

ABCTE's Recommendations on the Highly Qualified Teacher Definition

As Congress begins its process to reauthorize No Child Left Behind (NCLB), there is still much work to be done to determine what defines a "highly qualified teacher". As the Nation faces an impending teacher shortage, it is our hope that Congress will also consider the impact that this shortage is having in school districts across the country. They should consider how that definition may help address this problem as well as how it can help improve teaching and learning in the classroom. One thing that Congress can do is to recognize that traditional teacher certification programs are faced with a greater challenge than they can meet – providing enough highly qualified teachers for every classroom in this Nation. During the reauthorization of NCLB, it our hope that Congress will place greater emphasis on the role that alternative teacher certification programs can play in helping states address teacher shortages.

As an organization engaged in alternative teacher certification, the foundation of the American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence's (ABCTE) work is grounded in the belief that individuals who can demonstrate the knowledge and skills necessary for teaching are qualified to enter our Nation's classrooms. Likewise, we believe that "highly qualified teachers" should be judged on the knowledge they possess, their performance in the classroom, and the results they are able to obtain with their students. We recommend that all teacher certification programs, those rooted in traditional preparation as well as alternative programs, be subjected to continuous evaluation for quality and effectiveness through the increasing amount of data available.

Lack of "Quality" Teachers

There is no argument that the Nation is facing an impending teacher shortage but what is compounding that problem is the issue of quality. Not only do many of our schools need teachers in the classroom, they need high-quality and effective teachers. One untapped source is the pool of mid-thirty professionals interested in changing careers and becoming teachers. The American workforce is changing and individuals move more easily between careers than ever before. This creates more issues for school districts as younger teachers leave the classroom. But this evolution also provides tremendous opportunities for education systems to attract mid-career professionals who can translate their real-life experiences in the work place into classroom lessons.

There is no doubt that a quality teacher can enrich learning opportunities for an entire class of children and for individual students. A study conducted at the University of Tennessee found that teacher quality is a key determinant of student achievement, more important than any other societal or demographic factor. For instance, students assigned to the most effective teachers can achieve a full year of academic growth on top of expected annual gains—with low-performing students gaining the most academic benefit from these teachers.

No state should be considered successful until they also close the quality teacher gap. Our urban and rural areas are hardest hit by the teaching shortage and have the most students taught in classrooms with teacher on emergency waivers and teaching out of subject area. A greater focus on supporting strategies that have addressed this teacher quality gap must be a part of NCLB.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) requires all teachers to become "highly qualified" as defined under the law by the end of the 2005-2006 school year. Yet serious

concerns exist as to whether being considered "highly qualified" under NCLB will substantially improve the quality of teaching. The Center on Education Policy's March 2006 report found that only 9 percent of responding states and 8 percent of school districts believe that NCLB's teacher quality requirements have improved the quality of teaching

ABCTE Demands High Quality

Effective teachers are essential for achieving classroom success. ABCTE's vision is that every child in every classroom will have a highly qualified teacher—a teacher who possesses expert levels of knowledge in the subjects he or she teaches and mastery of research-based teaching strategies; a teacher who is effective in the classroom and in raising student achievement.

That is why we demand high quality in our *Passport to Teaching* certification program. All of our teaching candidates must hold a bachelor's degree and demonstrate mastery on rigorous subject-area and professional teaching knowledge examinations. These examinations, developed by teachers, policy-makers and other subject-matter experts, are considered among the most rigorous testing instruments for teachers in existence. All teachers who earn state certification through *Passport to Teaching* are considered "highly qualified" according to NCLB.

Our teachers are not only highly qualified—they are effective. We conducted a validity study in 2005 and 2006 to correlate teacher scores on ABCTE's exams for elementary education certification with the teachers' student learning gains. While the sample size was small, the study found that teachers who met *Passport to Teaching* certification requirements based on their proficiency in teaching knowledge and subject-area expertise produced significantly higher average student learning gains in the classroom than teachers who failed to meet certification

requirements. Passing teachers had positive student learning gains in each subject area, while failing teachers showed below-average student learning gains in every subject except reading.

