September 20, 2012

The Honorable Jack Reed
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mike Honda
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Reed and Representative Honda:

The higher education organizations listed below are pleased to offer our strong support for the Educator Preparation Reform Act. We are committed to ensuring that the best prepared educators serve in our highest need schools, and we believe this legislation embodies this goal. We particularly appreciate the recognition inherent in your legislation for the hard work many practitioners have already undertaken to reform teacher education, and your efforts to forge a collaborative partnership among those in the federal government, those in local schools and those on college campuses who care deeply about both our nation’s children and their teachers.

We share your keen interest in strengthening educator preparation and developing sound accountability measures. During the past several years, leaders of educator preparation programs on college campuses across the country have taken it upon themselves to re-engineer their programs in bold and significant ways. Typical improvements include strengthening clinical preparation to reflect strong partnerships between higher education and K-12; integrating technology to enhance instruction; developing valid and reliable performance assessments to determine candidates’ readiness to teach; integrating arts and sciences with teacher preparation; strengthening entry and exit requirements; and ensuring instructional capacity to teach diverse learners including English learners and students with disabilities.

The Educator Preparation Reform Act provides an effective legislative framework that will leverage these reforms by reauthorizing and enhancing Title II of the Higher Education Act. This bill makes significant improvements to the Teacher Quality Partnership Grants in Title II of the Higher Education Act by expanding the residency programs to include principals and providing partnerships flexibility in meeting the instructional needs of local school districts. Your bill also modernizes the current statute’s accountability measures for teacher preparation programs by requiring reporting on program features that provide meaningful feedback and that are related to the candidates’ future success in the classroom such as selectivity, clinical preparation, and outcome measures including placement, retention, and performance. The bill also reforms the TEACH Grants to limit the eligibility for grants to juniors, seniors, and master’s degree level students, and allow for partial payback based on the length of service for TEACH Grant recipients who do not complete the four-year service requirement.

We strongly believe that research should inform any components of teacher education program evaluation, including the development of metrics and indicators used to determine quality and value. Research has shown that the most important school-based factors for raising student achievement and turning around struggling schools are teacher quality and school leadership.
The Educator Preparation Reform Act seeks to ensure that the future teachers and leaders in our highest need schools are prepared to be effective in the classroom. We look forward to working with you in your effort to advance this cause.

Sincerely,

American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education
American Association of State Colleges and Universities
American Council on Education
American Psychological Association
Association of American Universities
Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities
Association of Public and Land-grant Universities
Council for Christian Colleges and Universities
Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities
National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education
National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities