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Federal Policymakers Urged to Focus Education Funding on Building Effectiveness of Teaching Forces

Changes to Federal Education Funding Could Reverse the “Widget Effect” and Close the Achievement Gap

NEW YORK, NY – The New Teacher Project (TNTP) today released a blueprint for how federal education funding could be better used to address students’ most pressing need: effective teachers. The policy brief, [“How Federal Policy Can Reverse the Widget Effect,”](#) illustrates how current funding priorities designed to improve teacher quality inadvertently reinforce the tendency of school systems to treat teachers like interchangeable parts rather than acknowledging and responding to differences in teacher effectiveness.

The brief extends on TNTP’s 2009 report *The Widget Effect*, which documented widespread weaknesses in teacher evaluation and development. It urges policymakers to use the upcoming reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) to refocus Title II spending on four overarching goals for improving teacher effectiveness.

“We can’t afford to miss this opportunity to fix funding streams that, however well-intentioned, are simply not giving poor and minority students more equitable access to great teachers,” said Timothy Daly, president of TNTP. “If we are serious about putting more students on track for success in college and beyond, effective teachers need to be at the center of every educational decision we make – including our spending decisions. The reauthorization of ESEA gives us an important, overdue opportunity to ensure our funding choices match our policy priorities.”

Title II of ESEA is an example of a federal policy expressly intended to improve teacher quality. Nearly all school districts receive some of the \$3 billion allocated for Title II each year. Unfortunately, the bulk of Title II funding is currently spent on initiatives that make little difference for students or teachers, including insignificant reductions in class sizes and one-size-fits-all professional development that does not help teachers improve.

TNTP’s brief shows how Title II could have a much greater impact on student achievement as an “Equity Fund” focused sharply on measurable teacher effectiveness outcomes. States and districts that receive Equity Fund grants would be able to select specific uses for the money, as long as they lead to measurable progress on four fundamental goals:

1. Increased supply of highly effective new teachers

2. Greater retention of top-performing teachers compared to ineffective teachers
3. Improvement in teachers' skills over time
4. Increased access to the most effective teachers for high-need students

TNTP provides specific metrics that policymakers could use to track progress towards these four goals – all of which require states and districts to implement evaluation systems that accurately measure teacher effectiveness – and offers examples of expenditures that align with them.

The full report is available at <http://widgeteffect.org/downloads/resources/FederalPolicy.pdf>

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About The New Teacher Project

The New Teacher Project (TNTP) works to end the injustice of educational inequality by providing excellent teachers to the students who need them most and by advancing policies and practices that ensure effective teaching in every classroom. A national nonprofit organization founded by teachers, TNTP is driven by the knowledge that although great teachers are the best solution to educational inequality, the nation's education systems do not sufficiently prioritize the goal of effective teachers for all. In response, TNTP develops customized programs and policy interventions that enable education leaders to find, develop and keep great teachers and achieve reforms that promote effective teaching in every classroom. Since its inception in 1997, TNTP has recruited or trained approximately 37,000 teachers – mainly through its highly selective Teaching Fellows™ programs – benefiting an estimated 5.9 million students. TNTP has also released a series of acclaimed studies of the policies and practices that affect the quality of the nation's teacher workforce, most recently including [*The Widget Effect: Our National Failure to Acknowledge and Act on Differences in Teacher Effectiveness*](#) (2009). Today TNTP is active in more than 40 cities, including Baltimore, Chicago, Denver, New Orleans, New York, and Oakland, among others. For more information, please visit www.tntp.org.