



Serving Learners

DRAFT – December 2006

**Recommendations
from the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education
Regarding the Definition of a “Highly Qualified Teacher” in the
No Child Left Behind Act of 2001**

The term “highly qualified teacher” (HQT), as defined in Title IX, Section 9101(23) of the *No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)*, is surely among the more significant—yet controversial and perhaps also misunderstood—provisions of the Act. It is also fair to say that these provisions may well be the catalyst for positive change within the nation’s schools and teacher preparation institutions. Now, however, as Congress prepares to reauthorize the statute, it is clear that “highly qualified” should be revisited and revised. Clarifying language provided by the Department of Education (ED) in several guidances should be incorporated into the new definition where appropriate, and aspects of the definition and its interpretations that are inappropriate, out of date or clearly not functioning effectively should be eliminated or rewritten.

The following are recommendations of AACTE, an association of nearly 800 schools, colleges, and departments of teacher education across the United States, for improving the HQT definition and ED’s interpretations of it.

Although our recommendations address the definition as it appears in current law, we point out that extensive development and consensus-building within the profession preceded NCLB’s articulation of the characteristics of high quality teachers. This body of work includes (1) model state teacher licensing standards developed by the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC);¹ (2) the professional accreditation standards of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE);² (3) The Five Core Propositions of The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards;³ (4) the definition provided by the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future,⁴ and, more recently, work sponsored by the National Academy of Education.⁵ AACTE has been the beneficiary of that work, much of which is reflected in these recommendations.

¹ Council of Chief State School Officers, *Model Standards for Beginning Teacher Licensing, Assessment and Development: A Resource for State Dialogue* (Washington, DC: Author, Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium, 1992).

² National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, *Professional Standards for the Accreditation of Schools, Colleges, and Departments of Education, 2002 Edition* (Washington, DC: Author, 2002).

³ National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, *What Teachers Should Know and Be Able to Do* (Washington, DC: Author, 8/2002).

⁴ National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, “National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future Publishes Criteria to Help States Define “Highly Qualified Teachers,”” *News Bulletin*. Washington, DC, October 23, 2002.

⁵ See: Linda Darling-Hammond, John Bransford, Pamela LePage, Karen Hammerness, K., & Helen Duffy (Eds.). *Preparing Teachers for a Changing World: What Teachers Should Learn and be Able to Do* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005) and Linda
American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education



Serving Learners

1. **Streamline and clarify the HQT definition.** The current definition of a “highly qualified” teacher has caused inestimable confusion. Each of its three parts applies to different types of teachers (all, new-, or *not* new-to-the-profession) at different levels (elementary, middle, or secondary), with varying but similar AND/OR requirements, some of which apply to more than one type or level of teacher. A new, more concise definition should apply to *all* teachers, assuming that veteran teachers would have, during the five or more years between initial passage and reauthorization of *NCLB*, met HQT requirements or left teaching. As intended, the High and Objective Uniform State Standard of Evaluation (HOUSSE) provision, which pertains only to veteran teachers, would be eliminated.

As is true for other professions, the quality of a teacher is not static. Teachers do not enter the classroom as ‘finished products,’ but grow and improve over time. A newly licensed “highly qualified” beginning teacher probably has not yet reached the “exemplary” standard mentioned in *NCLB*.⁶ The challenge is to establish a standard of teaching practice that—although it does not express the highest possible level of expertise—reflects a sufficient level of candidate knowledge and skill. The public must be assured that new teachers are capable of promoting student learning and are competent to be assigned to children as a teacher of record. This level of teaching quality must be guaranteed to all students.

2. **Require that teachers can teach.** The HQT definition should make it clear that all teachers must know their content *AND* are able to teach. The current definition is missing a critical and essential element in that *it does not require that teachers are able to teach*. Teachers’ knowledge of their subject matter is necessary, but not sufficient, for their students’ learning of it. Teaching requires *not just knowing*, but having the skills of the actual *doing* of teaching. The current HQT definition rightfully emphasizes teachers’ content knowledge. But equal weight must be placed on their *knowing how to teach* and *being able to teach* a particular subject to students at their varying levels of development within each class that is taught.

The HQT definition does require demonstration of subject knowledge “*and teaching skills*” in areas of the basic elementary school curriculum, but only for elementary school teachers who are new to the profession. Further, the demonstration of such skills is to be accomplished by passing a test, which may be a state licensing test. In most cases (see below) state licensing tests are written tests, not performance tests, and thus cannot indicate candidates’ ability to actually teach. In addition, the guidance issued by the Department of Education concerning highly qualified teachers focuses on candidates’ content knowledge. “The purpose of the test,” it says, “is *to establish the candidate’s knowledge of content* in reading, writing, math, and other areas of the basic elementary curriculum.”⁷

Darling-Hammond and Joan Baratz-Snowden (Eds.), *A Good Teacher in Every Classroom – Preparing the Highly Qualified Teachers Our Children Deserve* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005).

