

TEACHFORAMERICA

Testimony regarding Teach For America before the Primary and Secondary Education Subcommittee of the House Finance Committee

April 11, 2019

Good Morning Chairman Cupp, Chairman Patterson, and members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education,

My name is Holly Trifiro, and I am here today representing Teach For America Greater Cleveland and my colleague Ben Lindy who leads Teach For America's work in Southwest Ohio. Today, I want to highlight how the partnership we have with the State of Ohio has put our vision of a future where every student has the opportunity to attain an excellent education within reach.

Since 2012, Teach For America has been honored to be considered an additional resource for open teaching and leadership positions in Ohio as we work alongside others in the community to ensure that children's outcomes in life are not dictated by their zip code. Our corps members have the privilege of working in 3 of Ohio's 8 largest school systems and our alumni base of nearly 1000 work in approximately 75 school systems across the state. As a network of leaders, our corps members and alumni help students gain agency to overcome the barriers they face to lead and shape the dynamic, global world into which they will graduate. This is especially important in Ohio where our thriving economy and job growth is bringing many new opportunities to our state. To access these opportunities students need to be prepared for college and career. Leaders in our network expand opportunity for children from classrooms, schools, and every sector and field that shapes the broader systems in which schools operate.

Teach For America seeks funding to continue building on 7 years of service- recruiting, training and providing ongoing professional development to leaders from our teacher corps, filling critical teacher placements in Ohio, and developing our alumni to play key roles in education well past their two-year commitment. Support from the state ensures that principals in Cleveland, Lorain, Cincinnati, and Dayton have access to a critical source of diverse teaching talent and a committed partner in the push for educational equity and excellence. We respectfully request that you renew and expand funding for Teach For America to three million dollars per year in the next biennium budget. Funding from the state enables our ability to:

1. Expand opportunities for students through the leadership of our corps members
2. Contribute to the diversity of the teacher pipeline
3. Develop leaders who strengthen their schools
4. Offer continued leadership development for our alumni educators

Student Impact

Teach For America teachers work relentlessly to ensure expanded academic and personal growth opportunities for their students. As a result of the strong partnership between our teachers and their students, we see students demonstrating 1.2 years of growth in both reading and math across our classrooms on average. The stories paint the clearest picture of this impact. For example, Derrick Holifield, a graduate of Cleveland School of the Arts and Ohio University, was a 2014 Teach For America Greater Cleveland corps member. Derrick's vision as a teacher was to build student leadership and community-driven action, something he noticed was absent while growing up in Cleveland. During his time as a middle school teacher at Cleveland School of The Arts, Derrick led students on a volunteer trip to Flint and supported their increased engagement in extra-curricular opportunities that allowed his students to serve others. Under Derrick's leadership, his 7th graders made 1.7 years of growth and his 8th graders made 2.3 years of growth in reading, far beyond the year of growth that is expected in a single school year. Derrick completed CMSD's Aspiring Principal Program and is now expanding his leadership as the principal of Kenneth Clement Boys Leadership Academy. Derrick is one par of the network of more than 150 corps members and nearly 1000 leading underserved students across the state this year alone.

Diversity

TFA continues to be the nation's largest source of teachers serving schools in low-income communities, and the most diverse pipeline of educators among large teacher preparation programs. In Ohio overall, 7% of teachers identify as persons of color or multiracial. 42% of our 2018-19 corps identifies as a Person of Color, 45% are from a low-income background, and 35% were the first in their family to go to college, more closely mirroring our largest district partners. We recruit corps members from more than 300 colleges and universities across the country including top Ohio Universities like Miami, Ohio State, and Ohio University. Student achievement in Ohio is strongly influenced by TFA, especially in urban areas where we are a critical resource for hard to staff content areas like Science, Technology, Engineering and Math. 52% of our educators lead in STEM or Special Education classrooms.

Leadership Development

One of the hallmarks of our work with schools is the multi- year and multi- layered support that we provide for corps members through instructional and adaptive leadership practices. In the last few years, we've evolved our pre-service training; and increased our focus on cultural competence and culturally relevant teaching. Our intensive professional development is directed towards the goal of corps members achieving one year or more of grade growth with their students and focusing on broader outcomes such as personal growth and access to path changing opportunities. This is significant, given that many of our students are often several grade levels behind; moving a student by the equivalent of one year or more of grade growth ensures that they are making gains towards being at or above grade level.

Every TFA corps member is matched with a program coach; a TFA alum and/or veteran teacher with strong classroom experience and effectiveness. Program coaches perform regular classroom observations and meet with corps members 1-1 and in group settings. Our coaches work closely with school leaders to help corps members climb the steep learning curve all new teachers face. With nine out of ten principals surveyed indicating that they would hire another TFA corps member given the opportunity, we are confident in the coordinated and collaborative way we approach leadership development.

Alumni Support

We have extended support for alumni educators in their third, fourth, and fifth years in the classroom. Here in Ohio, 80% of TFA alumni work in roles that impact education or low-income communities. TFA has attracted the leadership of hundreds of alumni, many that moved to Ohio from other states, including dozens of school leaders and ongoing classroom teachers. Over 130 alumni serve in school leadership roles across the state.

With state support, we've been able to realize incredible progress. During the 2017-2018 school year, corps members and alumni received awards such as the Cleveland Metropolitan School District's Teachers of Excellence and the People's Liberty Haile Foundation Fellowship. In the same year, TFA corps members led their students to an average of 1.2 years of growth in a single academic year. We see proof points of possibility in schools like Rhodes College and Career Academy in Cleveland Metropolitan School District, which was the fastest improving school in the district last year under the leadership of TFA alumna Alyssa Starinsky and a cluster of Teach For America corps members. In Southwest Ohio, Tess Mitchner-Asinjo serves as the principal of Dayton Leadership Academy. With a staff that is 50% corps members and alumni, she led students to an average of 1.5 years of reading growth during school year 2016- 2017.

Teach For America has been a part of the Ohio education system for 7 years. Strong classroom-level and school wide outcomes are taking place but there is still more to be done. We can't stop now; our work is urgent, and the statewide need is great. Our unwavering commitment to bringing diversity to the Ohio talent pipeline and partnering with schools to support teachers puts us on a path to ensuring that all students in Ohio have the opportunity to demonstrate their truest potential and achieve at accelerated rates.

With your continued support, we can increase our reach from 15,000 high poverty students a year to nearly 30,000 students per year by 2022. We can also expand supports for alumni in education, offering more opportunities for them to strengthen their impact through professional learning and through preparation for expanded impact as school leaders. Continued state support will allow us to extend our geographic reach in Ohio. If we are awarded increased funding, we would implement a model that allows us to serve a talent-matching function for high-need districts across the state that do not currently employ TFA corps members. This would build on our experiences successfully recruiting national talent for school leadership roles in Cincinnati and Cleveland. We believe that talent matching with our alumni base would help us meet talent needs statewide and would increase the number of talented leaders working in education here in Ohio.

Together, we can accelerate the pace of change in education in our great state. We thank you for your time and attention, and respectfully request that you renew and expand funding for Teach For America to three million dollars per year in the next biennium budget.