



Closing the Teacher Equity Gap NSBA's Recommendations

Ensuring that every student in every school in every district is taught by a highly qualified and effective teacher is essential to achieving the lofty goals of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Research has shown that teacher quality impacts student achievement more than any other classroom factor, and that the benefits to students who learn from a series of effective teachers accumulate over time. Research also documents that students in high-poverty, high-minority schools disproportionately are taught by less experienced, less qualified teachers than students in other schools. Closing the student achievement gap will only be more difficult if this disparity among teachers persists.

Among the teacher quality provisions within NCLB is the requirement that states have plans to ensure that poor and minority students are not taught at higher rates than other students by inexperienced, unqualified, or out-of-field teachers. It also calls on local school districts to ensure the same through various strategies including professional development and recruitment programs.

How can the federal government assist local school districts and states in addressing and solving the existing teacher equity gap? We believe the best approach is to leverage the vast resources of the federal government to encourage and incentivize the creation and expansion of a range of strategies, many of which states and school districts already are implementing. This must be a national priority that utilizes local, state, federal and private resources to truly make a difference. And with research indicating that as many as 2 million new teachers will be needed in the next decade to address teacher retirements and turnover, now is the time for action. To that end, NSBA suggests the following recommendations for the upcoming 110th Congress to address regarding the teacher equity gap:

Assisting in Recruitment and Retention

- ✓ Under Title II of NCLB, states and school districts have broad discretion in the use of funds to improve teacher quality, including recruitment, retention and professional development programs. We recommend Congress continue to provide such flexibility but also permit the use of funds to assist states and districts in developing or improving comprehensive data systems to effectively track, in part, the distribution of qualified, experienced teachers across schools so officials can pinpoint inequities that need addressing. Allowable use of funds should also extend to strategies to ensure a positive school climate for students and teachers since that has shown to be a key factor in retaining teachers. Additionally, Congress must stop the backwards slide on funding the Improving Teacher Quality State Grants that occurred in FY06 and may continue in FY07.
- ✓ Improving professional development or in-service training is critical to improving teacher quality and retaining teachers. Under NCLB, there is little focus on the need to design and implement comprehensive professional development models. For example, many states and school districts lack a comprehensive approach to professional development that addresses the needs of teachers through the analysis of learning needs, ongoing collaboration, intensive induction and mentoring support, family engagement, and leadership skills. Congress should redirect the law's focus away from sanctions and move toward federal funding for comprehensive professional development programs targeted as a percentage of Title I funding to be accompanied by state matching funds.
- ✓ Many states and school districts are experimenting with teacher and principal recruitment and retention initiatives specifically geared toward high-poverty schools, including hiring bonuses, performance-based pay, housing assistance and relocation costs, student loan forgiveness, and "grow your own" teacher programs. Examples include a teacher and principal bonus pay program in Mobile County, Alabama; the new Market Factor Teacher Salary State Assistance Program in

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Iowa; and, Clark County, Nevada's performance-based pay program that encourages principals to lead high-poverty, high-minority schools and meet certain goals. Through Title I and II, and other programs like the Teacher Loan Forgiveness Program and Teacher Next Door Program, Congress can continue to help supplement initiatives of these types and encourage more districts and states to create such programs by expanding funding to be accompanied by state or local matching funds in some cases.

- ✓ Expand the Teacher Incentive Fund – Created by Congress two years ago, the program has been slow to start, yet the principles on which it is based are sound, as it is specifically geared toward district and state programs that reward teachers and principals who get results in high-poverty schools. However, \$99 million, which is the current funding level for the program, hardly counts as a priority. Congress should increase funding for this federal initiative which can also help foster the creation and expansion of state and district differential or market-based pay initiatives for teachers who agree to teach high-need subjects such as math, science and special education in hard-to-staff schools.

Expanding the Pipeline of New and Effective Teachers

- ✓ As many as 1 in 5 new teachers enter the workforce via alternative certification programs. Congress should help continue this momentum by supporting programs that open pathways to teaching for mid-career professionals who can demonstrate appropriate subject matter knowledge. Special focus should be given to programs creating new pathways for teachers of high-need subjects or those that successfully place teachers in hard-to-staff schools, as well as programs that focus on recruitment of minority teaching candidates.
- ✓ Provide scholarships for undergraduates who agree to teach in hard-to-staff schools for a set number of years.
- ✓ Hold institutions of higher education accountable and provide incentives to states or teacher preparation programs that develop accountability systems which track the preparedness and success of its graduates who enter teaching (e.g. Louisiana's Teacher Preparation Accountability System).
- ✓ Help foster increased collaboration between colleges of education / teacher preparation programs and local school districts and states to ensure better alignment with the teaching needs of schools and state standards/accountability systems, with an increased emphasis on preparing future teachers to make effective use of student achievement data, and training on classroom management skills.

Best Practices Clearinghouse

- ✓ While some organizations already provide "best practices" information on teacher quality, a central, online clearinghouse specifically regarding the teacher equity gap nationally that provides verifiable data as well as proven solutions enacted by states and districts could assist in addressing this issue. A small federal investment could provide the seed money needed to encourage a nonprofit entity to collect and present this information.

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