



Strengthening Teacher Quality NSBA's Proposed Recommendations*

Ensuring that every student in every school in every district is taught by a 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.

The clear link between teacher quality and student achievement coupled with estimates that 2 million new teachers will be needed in the next decade to address retirements and turnover, argues for a sustained commitment and partnership among all levels of government to build and maintain the teaching force needed to make a positive difference for America's 48 million public school students. While hiring decisions are best left to local school officials, the federal government does and should have a role to play in strengthening teacher quality.

NSBA believes 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. Congress also should amend the Highly Qualified Teacher (HQT) provisions in NCLB to better recognize unique needs among local schools and districts, and to focus more attention on teacher *effectiveness*.

Our legislative recommendations, which are discussed in more detail below, include these key points:

- 1) Congress should assist in the recruitment and retention of qualified and effective teachers via specific federal incentives and funding.
- 2) Congress should assist in strengthening professional development programs to ensure students are taught by qualified and effective teachers.
- 3) Congress should assist in broadening the pool of new and effective teacher candidates.
- 4) Congress should help strengthen teacher preparation programs to ensure appropriate alignment with NCLB requirements and foster increased accountability of the programs.
- 5) Congress should assist educators, administrators, district decision-makers and policymakers in facilitating and disseminating research/best practices on effective teaching.
- 6) Congress should improve the Highly Qualified Teacher provisions by emphasizing teacher effectiveness.
- 7) Congress should improve the Highly Qualified Teacher provisions by streamlining requirements and adding practical flexibility that recognizes unique situations.

Congress should assist districts and states in recruiting and retaining qualified and effective teachers through incentive programs and funding.

NSBA supports federal policies that encourage and support comprehensive efforts by school districts and states to recruit, train and retain qualified and effective teachers and principals, with an emphasis on increasing racial and ethnic diversity among educators. We also support recruitment and retention policies directly supporting teachers of high-need subjects like math, science and special education, and supporting high-poverty schools that have more difficulty recruiting and retaining educators assigned to them. These initiatives should include a range of strategies, such as hiring and retention bonuses, performance-based pay, housing assistance and relocation costs, student loan forgiveness, and "grow your own" teacher programs. Local

and state examples include a teacher and principal bonus pay program in Mobile County, Alabama; the new Market Factor Teacher Salary State Assistance Program in 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 funding of Title I and II, and other programs like the Teacher Loan Forgiveness Program, Congress can continue to help supplement initiatives of these types and encourage more districts and states to create such programs. In particular, Congress should stop the backwards slide on funding the Improving Teacher Quality State Grants under Title II of NCLB that occurred in FY06 and FY07 (based on committee-passed bills).

NSBA supports efforts by districts and states to implement teacher compensation programs that are linked to the goals of raising student achievement, and are responsive to the supply and demand challenges of certain academic subjects that many schools face. Congress should support such efforts by expanding the Teacher Incentive Fund, which is geared toward district and state programs that reward teachers and principals who get results in high-poverty schools. However the program's FY06 funding level of \$99 million hardly counts as a priority. Congress should increase funding for this federal initiative which could 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.

An additional way for Congress to assist districts and states in recruiting needed teachers is to provide scholarships for undergraduates who commit to teach for several years in hard-to-staff schools or high-need subjects, and for experienced teachers who further their education and commit to becoming "master teachers" or mentors in hard-to-staff schools.

Congress should assist districts and states in strengthening professional development programs.

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 specific costly sanctions that have not demonstrated effectiveness 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.

Congress should assist in broadening the pool of new and effective teachers.

NSBA supports changes in the traditional methods of training teachers that are aligned with standards-based education reforms, accountable for teacher effectiveness and responsive to the interests of public schools. As many as 1 in 5 new teachers enter the workforce via alternative certification programs which present an opportunity for school districts to cast a wider net in recruiting teachers. Alternative certification programs recruit a greater percentage of minority teacher candidates and are more likely to place its teachers in high-poverty schools. Research indicates that alternatively certified teachers are, on average, no more or less effective than traditionally trained teachers; rather, it is more dependent on the specific program.

Congress should help continue the momentum of alternative certification 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, those that successfully place teachers in hard-to-staff schools, those that focus on recruitment of minority teaching candidates, and programs that ensure sustained, high-quality professional development.

Congress could also help break down recruitment barriers by encouraging states to enter certification / licensing reciprocity agreements.

Congress should help strengthen teacher preparation programs.

