

Reauthorizing the “Teacher Quality” Provision of NCLB

The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF) takes the position that the current focus on the role of the “teacher” in this provision fails to recognize that the teaching profession is going through a fundamental paradigm change. The current definition of a “highly qualified teacher” is deeply rooted in a factory era policy that defined America's public schools for most of the last century – the assumption that a stand-alone teacher working in isolation in a self-contained classroom can achieve success for all students.

The reality is that this focus on the stand alone teacher neither recognizes nor capitalizes on the power of teachers working collaboratively to maximize learning for *all* students. While the rest of the world is developing collaborative working conditions and putting a premium on teamwork, U.S. education remains locked into an out-dated paradigm centered on the stand alone teacher. We believe this is a mistake and if the current highly qualified teacher provision is not changed to reflect this, we will miss a wonderful opportunity to move the teaching profession into the future.

This position is based on NCTAF's long-standing call for competent, caring, qualified teaching ***in schools organized for success***. The current version of NCLB focuses on teachers, but it must go further to support schools organized for success.

In successful schools, we see an increasing emphasis on collaboration in the development of professional learning teams, some by grade level, some by subject, and the very best as school-wide endeavors. Teachers on these teams understand that a sense of shared responsibility, honest inquiry, and willingness to pull your own weight as part of a team is making an enormous difference in their effectiveness as teachers and in their own willingness to stay in the classroom.

NCTAF recognizes the profound and lasting difference that individual teachers make in helping individual students succeed. We believe, however, that the long term success for all children depends on developing a collaborative network of teachers who together continually strive to improve their practice and, in doing so, improve student achievement. Schools that are successfully reaching AYP are increasingly recognizing the power of this collaboration.

In re-authorizing NCLB, Congress should help to accelerate this trend and create the necessary supports to make collaborative teamwork common practice. ***With this in mind, we make the following recommendations that include changing teacher preparation, providing induction support, and establishing career incentives for teaching in high-need schools and disciplines.***

First, we believe that the Highly Qualified Teacher provision should be modified to focus on “quality teaching.” This change shifts the emphasis away from the role of the individual teacher to a new definition of “effective highly qualified teaching” for all students. This new definition goes a long way toward recognizing that quality teaching is the result of a collective school-wide effort to improve learning.

Second, we believe that teacher preparation must be embedded in collaborative school cultures. Teachers tell us that their preparation programs do not teach them to work collaboratively with colleagues. We need to prepare the next generation of teachers to work collaboratively to overcome the isolation that so many inexperienced teachers now feel. ***We would propose that teacher preparation programs model themselves after the medical residency approach.*** We have seen how novice teachers gain confidence and re-new their commitment to the profession through ***a well developed induction process that places a strong emphasis on mentoring and collaborative teaching.***

Third, in reauthorizing NCLB Congress should make explicit its recognition that effective teaching is rooted in a collaborative teaching process. ***We need to close the teaching quality gap by ensuring that new teachers aren't disproportionately placed in our most challenging schools.*** The ability of an entire team of teachers to develop solutions for a student who is struggling makes an enormous difference to individual teachers who are seeking to help a child succeed. ***Incentives, with clear expectations and evaluations, should be built into the legislation that would encourage savvy, veteran teachers and principals to staff our high-need schools in teams.***

Fourth, Congress should ***mandate that "every child has access to quality teaching that develops 21st century skills."*** This phrase would address both the teaching quality issue and the competitiveness issue that concerns so many members of Congress. America's current economic success is, in part, rooted in the ability of American companies to develop highly creative and collaborative teams that maximize problem solving, creativity, and positive results. The teaching profession must do likewise.

Through the reauthorization language of NCLB, Congress has the opportunity to envision a new paradigm for education and thereby lead education into a new model for the 21st Century. NCTAF encourages Congress to take this critical step.