Further, in a recent comparison survey, 95 percent of principals said that ABCTE teachers are as effective as—or more effective than—teachers certified through other routes. Both the validity study and comparison survey provide preliminary evidence that teachers achieving certification through *Passport to Teaching* can increase student learning at a level equal to or greater than those of teachers achieving certification through traditional programs.

Increasing the Pool of Highly Qualified, Effective Teachers

As public school enrollment steadily rises and the number of teachers continues to decrease, it is clear that our nation's teacher crisis is so large that no single approach can solve the problem. Traditional teacher preparation and certification programs, emergency certification programs, alternative teacher preparation and certification programs—we are each one part of the larger puzzle to solve the problem. All of our unique strategies must be combined to address the teacher shortage. Only by doing so will we be effective in helping our children succeed both in the classroom and beyond.

Bring All Teacher Programs to the Table

The nation's traditional teacher education programs provide just one avenue for certifying teachers. We must look for additional avenues to improve the number of teachers available to support the needs of districts. Comprehensive, innovative approaches to teacher training, certification and support are critical if we are going to adequately address our nation's teacher shortage. Alternative certification programs—which have been providing effective ways to recruit, train, certify and support teachers for years—must be part of this important conversation

and part of the ultimate solution. Alternate routes to teaching like ABCTE that bring highly qualified and effective individuals to classrooms offer a significant resource to states and districts struggling to fill open positions. They provide a growing pool of teachers to meet the needs of schools nationwide, especially in high-need geographic and subject areas.

Like traditional teacher certification programs, alternative programs must meet high standards that will lead to teacher quality and effectiveness. This includes requiring its teachers to demonstrate mastery of both subject-area knowledge and professional teaching knowledge. It also means providing continued support for teaching candidates through counseling and test preparation materials, and for certified teachers through mentoring and professional development. It means measuring teacher effectiveness in the classroom and working with states to ensure that qualified and effective teachers serve in areas that are high need or hard to serve. In our efforts to fill classrooms, we cannot afford to sacrifice on quality, effectiveness and mentoring to ensure that teachers have what they need to be effective.

Evaluate and Hold Accountable All Teacher Preparation Programs—Be They Traditional, Emergency or Alternative

Evaluation and accountability must be a way of life in order to realize continuous improvement.

All teacher preparation programs—traditional, emergency or alternative—must be continuously reviewed and evaluated for quality and effectiveness.

Recent evaluations of alternative programs demonstrate their effectiveness in training teachers.

ABCTE's study, as mentioned earlier, found that those teachers who met *Passport to Teaching* certification requirements based on their proficiency in teaching knowledge and subject-area

expertise produced significantly higher average student learning gains in the classroom than teachers who failed to meet certification requirements.

Other alternative teaching programs have also been reviewed recently. For instance, one study found that, on average, Teach For America (TFA) teachers produced a positive effect on their students' achievement levels relative to teachers in the same district recruited and trained through other routes. Another study found that TFA teachers had a positive impact in math achievement when compared to a control group of teachers of all experience levels and that TFA teachers provided roughly one additional month of math learning per year. Meanwhile, 92 percent of principals said they would hire another The New Teacher Project (TNTP) teacher and 93 percent said they were satisfied with their TNTP teachers.

Conclusion

Teachers have a direct effect on student achievement. For that reason, we must ensure that there are a sufficient number of organizations preparing and providing teachers for our Nation's schools. It is now more necessary than ever to acknowledge and embrace the role that alternative teacher certification programs can play in a larger strategy to ensure that highly qualified teachers are instructing our children. All teacher preparation and certification programs must set high standards for quality and effectiveness both for their teachers and for themselves. And they must continue to grow and improve based on data received from ongoing evaluation and assessment.