Chairman Tiberi and Members of the Subcommittee. On behalf of the 3.2 million members of the National Education Association (NEA), we thank you for the opportunity to submit these comments for the record in conjunction with the hearing on certain expiring tax provisions. These comments focus on two specific expiring tax policies – the educator tax deduction and the Qualified Zone Academy Bond (QZAB) program.

Extend the Educator Tax Deduction
NEA strongly supports an extension of the educator tax deduction. This critical deduction, which expired at the end of the 2011 tax year, helps recognize the financial sacrifices made by teachers and education support professionals.

Educators often reach into their own pockets to purchase classroom supplies because they want to make sure students have what they need to succeed. Studies show that educators are spending more of their own funds each year to supply their classrooms and purchase essential items such as pencils, glue, scissors, and facial tissues. According to NEA’s most recent survey, 97 percent of educators surveyed indicated that, in 2006, they had spent some of their own money to meet the needs of their students. These educators spent an average of $477 a year out of their own pockets to purchase classroom supplies such as books, pencils, paper, and art supplies.1

Many educators are finding the need to reach into their own pocket has increased in these difficult economic times, as funding cuts lead to shortages in essential supplies and more students come to school without basic learning tools. A large majority of educators also spend an average of $15 a month out of their own pockets to feed students. (Status of the American Public School Teacher 2005–2006, March 2010)2

The need for these expenditures is not surprising. According to First Focus:
• 2.7 million more children lived with an unemployed parent during a typical month in 2011, compared to 2007 (an increase of 71%), bringing the 2011 total to 6.5 million children;
• 3 million (47% of those living with an unemployed parent) lived, during a typical 2011 month, with a parent unemployed six months or longer;

2 Ibid.
• 8 million more additional children relied upon SNAP for food in 2011, compared to 2007, bringing the total number of children receiving SNAP to 21 million (one in four);
• 16 million children (more than one in five) currently live in poverty³

The educator tax deduction is a bipartisan recognition of educators’ financial sacrifices as well as of the needs of students who lack even the basic necessities for success in school. Extending it will make a real difference for many educators, who often must sacrifice other personal needs in order to pay for classroom supplies and instructional materials.

Expand the Educator Tax Deduction
We also strongly support the Teacher Tax Relief Act (H.R. 1738), introduced by Representative Reichert (R-WA). This bill would expand the educator deduction to cover professional development expenses, increase it from $250 to $500, and make the deduction permanent. Teacher quality is the single most critical factor in maximizing student achievement. Ongoing professional development is essential to ensure that educators stay up-to-date on the skills and knowledge necessary to prepare students for the challenges of the 21st century. Expanding the deduction to cover professional development expenses would make a critical difference in helping educators access quality training.

Extend the QZAB Program
NEA also supports extension of the Qualified Zone Academy Bonds program. On average, the buildings that house our public schools are more than 40 years old.⁴ The American Society of Civil Engineers gives the condition of our schools a grade of “D” and attributes the failure to upgrade them to “problems in the financial sector and declining revenues for states and local governments.”⁵ According to Fix America’s Schools Today (FAST!), a project of the Economic Policy Institute and the 21st Century School Fund schools need an estimated $500 billion in repairs and upgrades.

The QZAB program has proven to be an efficient and cost-effective way to help disadvantaged communities address pressing renovation and repair needs. QZABs assist school districts in rural and urban communities by providing a financing mechanism to renovate buildings and invest in equipment and technology. Investors receive a federal tax credit equal to the amount of interest payable on the bonds, thereby relieving local taxpayers and municipalities of the interest burden.

A school that is awarded a QZAB may use the funds to:

• renovate and repair buildings;
• invest in equipment and up-to-date technology;
• develop challenging curricula; or
• train quality teachers.

The QZAB program expired at the end of the 2011 tax year. We urge Congress to extend this critical program.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

⁴ National Center for Education Statistics
⁵ Report Card for America’s Infrastructure, 2009
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