

Personal Testimony
House Bill 21
Jenna M. Davis

As a mentor to fifth grade students in my senior year of high school I decided I wanted to become a teacher. I was a typical, over-achieving suburban cheerleader with a high GPA who was involved in everything my high school had to offer. As I researched Teacher Education programs in Ohio I decided to attend the University of Dayton where I received my undergraduate degree in Middle Childhood Education with concentrations in both math and science. During my first week of college each of the professors in my four core classes assigned research papers, the shortest of which was to be 20 pages. I went back to my dorm room devastated with no idea where to begin what seemed like an impossible task when I realized I was the only student on my floor that was shocked by the workload. It was that moment I realized I was behind my prep school peers. I began to wonder how students who attended lower performing public schools than I did were ever expected to persevere through the challenge of coming into college much further behind. I went on to get both my undergraduate and masters degrees in education and the more I learned about the real achievement gap the angrier I became. When I read about Teach for America I knew this was the organization that could single-handedly change the face of a currently broken system and my anger grew into passion for change.

As a Teach for America corps member I had the opportunity to teach Biology, Earth Science and Physical Science to students with special needs at Warren County High School in rural Eastern North Carolina. Upon my arrival I faced many of the battles all teachers cite

when working at a low-income school. My classroom was ominously located on the dark and dirty “back hall,” I had no books or supplies beyond chairs and desks and when I inquired about science supplies I was condescendingly told; “Ms. Davis, if you can keep your kids in your classroom we’ll all be happy.” Over time, I was able to create a classroom environment where students were inspired to believe, after many years of being told no, that they too could succeed in spite of their disabilities and socioeconomic status. Ultimately, I lead my special education students to pass their Biology state test at a higher percentage rate than their counterparts in the state and I lead my Physical Science students to out perform their **regular education** peers on their state examination.

As a corps member, our Teach for America professional development sessions were often held at a KIPP school called KIPP Pride High, which employs many corps members and has sent 100% of their graduating classes to college. As I saw this model of a school I was angered that my students did not have this opportunity but I was encouraged that this utopia existed outside of my own personal dreams. In October of my second year in TFA I received a phone call from Hannah Powell, the school leader of KIPP Journey Academy in Columbus, Ohio. I was inspired by Hannah’s passion to create a school where our students in Ohio could achieve the results I had seen at KIPP in North Carolina and I was ready to get home to Buckeye football. I flew to Ohio, met with Hannah, fell in love with the school, and signed a contract as fast as I could.

After having been considered highly qualified in North Carolina for K-12 Special Education and Middle Childhood Science I returned to Ohio and was told I would be receiving a long-term substitute license.

After much disappointment and many phone calls around the state, our school was told I would need to go back to college in order to receive full licensure. I hold a degree in Middle Childhood Education in both Math and Science, a master's degree in Education and teacher licensure work through a university in North Carolina. I have taken and passed 6 different Praxis examinations and still am told I need to take another exam to become licensed but already missed the deadline for this school year and that there will be new requirements next year.

If I were to leave KIPP Journey Academy and work at a public school in Ohio I would be receiving hourly pay after having worked for one of the most prestigious and selective organizations in the country. In addition to the results I achieved during my Teach for America tenure, in my first year at KIPP Journey Academy I was able to double our science test scores from the year before, out perform our reading and math scores and achieve the highest science test scores of any Columbus Community School. I would never advocate for licensure to become a simple process by which any person could become a teacher, as it is *the* most important job a person can ever hold. Based on my personal experience however, I would be overjoyed to see Ohio on the cutting edge of moving towards valuing teacher effectiveness for licensure, incentives and promotion.