

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 6, 2007

CONTACT: Laura Capps/ Melissa Wagoner
(202) 224-2633

Statement of Senator Edward M. Kennedy
NCLB Reauthorization: "Strategies for Attracting,
Supporting, and Retaining High Quality Educators"

I welcome our participants in today's roundtable discussion on the No Child Left Behind Act. I'm grateful to our colleagues on the committee, especially Senator Enzi and his staff for helping us to arrange this roundtable.

One of the major goals of the No Child Left Behind Act is to have a capable teacher in every classroom across the nation. We all know that teachers are an especially important factor in student learning. They support, encourage, and inspire students to do their best and become the best they can be. I'm sure all of us here today have had great teachers whom we'll never forget.

International comparisons show that the United States is falling behind other countries in student achievement. The heart of the problem is the pervasive achievement gap between white students and other students. On the most recent test comparing students in industrialized nations, white students in the U.S. performed better than the average for all countries, while Hispanic and African American students did worse. If we can close this achievement gap, and guarantee all students a good education, we can put America back at the top of the list.

Research also shows that the way to close this achievement gap is to see that all children have good teachers. One study found that having a high quality teacher for five years in a row can overcome the average 7th grade achievement gap in math between lower income and higher income children.

It's unacceptable that America's most at-risk students are too often taught by the least prepared, the least experienced, and the least qualified teachers. Students in high-poverty and high-minority schools are twice as likely to be taught by new, inexperienced teachers than students in less-poor and less-diverse schools. Such teachers are less likely to receive the pay and support they need and they often leave their school or leave teaching all together, further destabilizing already struggling schools.

The teacher distribution gap exists for many reasons, such as poor working conditions, outdated facilities, large class sizes, inadequate salaries and benefits, and better support for individual teachers. These are all problems that can be solved.

It's especially troubling, given the global challenges we face, that we have such serious teacher shortages in math and science. Nearly half the math classes in high-

poverty or high-minority high schools are taught by teachers without a major or minor in math or a math-related subject. From 1990 to 2002, the percent of public high school math teachers with full certification in math decreased from 90 percent to 80 percent. We need teachers well-trained in these basic subjects who can inspire students to study them.

Today we're here to discuss some proven strategies and innovative approaches to meeting these challenges.

Obviously, we need to do more to recruit better teachers for high need schools. They deserve better financial incentives, better training, better opportunities to advance in their careers, and stronger support in taking on the added challenge of teaching in high-need schools.

Retention of good teachers is also a problem. In the 2003-2004 school year, nearly 270,000 public school teachers left the profession. The percent of teachers leaving the profession has risen steadily – from 6.6 percent in 1994 to 8.4 percent in 2004. In 2004, 28 percent of those who left the field had less than 3 years of experience.

Workplace conditions, lack of support, and lack of opportunities for professional development are major considerations in their decisions to leave their schools. It's clear that what we're doing now to support and retain teachers isn't enough.

Today, we'll discuss some of the innovative models that schools are using to overcome these problems, reduce the teacher distribution gap, and strengthen teaching as a profession. We'll hear about the importance of strong leadership and better strategies for recruiting and retaining good principals in schools where they're needed most.

We'll also hear about how to measure teacher effectiveness. There is no scientific formula for what makes a great teacher. Excellent educators are produced by combination of factors – knowledge of content, good classroom preparation, the right personality, support from other teachers and communication with them, and continuous learning in and outside of the classroom.

Student test scores are not the only measure. A balanced approach is needed, so that we can direct training and other resources as effectively as possible.

All of you here today have much to contribute to this discussion of effective strategies to meet these challenges. We look forward to your insights, and we appreciate your willingness to be here today.

The roundtable format enables us to hear from more people and to have an interactive discussion. After Senator Enzi makes his introductory remarks, we'll ask each of our participants to describe the strategies that have been effective in their communities for recruitment and retention of teachers, and the types of support and professional development that are most effective in high-need schools.

Once each witness has responded, we will open up the discussion so my colleagues can

comment and ask questions. In order to keep the discussion moving, we request that all participants limit their responses to any question to one minute. If the need arises, we will vary the format a little to fit the discussion.