

Testimony of Haroldine M. Pratt
Before the Labor, HHS and Education and Related Agencies
Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations
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Good morning Chairman Regula, Ranking Member Obey and Members of the Subcommittee. It is an honor to be able to share with this Subcommittee my experiences as a teacher and as a trainer of teachers. I commend the Subcommittee for focusing on the issue of "Improving Teacher Quality" as teachers are an important part of ensuring that no child gets left behind.

My name is Haroldine Pratt, a born and bred Washingtonian and a product of the District of Columbia Public School System. I have had the privilege of working in three different school systems, in our nation's capital. I accepted a five-month long-term substitute position in the District of Columbia Public School District – Jesse LaSalle Elementary School. I was a mathematics and science teacher for nine years in the Archdiocese of Washington– St Francis De Sales School, and most recently a member of the Friendship Public Charter School, for the last four school years. Teaching has been more than just an assignment, for me, for it has made an extraordinary and lasting impact on my life. There have been personal opportunities for review of subject matter, continued improvement and enhanced effectiveness.

The educational settings, in which I have worked, have had camaraderie of caring, knowledgeable and compassionate stakeholders – contemporaries, students, administrators and parents. As I look back on my teaching career, I realize that these components are as important to improving teacher quality as formal training and

professional development. During my long-term substitute assignment for a sixth-grade class at Jesse LaSalle, the principal and senior sixth-grade teacher mentored me, offering suggestions for management and organizational skills and other job responsibilities and practices. The challenge generated reflective practices, which were crucial for my lifelong learning and professional growth. This nurturing and support was crucial towards my development as a teacher and I believe that when teachers receive such support they are able to develop practices and routines that improve their teaching proficiency and ultimately improve their students' academic achievement.

I found a similar collegial and collaborative educational environment at St. Francis De Sales where I taught sixth-, seventh- and eighth-grade mathematics. During my nine-year tenure, professional development sessions and/or workshops, led to improved and/or increased teacher effectiveness. I had the distinct honor of representing my school at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center, Greenbelt, Maryland, in a five-week summer internship for mathematics and science teachers. The program, titled Students United with NASA Becoming Enthusiastic About Math and Science (SUNBEAMS), paired each teacher with a Goddard mentor. Each teacher assisted with various scientific research or instrument development and created standards-based, hands-on lessons to share with their students. I received so much that summer; ideas for engaging students in a variety of activities and incorporating higher-order thinking strategies for science. This sort of hand-on training from other math and science professionals helped to further my ability to provide interesting and quality instruction to my students.

Simply stated, I love what I do and do what I love. The transition from parochial school to public charter school was an interesting challenge. My current school, Friendship Public Charter School (K-12), has four campuses. The lead partner is Friendship House Association, a non-profit organization that has been serving D. C. families since 1904. Our other partner is Edison Schools, Inc., a manager of schools, of whose curriculum we teach. I was particularly excited by the prospect of working with the very innovative "Edison Design," which over the past few years has presented me with opportunities to engage in professional development to aid me in enhancing student learning. Our most important goal is to foster an environment in which the Friendship Edison students and teachers can experience academic achievement. Instructional staff professional development is offered throughout the week on a house team basis, which is the basic unit of teacher organization. These team teachers meet on a regular basis and are responsible for the core academic program of instruction and for managing a common group of students. The school schedule provides each house team daily common professional development time for regular house meetings, interaction with subject specialists, administrators, student support staff, and other teaching staff. These sessions are for collegial professional development. In addition, Edison provides training over the summer and ongoing training during the school year. I have personally attended several such training sessions including, Learning Environment Trainer, Mathematics Trainer, Lead Teacher Conference, and Edison Teaching Academy. These training sessions have provided me with the tools to improve my skills as a teacher and have helped me provide more quality instruction to my students.

