



The “No Child Left Behind” Provision for Distributing Teachers Equitably: Summary and Principal Ideas from a Roundtable Discussion

October 17, 2006

Background and Purpose

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act requires states to ensure that “poor and minority students are not taught at higher rates than other children by inexperienced, unqualified, or out-of-field teachers.” The U.S. Department of Education required all states to submit “teacher-equity plans” by July 2006 that laid out the specific steps states are taking to comply. These plans were criticized by some advocacy groups for insufficiently addressing the NCLB provision for equitably distributing teachers and, in some cases, for making minimal progress in demonstrating compliance. In this same vein, the U.S. Department of Education has also been criticized by these same advocacy groups for providing inadequate guidance and leadership on this provision. In the fall of 2006, most states submitted revised plans at the request of the Department of Education. As of January 1, 2007, the Department had approved the revised plans for all states except Hawaii, Kentucky, New Hampshire, Oregon, Puerto Rico, Utah, Vermont and Wyoming.

On October 17, 2006, the Center on Education Policy (CEP) convened representatives from 22 organizations in Washington, D.C., to discuss the merits of the NCLB teacher distribution provision. These organizations and many others were invited to attend if they had concrete, written proposals for improving the Act’s requirements for the equitable distribution of qualified, experienced teachers. At the session, participants discussed their proposals. Participating organizations are listed in the box below. Staff from the offices of several members of Congress also attended this meeting.

This document summarizes the proposals and discussions that emerged from this roundtable session. It is also intended to share ideas for improving the NCLB teacher distribution provision with officials in the U.S. Department of Education, the U.S. Congress, and the education community. This document was developed by CEP staff and has not been approved or specifically endorsed by any of the participating organizations.

Organizations Participating in the October 17, 2006, Roundtable Discussion

1. American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education
2. American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence
3. American Federation of Teachers
4. Association of Teacher Educators
5. Campaign for Educational Equity, Teachers College
6. Center for American Progress
7. Center for Teaching Quality
8. Center on Reinventing Public Education
9. Citizens' Commission on Civil Rights
10. The Education Trust
11. National Association of Elementary School Principals
12. National Association of Secondary School Principals
13. National Association of State Boards of Education
14. National Board for Professional Teaching Standards
15. National Commission on Teaching and America's Future
16. National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education
17. National Council for the Social Studies
18. National Council on Teacher Quality
19. National Education Association
20. National School Boards Association
21. New Teacher Center at UC Santa Cruz
22. Teach for America

To structure the roundtable session, the Center on Education Policy asked participating organizations to submit proposals in advance with their ideas for improving the distribution of qualified, experienced teachers between high-need schools (those with high enrollments of low-income or minority students) and lower-need schools. Most of these proposals can be accessed under the "meetings" tab of the CEP Web site at www.cep-dc.org. While the organizations suggested a variety of approaches, many groups agreed about the need to focus on the following seven policy steps:

1. Strengthening teacher recruitment programs
2. Strengthening teacher retention programs
3. Improving teacher and administrator preparation programs
4. Revising teacher licensing/certification
5. Establishing or enhancing data collection systems
6. Increasing funding
7. Improving the transparency of school, district, and state data on teacher qualifications and experience and obtaining clearer guidance from the U.S. Department of Education about the teacher distribution provision and its enforcement (such as clarifying who qualifies as an experienced teacher)

CEP organized the roundtable discussion around these seven themes. During the discussion, participants found common ground around three principal ideas:

1. Comprehensive initiatives for teacher recruitment and retention
2. Better data collection and reporting systems
3. Improved and more equitable funding formulas

Each of these ideas is described below.

Principal Idea 1: Comprehensive Teacher Recruitment and Retention

Participating organizations generally agreed that both teacher recruitment and retention efforts must be strengthened to ensure the equitable distribution of qualified and experienced teachers across schools. Further, these efforts must be comprehensive and include a complete package of initiatives. There was widespread agreement that no effort to achieve a better distribution of qualified teachers was worth undertaking unless it was comprehensive. Single measures do not work; a holistic approach that includes intensive support for new teachers is essential.

