

## When it Comes to Teach for America, the Students Aren't the Only Ones Learning -- September 2005

By: Delaware Congressman Mike Castle

Teach for America's very goal is embodied in its title. The national program enlists young, enthusiastic, best of the brightest college graduates with various backgrounds to teach disadvantaged children and help them become the future of America. Without a quality education and just as importantly, a dedicated teacher, a child lacks crucial tools for their future. Teach for America is working to ensure that every child in that country has these opportunities, regardless of their socio-economic background.

Formally, Teach for America is the national corps of exceptional, willing recent college graduates of all academic majors who commit two years to teach in urban and rural public schools. This commitment makes these young adults true role models in any community and many of them, leaders in the future in education throughout the country. In fact, this fits with the vision that Wendy Kopp had when she started 'Teach for America' in 1989 during her final year at Princeton. She realized that something had to be done about the educational inequities that existed in low-income communities across the country and truly believed that there were many people in her generation who were willing and capable of making a difference.

Unfortunately, this vastly important program does not exist in Delaware, but my plans are to try and change that with the new legislation I have recently introduced in Congress that would authorize \$12 million to help Teach for America reach its goals to grow to expand by 2010. Part of my plan for that growth would include implementation of the program in Delaware in the urban and rural areas all around the state. Other national goals include growing the Teach for America corps to 8,000 members teaching in 30 underserved communities, reaching a record 700,000 students each year with an annual budget of over \$100 million. We must continue to work towards eliminating the education gap that plagues our country and I believe this legislation will work to reach that goal.

In addition to the classroom learning, there are other important aspects of the program that many people do not think about. Regardless of the subject these young graduates are teaching, they are also passing on a much greater lesson to these children; compassion and opportunity for all. They are showing the children through example that everyone has a chance with an education, and how much you can help someone else with that education.

There is also another underlying exchange going on. A teacher who comes into one of these areas is also learning; from his or her students. Many of these young children in the classroom have gone through more hardship in their life than the teacher standing in front of them. Therefore, while these young adults are teaching math or English, they are learning about poverty and adversity from their students. The more that populations of different sectors of our country know about each other and interact, especially within the younger generations, the better off our country will be. Understanding leads to the desire to help and change the situations of others.

For those who are young and will have a bachelors degree (a requirement for Teach for America candidates) or anyone who has recently graduated, think about this opportunity and experience for your future. Think about the opportunity you are providing a class of young people by improving their education and consequently, their future. For anyone who is not in the position to become a Teach for America corps member, please spread the word to others who might be able to

help. Teach for America is a program that helps us all in the end. If teachers can help give a chance for a better future to a youth with few resources, they may be giving a chance for a better future for our country.