In assisting teachers at promoting a school culture of achievement, and to generate pertinent information about student learning, we have an important academic component, the Edison Benchmark Assessments. These assessments, a support tool for our school, offer teachers, students and parents/guardians an opportunity for a monthly gauge of student knowledge and achievement. This important information helps identify student strengths and weaknesses, on a month-to-month basis, which allows us to prepare for the SAT-9 assessments. A professional development session is earmarked for the analysis of benchmark results in reading, language arts, and mathematics, on a regular basis, so that the instructional and support staff can modify teaching strategies. In fact, just last week my colleagues and I were analyzing last month's Benchmarks results in order to provide such professional development sessions for the school's teachers. An effective teacher at our school will monitor student performance by using the Benchmark assessments and decide what instructional strategies should be offered, depending on data analysis. Without this important data-driven strategy, an educator may conduct a "hit and miss" plan that will not result in increased achievement levels. Consequently varied formal and informal assessments must be incorporated in the learning environment. Professional development sessions can ensure that a teacher learns how to differentiate for student academic needs. If one instructional strategy did not work, then another strategy must be incorporated. The need for integrating learning styles and consideration of multiple intelligences is very necessary in the nation's learning environments.

Sharing and celebrating with other teachers has generated a new level of professional inquiry within me. Previous non-teaching experiences exposed me to what were then

the latest technological advances. In addition, during my internships at NASA – Greenbelt, opportunities for mastering HTML language, creating a website, and searching for current scientific information for lesson plans were appreciated. Consequently, when I joined the Friendship Public Charter School family, weekly technology professional development sessions greatly assisted me in catching up with current educational trends of incorporating technology into our learning environment. This educational environment, with its high-tech feel, motivated me to enroll in a graduate course at University of Maryland’s University College for learning how to integrate technology in the classroom.

When thinking about successful methods for improving teacher quality, it is important to consider one’s definition of an effective teacher. Many scenarios may indicate teacher effectiveness, as follows: high performance evaluations from clinical supervisors; stakeholders’ comments and assessments; and/or evidence of increasing academic student achievement, as well as student subgroups meeting or exceeding annual measurable objectives. In “Qualities of Effective Teachers”, the author, James H. Stronge states the following:

“The growing body of research concerned with teacher effectiveness has reinforced the notion that specific characteristics and behaviors matter in teaching, in terms of student achievement as well as other desirable outcomes. ... Commonalities highlighted in *Qualities of Effective Teachers* include characteristics of the teacher as an individual, teacher preparation, classroom management, and the way a teacher plans, teaches, and

monitors student progress. Put these jigsaw pieces together and a portrait of an effective teacher takes shapes.”

This description appeals to me, because it is very holistic. A caring educator, who models core values; treats students, parents and colleagues with professionalism; fosters an attractive and positive learning environment; and conveys high expectations; assist schools in tapping into their students’ enthusiasm for learning. Consequently, opportunities for maintenance of spiritual, emotional, mental and physical equilibrium should be offered. With so many varied challenges in our nation’s educational settings, many of our educators are short candles, who are being burned at both ends. I can genuinely speak from personal experience. In spite of this, something in many of us provides unlimited fortitude to get through another twenty-four hours or another week. Professional development, like the type that I received in the past and that I now coordinate in my current role at the Friendship Public Charter School, and that address these kinds of needs for renewal and/or respite would be, I believe, widely accepted and appreciated.

As for teacher preparation, perhaps we should consider having our pre-service teachers enter classrooms much sooner. During a first semester, one would be given the opportunity to ponder if this is what one really wants to do. At an early junction, serious consideration could be given to entering the education field, before accumulation of a large school loan forces someone to enter the teaching field, just so that a monetary debt could be paid. As a learning community, in-service teachers must be offered professional development to advance their knowledge and skills, so that our students

will be provided with exceptional learning opportunities. As we focus on student achievement, we must also focus on methods that will allow educators to participate in meaningful work. It is important that our teachers be engulfed in a culture of professional inquiry, which can avoid a feeling or sense of isolation.

Professional development should have teachers participating in collaborative work, reflective practices, and internal and external sources of new instructional and classroom management strategies.

Lastly, we may want to consider with whom do we want our students to interact during quality instructional sessions? I would think that it is the educator who is: comfortable with teaching and sharing information; knows the subject matter very well; and can project to students that the subject matter is not difficult to master, with the appropriate work and study skills. This type educator also should be very good in their field, and enjoy communicating the information, because capable people in a learning environment know what they are doing, since it's likely what they do most of the time. However, non-competitive salary levels for certain sets of skills may be keeping a very competitive and skilled group from entering our educational settings, thereby allowing incompetence in.

I again would like to thank the Subcommittee for holding this very important hearing. I welcome any questions the Members might have for me during the question and answer session.