

December 14, 2020

SC Education Oversight Committee

RE: State Inspector General Review of the Teach for America South Carolina Program

Dear Executive Director Ferguson, Chairperson Weaver, Vice Chairperson Couch and Members of the SC Education Oversight Committee,

I appreciate the great responsibility that you have as you consider state education budget priorities in the context of the current pandemic, and how to best invest in South Carolina's students. We are grateful for the recent evaluation of our program and believe that your feedback and input are essential to maintaining a successful partnership with the State. We appreciate your commitment to accountability and look forward to additional oversight that will continue to shape how we approach our work. Teach For America South Carolina (TFASC) has been fortunate to partner with students, families, communities, and educators of South Carolina for almost a decade. I'm writing today to elaborate further on the impact of this work and our critical partnership with the state to aid children growing up in South Carolina's most underserved communities.

South Carolina's investment in this work is more critical than ever. We know that all students are struggling in this pandemic as they navigate new ways of learning and adapting to the impact of this public health crisis. This year has been especially hard for South Carolina's most vulnerable children: for families with the fewest resources; for children of color whose unmet needs stem from systemic failures and inequities; for those students who count on schools for so much more than an education. The TFASC network of over 700 teachers, alumni, and staff are showing up for our students in unprecedented ways. TFASC is committed to getting students the resources and support they need to continue learning, and I know you share our commitment to this priority.

As a widely recognized and [studied](#) national organization, Teach For America (TFA) is part of 350 rural and urban communities across the country that are working to expand educational opportunities for children. Today, TFA has over 64,000 alumni and teachers working in over 9,000 schools nationwide in pursuit of profound educational equity and systemic change. I'm humbled and proud that this work includes 20 of South Carolina's underserved school districts, and through this work our teachers have taught 55,000 students since TFASC's founding in 2011. Working in partnership with communities across the Pee Dee, the Midlands, the Lowcountry, and the Upstate regions, TFASC leverages our national resources and local network to prepare educators who are deeply invested in the students, communities, and classrooms who need them most. We draw upon the depth of experience and learnings of a 30-year-old national organization, and innovate locally to best meet the needs of South Carolina's students and communities.

TFASC differentiates itself from other alternative certification and teacher recruitment programs, through our intensive high-touch support model. Our model is based on education industry research that finds the first two years in the classroom are critical in a teacher's development. During this period, a teacher will either fall in love with the profession or exit the classroom early. This is why we invest significant resources in programming for the first two and a half years. TFASC teachers start their professional development with an intensive six- to eight-week summer teacher training program, focusing on lesson planning and pedagogy, content specialization, classroom teaching with observation, and Praxis support. TFASC complements the initial preparation with continual evaluation and skill development through weekly one-on-one coaching and support from veteran educators for the next four semesters, providing an invaluable experience intended to develop a lifelong commitment to addressing achievement and opportunity gaps among students.

- **TFA understands the privilege and responsibility teachers carry;** therefore, we are highly selective in our recruitment. With an average of 50,000 applicants per year, we accept and place only six percent of applicants with a majority coming from low-income backgrounds.
- In a 2019 principal survey, **91 percent of principals say TFASC teachers contribute to a positive, collaborative, and professional culture in their schools, and 78 percent of principals reported that TFASC teachers made a positive impact on students' academic growth.**
- Since 2011, TFASC has recruited, trained, and provided ongoing support and professional development to **645 teachers**, including **180 teachers** in the 2020-2021 academic year. **TFASC educators are working in more than 20 school districts and charter schools across the state.**
- During the 2019-2020 academic year, **72 percent of TFA teachers decided to extend** their initial two-year commitment to teach in South Carolina. **At a time when the state's teachers are resigning at higher rates than previous years, and our schools are facing greater challenges than ever before, TFASC teachers are committed to our students, and through our Second Tour Fellowship, we are encouraging our teachers to expand their classroom commitment from two to four years.**
- **TFASC teachers' impact on student learning and achievement is considerable.** In schools where our teachers work, just 30 percent of students meet or exceed grade-level standards on SC READY. Each year, students fall further behind their on-grade-level peers. Yet, **63 percent of TFASC teachers achieve over a year's worth of academic growth in their classrooms. By accelerating learning, TFASC teachers close their students' achievement gap and bring them closer to their on-grade-level peers.**

TFA's impact in South Carolina extends well beyond the important work of filling critical teacher shortages and increasing student learning and achievement in individual classrooms. **Through our [Rural School Leadership Academy \(RSLA\)](#), 26 South Carolina educators, including non-TFA teachers, have participated in a yearlong fellowship for aspiring school leaders. TFA is helping retain education leaders in South Carolina through this no-cost, federally-funded supplemental training program, and we are creating strong and diverse networks of aspiring school leaders who are invested in South Carolina's students.**

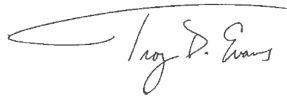
The TFASC program is responsive to the needs of our state and communities, and adapts to the ever-changing landscape where our students and schools operate. We realize that our work is stronger when we reflect on quantitative assessments of our impact and center our strategic planning in continuous improvement. With the support of our partner districts, the Department of Education and the Education Oversight Committee (EOC), we will continue to respond to the needs of our students using strong data and feedback that will light the path forward.

Today, and long into the future, with the support of the EOC and its members, we hope to continue our work, grounded in data, to bring an equitable and excellent education to every student in South Carolina.

For your review, I have attached supporting documents, and will be happy to answer any questions virtually or in person.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Troy D. Evans". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "T" and a horizontal line above the name.

Troy D. Evans

Executive Director

Teach for America South Carolina