⁶ See “exemplary” as defined in *NCLB*, Title IX/Part A – Definitions.

⁷ U. S. Department of Education, “Improving Teacher Quality State Grants, Title II, Part A, Non-Regulatory Guidance” (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Academic Improvement and Teacher Quality Programs, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Revised January 16, 2004), p. 8.



Serving Learners

Before beginning their practice, teachers should understand how students learn. They must be able to engage student interest in a subject and to impart the content in ways their students will understand. Teachers must be able to change instructional strategies instantaneously, according to the learning needs of diverse learners, including special education students. They must deftly manage a classroom while maintaining students' motivation. Teachers must be skilled in observing students' progress toward set standards as well as interpreting scores from formal assessments, and then adjusting their instruction appropriately. Further, teachers must be able to coach and monitor students' use of technology to aid their learning, contribute to a robust teaching/learning collaboration within the school, as well as deal effectively with parents and the community.⁸ These skills are as critical to successful student learning as is content mastery. Therefore, they should be required under any definition of a qualified practitioner.

3. **Mandate extensive, supervised clinical experience.** Most states require teacher candidates to undertake some form of practice teaching. However, considerable variation exists in the extent and rigor of these experiences from state to state. Recent data show that about three-quarters of the states require clinical experience, which may range from five to twenty weeks.⁹ Research indicates that the lack of clinical skills and experience feeds high levels of teacher burnout and attrition.¹⁰ Candidates who have had student teaching are twice as likely to stay past the first year of teaching than those who have not.¹¹ Prospective teachers should exhibit consistent success through a substantial pre-service clinical experience involving a variety of challenging situations, and supervised by both university- and school-based faculty. The Professional Development School model, when practiced according to the PDS Standards,¹² is the most evidence-based exemplar of high quality, effective, clinical experience.

The HQT definition should thus mandate for each teacher candidate a minimum number of hours of closely monitored and supervised classroom experience. We suggest at least 15 weeks at 30 hours per week, or a total of 450 hours. This requirement should pertain to both traditional and alternative route candidates.

⁸ See Linda Darling-Hammond and Joan Baratz-Snowden (Eds.), *A Good Teacher in Every Classroom – Preparing the Highly Qualified Teachers Our Children Deserve* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005).

⁹ Melissa McCabe, "State of the States," in *Quality Counts: A Decade of Standards-Based Education*. 2006. *Education Week*, Vol. 25, No. 17, January 5, 2006. pp. 72-89.

¹⁰ National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, *No Dream Denied: A Pledge to America's Children* (Washington, D.C.: NCTAF, 2003), 77.

¹¹ National Center for Education Statistics. *Characteristics of Stayers, Movers, and Leavers: Results from the Teacher Follow-up Survey, 1994-95*. (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Education Research and Improvement, 1997).

¹² National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, *Standards for Professional Development Schools* (Washington, DC: Author, 2001).



Serving Learners

4. **Require assessment of teaching performance.** A major omission in the nation’s system of determining the quality of entry-level teachers is an assessment of their ability to teach. Innumerable, and frequently inadequate, tests of content knowledge, professional knowledge, and in some cases subject-specific pedagogy, are available and used by states in licensing teachers. However, a rigorous assessment of candidates’ ability to actually teach is, with few exceptions, not part of the licensing process. A growing body of research indicates that performance assessments that include evidence from actual teaching practice can better evaluate instructional practice and can serve as powerful professional learning experiences. Reports of the National Research Council¹³ and the National Academy of Education¹⁴ call for such assessments.

California and Connecticut both require performance-based assessments of teachers for licensure. A promising exemplar of the implementation of California’s mandate¹⁵ is the Performance Assessment for California Teachers (PACT). This is a group of colleges and universities formed to develop an integrated, authentic, and subject-specific assessment that meets state standards for validity and reliability. PACT assessments build on efforts by the NBPTS and INTASC¹⁶ to assess expert and beginning teachers, respectively, but PACT’s tasks measure teacher performance at the preservice level. Data sources include teacher plans, teacher artifacts, student work samples, video clips of teaching, and personal reflections and commentaries, that are organized around the teaching categories of planning, instruction, assessment, and reflection¹⁷. Connecticut’s Beginning Educator Support and Training (BEST) is a three-year induction program that covers preservice training, beginning teacher induction, and continuing professional growth. It includes both mentoring and support for beginning teachers as well as a portfolio assessment. The training requirements for prospective teachers reflect the state’s Common Core of Teaching, which details the subject-specific knowledge, skills, and competencies the state believes teachers need to ensure that students learn and perform at high levels.

