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A Clear Call for Change in Teacher Preparation

By Teresa Lubbers, Commissioner, Indiana Commission for Higher Education

The quality of the classroom teacher is arguably the most important factor in ensuring the college and career readiness of Indiana students. Multiple studies show that students who have strong teachers can succeed regardless of their economic circumstances or family background. The converse is also true: students who are assigned ineffective teachers are likely to struggle irrespective of their background or starting point.

Student learning is what matters most, and our teacher preparation programs must be designed with accountabilities that measure and report their graduates' impact on student achievement. We should pay particular attention to reforms that strengthen the course-content knowledge required of all teachers and streamline alternative certification programs. These principles are drawn directly from *Reaching Higher*, our Commission's strategic plan for postsecondary education.

Released more than a year ago, *Reaching Higher* is grounded in the reality that Indiana's economic vitality and the well-being of our citizens are tied directly to the strength of K-12 and higher education. It is no coincidence that our recommendations on the preparation of Indiana's teachers and school leaders comprise the centerpiece of our strategic plan.

We have actively tracked the progress of the public debate surrounding the Indiana Department of Education's proposal to revise teacher licensure requirements over the last few months, and we've noted several key parallels between that proposal and our own strategic plan.

In determining our Commission's position on the proposed teacher licensing changes, we consulted representatives from our schools of education, engaged in substantive internal discussions, and looked to our strategic plan for guidance. As a result, we offer this letter of support for streamlined, rigorous standards for teacher preparation, consistent with *Reaching Higher's* call for the redesign of teacher preparation in Indiana.

We recognize that a strong partnership between K-12 and higher education is critical to raising student achievement, and we look forward to moving Indiana's teacher preparation programs forward for the benefit of both students and teachers. We should use these thoughtful debates about teacher licensure as a springboard for discussions on other reforms such as retaining and rewarding quality teachers; developing effective ongoing professional development; and providing meaningful feedback on how graduates from Indiana's teacher preparation programs perform in the classroom. Only then can we fairly assess teacher effectiveness and ensure quality instruction for all our students.

NOTE: This letter was written with the unanimous consent of the Indiana Commission for Higher Education's 14 members. Visit www.che.in.gov to learn more about the Commission's strategic initiatives for higher education.