Components of such a comprehensive approach should include the following:

- Substantial financial incentives to *recruit* qualified, effective, and experienced teachers in hard-to-staff schools; examples include bonuses, tuition reimbursement, loan forgiveness, or housing stipends
- Substantial financial incentives to *retain* qualified, effective, and experienced teachers in hard-to-staff schools; examples include higher salaries, bonuses, tuition reimbursement, loan forgiveness, or housing stipends to teachers who will make a long-term commitment to stay in a hard-to-staff school
- High-quality “residency” programs for new teachers and their mentors developed specifically for and tailored to the demands of teachers in high-need schools, such as the recently formed Coalition of Urban Teacher Residencies
- Similar residency/training programs for school leadership staff, such as the KIPP (Knowledge Is Power Program) principal leadership program
- Improved working conditions; for example, lighter course loads for new teachers, reasonably sized learning communities, increased planning and collaboration time, shared decision making, and up-to-date textbooks, technology, and facilities
- Retirement incentives and stipends to encourage experienced teachers to remain or become active in high-need schools, either through mentorship, coaching, or other capacities
- Continued research-based professional development and quality in-service training for teachers and administrators

- Continued support for additional teacher recruitment and retention initiatives, such as “grow your own” teacher programs, that may be effective in recruiting and retaining a more diverse teaching staff

The general view was that none of these approaches alone is sufficient to address the equitable distribution challenge; rather, a comprehensive approach that combines these policies is necessary.

In addition, many organizations agreed that NCLB must support and encourage policies that enable hard-to staff-schools to become more competitive in attracting teachers. For example, early hiring policies in these schools may give principals an advantage over other schools in hiring qualified, experienced teachers. Some of the proposals submitted for the roundtable included data that dispel some of the main concerns teachers have about these schools—lack of community support, poor leadership, and poor working conditions—and provided guidance on how to improve working conditions and ensure strong leadership.

Roundtable participants also generally agreed about the continued need for alternative certification programs to help recruit qualified teachers, especially in hard-to-staff schools. Still, some organizations thought there should be common and consistent standards for both traditionally and alternatively prepared teachers. For example, some organizations proposed amending NCLB so that alternative route teachers would not be considered highly qualified until they have finished their teacher preparation program. This would parallel the policy for teachers prepared through the traditional route, who are not deemed highly qualified under NCLB until they complete their programs. Further, there was general agreement that scholarships and the previously discussed recruitment and retention incentives should be available for all teachers—traditionally prepared teachers and mid-career switchers alike.

Some participating organizations said both alternative and traditional certification programs should include coursework on child development and pedagogy and should require classroom experience; however, others recognized that preparation programs for recent high school graduates and experienced career changers can, and often should, be different. Many agreed that experienced professionals with college degrees should not be required to fulfill the same types of requirements as those without a degree or professional experience.

On the issue of teacher licensure/certification, the roundtable session generated much discussion but less specific agreement. Some organizations expressed concern about the federal government becoming involved in teacher licensure and certification, which has traditionally been a state responsibility. Other organizations called for a stronger federal role that would encourage states, perhaps through incentives, to invest in more research on teacher effectiveness and to develop common standards in such areas as teacher licensing examinations, state reciprocity agreements, and pension portability. The latter group argued that the current structure of teacher licensure does not support today’s highly mobile workforce. One organization specifically called for enticements to bring innovation to the credentialing process, saying that “the current economic dynamics do not support innovation.”

Most participants supported the elimination of emergency certification, and many called for more flexible certification policies for special education teachers who teach multiple subjects and for middle school teachers.

Principal Idea 2: Data Collection and Reporting Systems

Most organizations participating in the roundtable agreed on the need to strengthen data collection and reporting systems. Organizations highlighted two ways in which data collection and analysis might be used to support the equitable distribution of highly qualified teachers.

First, several organizations called for additional and more in-depth market research on the teaching profession to ensure more effective teacher recruiting and retention programs. Collecting data on where teachers come from, how long they stay in the profession, why they leave, and similar questions would allow policymakers and educators to understand the workforce dynamics that affect staffing in schools. Further, comprehensive data collection would allow for a data-based approach to addressing specific school staffing needs.

Second, several organizations called for federal resources and initiatives to move states toward comprehensive statewide data collection systems. These systems could produce data on teacher and school variables and student achievement that would inform policy decisions and help states and districts comply with NCLB requirements. A few groups suggested doing this through the use of unique teacher and student identifiers. Some organizations cautioned, however, that careful consideration should be given to which types of student and teacher data would be collected and for what purposes. For example, not all the participating organizations supported a system that would immediately link student achievement data with teacher identifiers. Instead, there was more agreement about data systems that could inform states, districts, and schools about the circumstances under which students and teachers are more likely to be successful. States could collect diverse data about teachers and schools—such as student-teacher ratios, percentage of teacher time spent in preparation versus teaching, and mobility rates of teachers and/or administrators—and use that data to better understand how schools and districts can support teachers and students.

