Good teaching matters. Teachers, policymakers, and parents realize that student achievement need not be prescribed by socioeconomic status, parent involvement, or race and ethnicity; on the contrary, recent evidence makes clear that regardless of the factors that students bring to school, good teachers measurably increase student learning, and good schools foster high levels of student achievement in large part because of the quality of their teachers and principals. Teacher and administrator quality may be one of, if not the most, significant factors in student achievement.

In general, there are three reasons why students are not being taught by a qualified and high-quality teacher for every year of their K-12 education:

1) Teachers are not earning licenses in the fields where they are most needed.
2) Teachers are not willing or able to teach in the geographic areas where they are most needed. Wealthy districts rarely experience shortages, low-income ones often do
3) Teachers leave the profession at high rates during their first five years on the job. Thirty-nine percent of all new teachers leave the field within five years.

Because student achievement and teacher quality are inextricably intertwined, all stakeholders—federal, state, and local policymakers—must assume ownership and responsibility for their roles in the process of ensuring high quality teacher in every classroom.

Effective teacher quality policies must include:

- State board of education authority over teacher licensure and certification, ensuring that these policies are fully integrated with the state education program.
- Preservice teacher education programs that have clearly articulated standards aligned with K-12 systems.
- Requiring the completion of an approved teacher education program (or alternative teacher preparation program) and demonstrated knowledge of basic skills, content area, child development, methods of instruction, and classroom management.
- The limitation and ultimate elimination of emergency certification.
- State-developed proficiency-based approval for teacher education programs.
- A state-established process to examine the background, including any criminal record, of all school personnel.