



American Federation
of Teachers, AFL-CIO

AFT Teachers
AFT PSRP
AFT Higher Education
AFT Public Employees
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May 25, 2006

Dr. Henry Johnson
Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
FOB 6
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Dr. Johnson:

On behalf of the teacher and paraprofessional members of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), I am writing to request your assistance on two important matters related to the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

We welcomed your recent flexibility in allowing states that have been making a “good faith” effort to meet the highly qualified teacher requirements to revise their plans so that they will meet NCLB’s highly qualified goals by the end of the 2006-07 school year and beyond. We appreciate the Department’s recognition that, despite the best efforts of states and districts, challenges exist to meeting the 100 percent goal, particularly in hard-to-staff schools and subjects. Our requests align with the spirit of flexibility that you have demonstrated and your recognition of the efforts of educators to meet the law’s requirements.

When we met on Feb. 13, 2006, I asked you about our request from Nov. 10, 2005, that the U.S. Department of Education maintain its stated policy of aligning NCLB’s teacher and paraprofessional requirements by allowing states to submit revised plans for meeting the paraprofessional provisions of the law by the end of the 2006-07 school year. As is the case for teachers, paraprofessionals are working diligently to meet the requirements of the law, but may not reach it in all states, districts and schools. Our data indicates that districts have made steady progress toward the goal of 100 percent of Title I instructional paraprofessionals in meeting the requirements. But, as with teachers, they may need a little more time to fully meet the goal. States should be required to submit data demonstrating concrete efforts to meet the paraprofessional requirements, and revised plans to reach full compliance by the 2006-07 school year. I am enclosing a copy of our initial request and look forward to hearing from you as to your decision on this matter.

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In your May 12, 2006 letter to chief state school officers, you indicate that revised plans to meet the highly qualified teacher goals by the end of the 2006-07 school year should phase out the use of the HOUSSE option for teachers to demonstrate that they are highly qualified, except for special education teachers, those in rural areas, and temporary visiting teachers. Continuing to allow teachers to demonstrate their subject-matter competency via the HOUSSE allows schools the flexibility to maintain a talented, high-quality workforce while ensuring that they are highly qualified. We are requesting that states be allowed to continue to offer the HOUSSE option to veteran teachers.

Thank you for your attention to these matters. I look forward to a response.

Sincerely,

Antonia Cortese
Executive Vice President

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Enclosure (1)