

Personal Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Education

Written Testimony

By

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**HCR 13 AND HR 14: REQUESTING THE HAWAII CONGRESSIONAL
DELEGATION TO SUPPORT THE TEACH FOR AMERICA PROGRAM**

Chair Takumi, Vice Chair Belatti, and Members of the Committee:

As Dean of the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa's College of Education, I am aware of the good work of TFA in helping to address teacher shortages. Recruiting academically gifted individuals to become teachers, if even for a short time, is a worthy cause. TFA is not alone in this effort. Other entities, private and public, are taking up the cause of recruiting high quality individuals to become teachers, both for the long term as well as the short term. TFA's focus is on the short term.

Hence, while I consider TFA is a worthy cause, I believe more thought should be given to how federal funds are allocated to support recruitment of academically gifted individuals who are committed to education for the long term, as well as the short term. Often, the students in our most difficult to staff schools are those who need consistency and stability the most, and would benefit from bright teachers committed to those communities.

Teach for America is only one small part of the larger solution to maintaining highly effective teachers in our schools. I believe it would be short sighted to focus funds on only this solution without considering other, equally worthy, approaches to resolving our education problems. For example, recent studies clearly indicate the importance of mentoring in retaining high quality teachers. Current retention rates for teachers, prepared through many pathways including TFA, are 50% or lower over five years. It would be, in my opinion, beneficial and more cost effective long term to allocate additional funding to support teachers through mentoring. The cost of recruiting and preparing teachers is high relative to the cost of maintaining them once they are employed.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

March 30, 2011 at 9:00 am

**Testimony to the
House Committee on Education
Conference Room 309**

**HR 14 REQUESTING THE HAWAI'I CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATION TO
SUPPORT THE TEACH FOR AMERICA PROGRAM**

Chairman Takumi, Vice-Chair Au Belatti, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of Teach For America-Hawai'i, we appreciate the introduction of House Resolution 14 and testify in support of this Resolution.

Teach For America is a corps of outstanding recent college graduates of all academic majors who commit two years to teach in underserved urban and rural schools and become lifelong advocates working for systemic educational reform from all sectors. Our mission is to build the movement to eliminate educational inequity by enlisting our most promising future leaders in the effort. Nationally, there are 8,200 corps members teaching in 39 regions across the country while 17,000 Teach For America alumni continue working from inside and outside the field of education for the fundamental changes necessary to ensure educational excellence for all students.

For the 13 million children growing up in poverty in America, the reality is that by the time they are in 4th grade, they will be, on average, three years behind their peers from more affluent communities. Only half will graduate from high school, and those who do will perform, on average, at the level of eighth graders in higher-income communities. Even here in Hawai'i, too many of our children living in poverty—especially native Hawaiians—are falling behind in similar ways. But it doesn't have to be that way. Teach For America teachers and alumni along with many others are demonstrating in their classrooms every day that this achievement gap can be closed—and all of our children, even low income children, can achieve the skills they need to be successful in life.

Let me share a story about Matt Lucas, a 2009 corps member. Matt teaches 6th grade English Language Arts at Konawaena Middle School on the Big Island. As a first year teacher last year, Matt set the goal that his students would grow on average at least 1.5 points on the state writing rubric. Matt crafted lessons that related to his students' lives and interests, integrated technology into his classroom practice, and spent hours writing grants in order to procure technology for his classroom. Under his direction, his students exceeded their goal and finished the year having made on average 1.7 years of growth.

Victoria Schiller, also a 2009 corps member, teaches 4th grade at Jefferson Elementary. Last year, Mrs. Schiller used the highly-vetted McLeod Reading Comprehension test to assess her student's against their growth goal of 1.5 years in reading in only one year of

instruction. Many of her students came into her 4th grade class reading on a 2nd grade level, and by the end of the year they had made 1.7 years of growth in reading. The principal of Jefferson Elementary, Vivian Hee, said, "Mrs. Schiller's instruction is strong and leads students to success in reading and math. It is important to bring passionate and dedicated educators like Mrs. Schiller to Hawai'i. She is truly a 'spark' on the fourth grade team at Jefferson."