A 2006 study led by Arthur Levine, president emeritus of Teachers College at Columbia University, illustrated the critical need to transform and strengthen the nation's teacher preparation programs. "More than three out of five alumni say teacher education programs do not prepare graduates for classroom realities," Levine wrote in an October, 2006 *Boston Globe* op-ed. Congress can help states hold teacher preparation programs accountable by providing incentives for states to develop accountability systems to track the preparedness and success of its graduates in raising student achievement. Though some states already are moving down this path (e.g. Louisiana's Teacher Preparation Accountability System), few states have such data systems in place.

Additionally, Congress should assist and encourage schools of education to collaborate with local school districts to ensure better alignment with NCLB requirements and state's academic standards, as well as emphasizing the teaching practices needed to be effective in raising student achievement, particularly for English language learners (ELL) and students with disabilities. Teacher preparation programs should also focus on helping teachers differentiate instruction for learners of different abilities.

Congress should help facilitate and disseminate quality research and best practices on effective teaching.

While some organizations do provide "best practices" information on teacher quality, many policymakers realize that more definitive findings on teacher effectiveness are needed. A small federal investment could assist in comprehensive research to address the question of "what makes a teacher effective?" along with the appropriate dissemination of those findings to teachers, administrators, school board members and teacher preparation programs.

Congress should improve the Highly Qualified Teacher provisions in NCLB by placing more emphasis on teacher effectiveness instead of credentials alone.

As a teacher at a 2006 NCLB hearing put it, "highly qualified" does not necessarily mean "high quality." The inverse of this could also be true: a high quality or effective teacher may not necessarily meet all the requirements of the Highly Qualified Teacher (HQT) provisions currently in NCLB. That's because current HQT requirements focus on teachers' knowledge, credentials and in some cases, subject-related assessments, but do not consider the *effectiveness* of the teacher in helping students learn. A teacher in fact could have a record of success in helping to raise students' achievement yet not meet all the HQT requirements.

And since raising student achievement and closing the achievement gap are the underpinnings of NCLB, Congress should amend the definition of HQT to take into account the "value added" to student achievement by teachers, and permit that approach as an alternative route to meeting the HQT definition. (NOTE: we are not advocating a new, additional requirement to be met, but rather an alternative way for teachers to demonstrate that they are "highly qualified").

Although value-added assessments provide information on student performance, it should not be the single determining factor in evaluating teacher performance. Other data such as peer, parental, principal and even student evaluations should also be considered. Congress must recognize the difficulty and expense in developing reliable and fair “value added” models and should, in addition to amending HQT to permit this approach, provide the funding necessary (through matching grants) for states to develop such systems. One possible approach might be to create a demonstration program for interested states wishing to utilize or create a value-added model to evaluate teacher performance.

Congress should improve the Highly Qualified Teacher provisions in NCLB by incorporating more consistency and reasonable flexibility.

NSBA believes that instructional personnel employed by supplemental service providers should meet the same HQT requirements as comparable instructional personnel (e.g. subject-area specialists) in public schools.

One other way Congress should make NCLB requirements consistent would be to defer to the discretion of any state that wishes to consider social studies a core academic subject as opposed to the current definition that splits social studies into five subjects: geography, history, civics and government, and economics. Or, permit social studies teachers an HQT pathway that is similar to science teachers, whereby teachers in states that offer a “broad field” degree or certification can be considered highly qualified.

Recruiting and retaining special education teachers were challenges for school districts before NCLB and the HQT requirements have only added to the challenge. The Department of Education has recognized this and granted flexibility to districts and states. The recently released IDEA regulations also clarified that states may develop a multi-subject HOUSSE to allow special education teachers to demonstrate subject-matter competency in every core academic subject they teach. In the reauthorization of NCLB, Congress should either make that multi-subject HOUSSE provision permanent, or permit a special education teacher with full state special education certification and a bachelor’s degree to be considered highly qualified.

Similarly, rural school districts often employ teachers of multiple core subjects for which the current HQT requirements are unnecessarily burdensome. Although the Department of Education has recognized this and granted some flexibility, more is needed. Consideration for additional flexibility should include eliminating hurdles for retired teachers returning to the classroom or out-of-state teachers to meet the HQT requirements.

Given the practical challenges school districts face in meeting the existing HQT requirements, we recommend that the current list of core academic subjects within NCLB not be expanded.

Finally, NSBA believes that Congress must provide districts and states with the authorized funding levels that are necessary to achieve NCLB’s lofty goals.

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