Further, many organizations proposed involving the higher education community in solutions to the problem of the equitable distribution of teachers and looking to higher education institutions to provide accurate information on their program graduates. Some suggested that the federal government provide incentives to states that would encourage institutions of higher education and teacher preparation programs to track the preparedness and success of their graduates who enter teaching. This should help ensure that teacher preparation programs take into account state and local teaching needs and are coordinated with state accountability systems.

Some organizations called for greater transparency in reporting the distribution of qualified and experienced teachers. One organization wrote, “A strong reporting system reflecting data on teacher attrition, teacher absenteeism, and teacher credentials can lend much-needed transparency to those factors that contribute to staffing instability and inequity.” Some called for

teacher quality and experience data to be reported and posted on the district report cards required by NCLB or in a central location on the U.S. Department of Education Web site.

In sum, many organizations said the federal government should provide incentives for states and others to collect data on teachers' qualifications and experience, foster increased collaboration between schools/districts and institutions of higher education, and encourage more transparent and accurate reporting systems.

Principal Idea 3: Distribution of Title I Funding

Most organizations expressed general concern about funding to address this issue but their specific suggestions varied. Several organizations called for changes to the funding formulas for the federal Title I program for disadvantaged children, to help ensure the equitable distribution of qualified and experienced teachers among all students. One organization suggested changing the Title I formulas to create "weighted student formulas where funding comes on a per-student basis to each public school," and further proposed that "per-student funding should vary according to each child's need with funds arriving at the school as real dollars (i.e., not teaching positions, ratios, or staffing norms) that can be spent flexibly." Others argued that a needs assessment should be conducted to determine the real cost of equitably distributing qualified and experienced teachers. One group suggested that states calculate the true cost of teacher turnover, contending that if states and districts saw this figure they would be more supportive of funding for teacher induction and retention programs.

Finally, some organizations pressed for better enforcement of the Title I comparability provision. Under this provision, school districts that receive Title I funds must use state and local funds to provide services in Title I schools that, taken as a whole, are comparable to services in non-Title I schools. (Title I schools are those with higher percentages of low-income students.) If a school district designates all of its schools as Title I schools, then it must use state and local funds to provide services that on the whole are substantially comparable in each school.

One organization cited its research on the comparability provision, which revealed great inequalities in spending on teacher salaries between schools. Others echoed these sentiments, pointing out that many districts meet the comparability requirement through a uniform salary schedule. Thus, some organizations suggested looking at actual expenditures, instead of the salary schedule, to ensure the actual amount of money spent on teachers is equal among schools. This, they contend, would expose situations where experienced teachers are clustered in more affluent schools and novice teachers in poorer schools. Further research and analysis of the comparability requirements would be useful.

Conclusion

Each of the 22 participating organizations submitted its own specific proposals and ideas on how to improve the teacher distribution provision of NCLB. Participants in CEP's roundtable

discussion reached some consensus around three central policies to improve the equitable distribution of experienced, qualified teachers:

1. Comprehensive initiatives addressing teacher recruitment and retention
2. Better data collection and reporting systems
3. Improved and more equitable funding formulas

The Center on Education Policy urges the Congress and U.S. Department of Education officials to consider these recommendations and the specific suggestions submitted by the roundtable participants as they begin their deliberations on reauthorization of No Child Left Behind.

Credits

This meeting summary was researched and written by Jennifer McMurrer, CEP research associate. Nancy Kober, CEP consultant, edited the report. Jack Jennings, CEP's president and CEO, and Diane Stark Rentner, CEP's director of national programs, provided advice and assistance.

Based in Washington, D.C., and founded in January 1995 by Jack Jennings, the Center on Education Policy is a national independent advocate for public education and for more effective public schools. The Center works to help Americans better understand the role of public education in a democracy and the need to improve the academic quality of public schools. We do not represent any special interests. Instead, we help citizens make sense of the conflicting opinions and perceptions about public education and create the conditions that will lead to better public schools.

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