replication of model induction

programs. Another would be to establish an induction demonstration program that might provide a one-year paid internship. At the very least, important elements of federally supported induction activities would be professional development, employment-based instruction, a reduced teaching load with an emphasis on the clinical experience of teaching and a strong mentoring program with specific criteria to ensure a quality mentoring experience.

### *Pedagogy*

The AFT believes that there is a tremendous need for core pedagogy curricula, an agreement within the education profession about what prospective teachers should know about teaching subject matter such as reading and mathematics. There is no consensus on core pedagogy and the AFT believes that the federal government could play a major role in correcting this impediment. We urge the Committee to fund an effort by the National Academy of Sciences to develop such curricula and promote their adoption by colleges of education. The recommendations should be based on the best research into how students learn and on the content-specific teaching methods shown to be effective with students.

### *Accountability—teacher education programs*

The AFT supports the accountability provisions in Section 207. They should strengthen education schools' accountability, create leverage to improve quality in teacher training, and help students and their parents make better informed choices about postsecondary education. We believe that this section should be modified, however. The federal interpretation of the definitions has created confusion and a lack of clear understanding about what schools should report. We ask Congress to clarify the interpretation to make the reporting more uniform.

### *Early Childhood Workforce*

The need for a well-educated early childhood education workforce is becoming increasingly clear. Unfortunately, few postsecondary programs exist to support the education of those seeking careers in early childhood education.

We propose using the HEA to develop or enhance early childhood certificate programs at community colleges and four-year institutions, recruit faculty for these programs, and develop early childhood certification in states where it does not exist.

### Technology and Distance Education

Technology and distance education are enormously promising new tools to promote teaching and learning, particularly when combined with same-time, same-place instruction. However, there are legitimate concerns about quality, and fraud and abuse in distance education, as well as the impact of distance learning on the availability of financial aid for our neediest students.

The AFT believes that in order to ensure quality and to curb fraud and abuse reasonable controls should apply to programs that use technology as their primary mode of delivery and that are funded primarily by federal student aid .We also urge the federal government to support large-scale federal research that explores how to identify the quality of distance education learning, who it is serving, and how federal aid programs will be affected by the expansion of student aid eligibility for distance learning.

#### Accountability for Institutions of Higher Education

The AFT believes that institutions of higher education should be held accountable for properly managing the federal funds they receive. We also believe federally-aided institutions should be accountable for providing quality education. The federal government has generally relied on private institutional accreditation to monitor quality and many would agree that the quality of American higher education is the best in the world.

Reauthorization offers Congress a good opportunity to review accountability measures already in place. We would urge the Congress to resist imposing accountability measures that are strictly quantitative, rigid or narrow in light of the great variety of postsecondary programs and student goals in attending postsecondary education.

#### Institutional Support

Many of the institutions of higher education that are already serving the most diverse and financially needy populations have faced an influx of recent immigrants. It is crucial that such institutions meet the immigrants' needs, but they need more help in undertaking this responsibility. To address this concern, the AFT supports amending Title III to establish a program to allow institutions with high immigrant populations to receive additional federal support.

#### Child Care

As more non-traditional students enter our postsecondary education system, child care becomes an important issue. During the last HEA reauthorization, Congress established the Child Care Access Means Parents In School (CCAMPIS) program to provide child care for low-income students. The guidelines currently used to determine eligibility screen out many low-income parents. In order to continue to promote the value of education and attaining a degree, the AFT supports a change in the statute to expand eligibility and to increase the authorization for this program.

We look forward to working with you and the other members of the Committee on the HEA reauthorization. If you have questions on our positions or would like

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further information, please contact me or Gabriella Gomez of our staff, at (202) 879-4452.

Sincerely,

Charlotte J. Fraas  
Director  
Legislation Department

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