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Statement of Michael B. Enzi
Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
ESEA Reauthorization: Teachers and Leaders

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Thank you, Senator Harkin, for holding this roundtable on teachers and leaders as part of our work on the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Teachers, principals and administrators are the people we rely on to provide our children with a quality education in a safe school environment. Their roles cannot be overlooked or diminished as we work on fixing and improving ESEA.

I believe that the underlying purpose we had in No Child Left Behind regarding highly qualified teachers was a good one. Of course every parent in America wants their child taught by an educator that is considered to be 'highly qualified.' However, there is a vast disconnect between a teacher who meets certain requirements on paper and one whose teaching has a true impact on students in the classroom and increases academic achievement. It is also important that the leadership in our schools supports good teaching and student achievement, encourages innovation with results, and creates a safe learning environment.

I am part of a family of educators – I hear daily what life is like in the classroom. Some of the people who have had the largest impact on my life were teachers. I believe that teachers are provided with a tool box of sorts when they walk into the front door of their school. However, that tool box may not be fully stocked – it may take years of practice, professional development, and collaboration with other veteran teachers to fill the tool box.

Similarly, school leaders bring certain experience and skills with them when they move into leadership roles. These skills could be considered tools as well. As with teachers, these skills need to be encouraged, fine tuned and advanced, so that their tool box is fully stocked to meet the needs of the students and teachers in the school. The reauthorization of ESEA provides us with an opportunity to do just that.

However, we have moved beyond looking just at the 'qualifications' of teachers and school leaders. We are now beginning to focus on the effectiveness of teachers, leaders, schools and school districts. Let me emphasize our ultimate goal has not changed – it continues to be improving student achievement. I support measuring teacher effectiveness, but we need to have the wherewithal to move as smartly as we do quickly. These systems need to be developed in an open and transparent manner and they need to be developed with the people they will affect, the students, parents, teachers and school administrators. This shouldn't be a top-down directive solely from Washington – far removed from local school districts, teachers and students. Teachers, principals and parents need to understand and

define what is meant by an 'effective' teacher and principal, how that differs from 'qualified,' and how these measures will be used in teacher and principal evaluation systems.

Washington needs to listen. There is no doubt that we are moving in the right direction, but this will take time and hard work in order to get it right. To rush in without thinking it all the way through would be reckless and endanger the momentum we enjoy today to shift policy and practice to measures of effectiveness.

I am so pleased that Layne Parmenter could join us today to talk about his experiences as a principal in Wyoming. He has provided great leadership in the state and can talk to us about how the needs of principals in rural schools are often different than those of their urban and suburban counterparts. He also plans to discuss some of the changes proposed to ESEA and the impact they could have on rural schools and districts across the country. Thank you for making the long trip to join us today, Layne.

I want to thank each of the participants for being here today and sharing their perspectives on the critical role teachers and leaders have in our schools and the education of our children. I look forward to the conversation we will have, listening and learning from what each of you has to say.

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