Matt and Victoria are extraordinary teachers, but they are not alone. Our program directors manage all 119 Hawai'i corps members to achieve significant gains for their student, and they are producing results that will close the achievement gap for our students in Hawaii. These 119 teachers, including 17 Kama'āina corps members who returned home to give back to their Hawai'i community through Teach For America, are impacting nearly 10,000 of our island keiki. They are going above and beyond to close the achievement gap for their students are producing incredible results with their students. Their principals are pleased to have them on staff. At the end of 2009, principals in Hawai'i were surveyed. 100 percent of responding principals reported that Teach For America teachers were as effective, if not more effective, than other first year teachers, with 76 percent of those principals rating our teachers as above or much above average. Our largest number of teachers are clustered at Campbell High School (17 teachers) and Wheeler Middle School (15 teachers). Letters from the principals of each of these schools are attached here for your review and reference.

Independent research has proven that these stories are not exceptions but are typical. In 2004, Mathematica (*The Effects of Teach For America on Students*) found that students taught by Teach For America teachers make more progress in both reading and math in a year than would typically be expected. It also found that these students attain significantly greater gains in math than students of the other teachers in the study, even veteran and certified teachers. These results were supported in a 2008 study by the Urban Institute (*Making a Difference? The Effects of Teach for America in High School*), which found that Teach For America corps members have a positive impact on student achievement relative to other teachers, including those who are fully certified in their subject areas.

Significantly, however, Teach For America's impact extends beyond corps members' two year commitment as two-thirds of alumni nation-wide, and here in Hawai'i, continue to work or study full time in the education field after their corps experience. In regions where Teach For America has been established for many years, alumni play significant roles in educational leadership. For example, approximately 325 alumni remain in the Greater New Orleans area, including 185 of whom remain teaching full time. Sixteen of these alumni are school leaders, including four of the top-performing charter schools, and several have founded or hold leadership roles in a number of other organizations, including New Schools for New Orleans, the Recovery School District, KIPP, TeachNOLA, Communities in Schools, the Youth Empowerment Project, and Teach For America.

Here in Hawai'i, we hope to be able to similarly grow our alumni movement and leadership pipeline. There are over 100 Teach For America alumni living in Hawai'i, and two-thirds of them continue to work in education. As our alumni base grows, we see increasing examples of alumni pursuing and taking on leadership roles in their schools and the broader community. For example, Stephen Schatz, a 1994 Teach For America alumnus, is currently a Complex Area Superintendent for the Honolulu District, Petra Schatz, a 1995 Teach For America alumna, is currently a Language Arts Specialist with the Department of Education, and Patricia Halagao, a 1992 Teach For America alumna, is currently a Professor in the Education Department at the University of Hawaii. Additionally, an increasing number of our alumni each year are enrolling in the Department of Education's Teacher Leader Academy to build leadership skills to be put to use in the classroom and school setting. Alumni remaining in the classroom have also taken on leadership roles as curriculum coordinators and department heads. This year, 2008 corps member, Maggie Desmond, was asked to lead the innovative, project-based curriculum program, New Tech, at Nanakuli High School and 2007 corps member Jonathan Sager also teaches in the program.

Growing our impact starts with increasing our corps size. Our corps size is currently 119 corps members and we have an unbelievable opportunity to increase this number as over 48,000 of our nation's top college graduates competed for 4,500 slots in Teach For America this year. Here in Hawai'i, we rely partially on a subsidy from our national organization which is made possible by Teach For America's federal funding. The loss of Teach For America's federal funding would mean that here in Hawai'i we must welcome fewer new teachers. This is particularly troubling this year as we have an unprecedented number of Kama'aina applicants for the corps and loss of federal funding would mean that fewer of these committed individuals would be able to join our corps and give back to their home community.

We would be grateful for the support of the Hawai'i State Legislature through House Resolution 14 to encourage our federal legislators to stand behind Teach For America's federal funding. This federal funding has a direct impact on our Hawai'i region, particularly this year when we rely on federal funding to subsidize our regional funding efforts and when we have the opportunity to welcome our largest number of Kama'aina corps members to date. An increased corps size would mean our program reaches an even greater number of students in Hawai'i's low income communities. The benefits of an increased corps size would also extend beyond corps members' two year commitment as they join our alumni base and become leaders in our community. The passage of House Resolution 14 in support of Teach For America would help to ensure that we are able to continue growing our positive impact on schools in low-income communities and the community at large.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.