



where teachers are central to improving schools

No Child Left Behind and Defining the ‘Highly Qualified’ Teacher

By

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As noted in our previous paper submitted to CEP, The NCLB requirement that states ensure a "highly qualified" teacher for every child in every core academic subject, can provide a national framework for closing the teaching quality gap besetting our nation's schools. While NCLB has sent a very strong signal to practitioners and the public regarding the importance of new approaches to teacher recruitment and retention, school districts face major obstacles in achieving the goal of a high quality, highly effective teacher for every student. Briefly, some of these obstacles include:

- (1) *A sleight of hand on teacher qualifications* where current federal rules allow states to immediately label teachers as "highly qualified" if they have just enrolled in, but not finished, their preparation.
- (2) *The limitations of current teacher testing* means that teachers can earn "highly qualified" status by passing a narrow and inexpensive subject matter test.
- (3) *Inflexibility for multiple-subject teachers* who often teach in rural schools or in interdisciplinary teams in redesigned high schools.
- (4) *Insufficient resources for recruitment and preparation* where few districts—especially poor urban and rural—can offer sufficient financial incentives for teachers to move to high-need schools.
- (5) *Woeful disregard for teacher working conditions* that often include school administrators who do not support or utilize teachers in key decisions and provide limited time for teachers to engage in high quality professional development and collaborative work.

A New Definition of the "Highly Qualified" Teacher

We could not agree more with AACTE submitted proposed to redefine our nation's "highly qualified" teachers:

- *Streamline and clarify the HQT definition* so that there is unity in purpose and all teachers are expected to meet the same high standards.
- *Require that all teachers (including those entering through alternative route) can teach* before they begin teaching as an independent teacher of record.
- *Mandate extensive clinical experience where a teaching performance assessment* is used to determine who is ready to teach and when.
- *Establish levels of "qualified"* where, like in other professions, different distinctions are made for those who are well prepared as a novice and those who are highly accomplished. A one size fits all definition of a "highly qualified" teacher sends the wrong signals to the profession as well as the public.

We would add an additional criterion to the "highly qualified" teacher "levels." We believe that the NCLB "highly qualified" teacher designation need to explicitly recognize teachers who not only help students learn but also identifies accomplished teachers who spread their teaching expertise to their colleagues. Schools will improve when effective practices are well known, shared, and incorporated, and the NCLB can promote schools and districts identifying effective teachers who help others improve their teaching.