NCLB should incorporate a demonstration of teaching competence, based on such an assessment, within its HQT definition. Such assessments should be administered prior to licensure—by states in their certification testing process or by individual preparation programs—and licensure should be dependent upon satisfactory performance.

¹³ National Research Council. 2001 *Testing Teacher Candidates: The Role of Licensure Tests in Improving Teacher Quality*. Committee on Assessment and Teacher Quality, Mitchell, K.J., Robinson, D.Z., Plake, B.S., and Knowles, K.T., editors. Board on Testing and Assessment, Center for Education, Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 2001) 172.

¹⁴ Linda Darling-Hammond and Joan Baratz-Snowden (Eds.), *A Good Teacher in Every Classroom – Preparing the Highly Qualified Teachers Our Children Deserve* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 62-63.

¹⁵ SB 2042, 1998.

¹⁶ INTASC = Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium.

¹⁷ For further detail see: Raymond L. Pecheone and Ruth R. Chung, “Evidence in Teacher Education – The Performance Assessment for California Teachers (PACT). *Journal of Teacher Education*, Vol. 57, No. 1, January/February 2006, 22-36.



Serving Learners

5. **Eliminate inequities favoring alternate route candidates.** Paradoxically, an ED Guidance exempts teacher candidates participating in alternative route to certification programs from their state certification requirements.¹⁸ ED authorizes uncertified alternate route to certification candidates to “*assume functions as teacher*” for up to three years while they are seeking certification. This policy appears to grant federal authority to candidates developing the essential teaching skills to comply with their state’s certification laws to actually break those laws and *become* teachers prior to obtaining certification.¹⁹ This interpretive language should be eliminated. To become “highly qualified,” all teachers should be subjected to the same requirements regardless of the pathway they take to get there.
6. **Include characteristics of caring and commitment.** Although they are difficult to measure, any meaningful definition of a highly qualified teacher should address the behaviors of caring and commitment to the welfare of children. Such behaviors include: the firm belief that all students can learn; commitment to making knowledge accessible to all students; a caring concern with their motivation and self-concept; fair treatment of all children; commitment to advancing each child’s growth and development as a learner; and respect for the cultural and family differences children bring to the classroom.²⁰
7. **Provide flexibility for teachers of multiple subjects.** The law should provide options for teachers of multiple subjects—who are teaching in middle schools or in small, rural schools—to the requirements of having a major in each subject they are teaching or having passed the content test required of majors in the subject. Federal support should be provided to states to develop multiple subjects certification or examinations strategies to accommodate heavily rural states.
8. **Revise the definition of a highly qualified special education teacher.** IDEA 2004 contains its own definition of a “highly qualified special education teacher.” However, it is oriented almost exclusively to special education teachers’ possession of requisite content knowledge. It provides flexibility to states in interpretation, but does not require them to ensure that special education teachers have demonstrated both special education knowledge and teaching skills. While curricular content mastery is an essential component of being a highly qualified special education teacher, so is the ability to understand the

¹⁸ U. S. Department of Education, “Improving Teacher Quality State Grants, Title II, Part A, Non-Regulatory Guidance” (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Academic Improvement and Teacher Quality Programs, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Revised January 16, 2004), 10.

¹⁹ The Guidance considers such candidates certified if their alternate route program provides strong professional development, intensive supervision or a mentor, and the candidate shows satisfactory progress.

²⁰ See: National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, *Professional Standards for the Accreditation of Schools, Colleges, and Departments of Education, 2002 Edition* (Washington, DC: Author, 2002), p. 53: Definition of “dispositions,” as revised, 2006; National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, *What Teachers Should Know and Be Able to Do* (Washington, DC: Author, 8/2002), Proposition #1, p. 8; National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, “National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future Publishes Criteria to Help States Define “Highly Qualified Teachers,”” *News Bulletin*. Washington, DC, October 23, 2002.



Serving Learners

implications of an individual's exceptional condition. They must know how to continuously assess student performance, accurately interpret the results, and adjust the learning environment accordingly. They must use positive behavior supports and interventions as well as select and implement appropriate accommodations. The definition should thus be modified to require that highly qualified special education teachers are also able to demonstrate the essential skills of teaching special education students. If prospective special education teachers cannot demonstrate these critical skills, they should not be considered "highly qualified."

For additional questions please reach out to Dr. Jane West, AACTE Vice President of Government and External Relations, at 202.478.4593 or jwest@aacte.org

###