
Principles for Reauthorizing the Teacher Provisions

of the No Child Left Behind Act and the Higher Education Act

In fall 2006, the Center on Education Policy (CEP) convened representatives from nearly two dozen organizations in Washington, D.C., for two “roundtable” meetings on the teacher provisions of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). CEP was uniquely positioned to sponsor these meetings because since 2002 it has been conducting a comprehensive, multiyear study of state and local implementation of NCLB. At these meetings, participants discussed their proposals for improving the federal law. More information about the meetings, the participating organizations, and the proposals can be found at www.cep-dc.org/nclb/hqt/.

Below is a summary of three guiding principles for reauthorizing the NCLB teacher provisions that emerged from these meetings and from CEP’s broader study of NCLB. These principles seemed to have the broadest support at the meetings, but they have not been approved or specifically endorsed by the participating organizations. CEP offers these ideas for policymakers to consider during the upcoming reauthorization of NCLB; some suggestions may also be relevant to the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA).

Principle 1: Encourage states to develop methods to measure teacher effectiveness and refine the NCLB definition of a highly qualified teacher.

NCLB requires states to ensure that all teachers of core academic subjects are “highly qualified” according to the law’s definition, which means that they must have a bachelor’s degree, be fully certified, and demonstrate their knowledge and skills in the subjects they teach by having sufficient academic coursework, passing a state test, or meeting other state requirements. This definition does not, however, require teachers to demonstrate that they are effective in the classroom. Since no consensus exists about the best ways to measure teacher effectiveness, it would not be advisable to add another requirement to the definition of highly qualified. A better approach would be to develop an incentive program that would encourage state innovation in measuring teacher effectiveness.

- Provide grants and incentives to states to develop their own systems to measure and report on demonstrated teacher effectiveness. These measures of teacher effectiveness could be incorporated into the states’ teacher certification and licensure systems for veteran teachers.
 - Refine the current NCLB definition of a highly qualified teacher to address the special circumstances of certain kinds of teachers, such as special education teachers and teachers in rural areas who teach multiple subjects.
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Principle 2: Support a comprehensive approach to recruiting and retaining teachers in high-need schools.

NCLB requires states to ensure that experienced, well-qualified teachers are distributed equitably among high-need schools (those with high enrollments of low-income or minority students) and lower-need schools. This requirement should be supported by a federal effort to help states and school districts recruit and retain teachers. This effort must be a comprehensive approach, rather than a piecemeal assortment of small, narrowly focused programs. States and districts should be required to use federal funds for a comprehensive program that includes at least the following elements:

- Financial incentives to recruit qualified, effective, and experienced teachers in high-need schools; incentives could include bonuses, tuition reimbursement, loan forgiveness, or housing stipends
- Financial incentives to retain qualified, effective, and experienced teachers who will make a long-term commitment to teach in high-need schools; incentives could include higher salaries, bonuses, tuition reimbursement, loan forgiveness, or housing stipends
- High-quality “residency” programs, similar to those used in medical training, developed specifically for new teachers and their mentors in high-need schools and for school leadership staff
- Improved working conditions for teachers, such as 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 stay in or become involved in high-need schools as mentors or instructional coaches or in other capacities
- Continued research-based professional development and quality in-service training for teachers and administrators
- Other initiatives, such as “grow your own” teacher programs, that may be effective in recruiting and retaining a more diverse teaching staff

Principle 3: Provide resources to states to develop and implement comprehensive data systems.

To comply fully with the NCLB requirements for highly qualified teachers and equitable teacher distribution, states need to strengthen their data systems. For example, with more comprehensive data about teacher qualifications, student-teacher ratios, teacher time spent on preparation versus teaching, and mobility rates of teachers and administrators, states and school districts could better understand which conditions contribute to teacher and student success and how to support teachers.

- Include resources in NCLB or HEA to help states develop and implement comprehensive statewide data collection systems
- Encourage greater transparency in reporting the distribution of qualified and experienced teachers