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Majority of State & District Officials Say NCLB's Teacher Quality Requirements Have Had Little Impact on Student Achievement

More Than One-Third of States, Three-Quarters of School Districts Say the Law Has Not Had a Major Impact on Teacher Effectiveness

WASHINGTON – August 22, 2007 – While most of the nation's school districts—about 83 percent—report that they are on track to be in full compliance with the No Child Left Behind Act's "highly qualified" teacher requirements, more than half of states and two-thirds of school districts report that the requirements have had little impact on student achievement, according to a new study from the Washington, D.C.-based Center on Education Policy.

The study, based on a survey of officials in all 50 states and a nationally representative group of nearly 350 school districts, looks closely at how states and school districts have implemented the law's teacher requirements.

More than half of all states and two-thirds (66 percent) of districts reported that the requirements have improved student achievement minimally or not at all. Only 6 percent of states and 4 percent of districts indicated that the requirements have improved achievement to a great extent.

In addition, 19 states (38 percent) and almost three-quarters (74 percent) of districts say NCLB's requirements have had a minimal or nonexistent impact on the effectiveness of the teacher workforce.

NCLB's teacher requirements—viewed by the law's sponsors as a critical step to improving student achievement—call for teachers to have a bachelor's degree, full certification, and a demonstration of subject-area expertise through completed coursework, passing a state test, or other criteria.

The report, *Implementing the No Child Left Behind Teacher Requirements*, finds that by early 2007, 66 percent of school districts reported that they were already in full compliance, and 17 percent expected to achieve full compliance by the end of the school year.

States had more difficulty complying with the highly qualified teacher provisions statewide than at the district level. When surveyed by CEP in the late fall and winter of 2006-07, just three states said they were in full compliance, and 14 more states expected to reach full compliance by the end of school year 2006-07—the deadline set by the U. S. Department of Education for all teachers to be highly qualified. At least 11 states and 6 percent of districts acknowledged that they are unlikely to ever meet the highly qualified requirements for 100 percent of their teachers.

Compliance is more difficult for states, according to the report, because of the large number of teachers involved, disparities in school districts' resources and capacity to meet the requirements, and persistent shortages or staffing problems.

“Despite efforts to comply with the law’s teacher quality requirements, the effect of these requirements in raising student achievement and improving teacher quality continues to be met with skepticism,” said Jack Jennings, CEP’s president and CEO.

Many state and district officials felt the NCLB definition of a highly qualified teacher was too narrowly focused on content knowledge. Survey respondents and interviewees who participated in case studies prepared for the report suggested revising the definition to take into account teachers’ effectiveness in the classroom and other qualities essential to a good teacher, such as the ability to relate to students and the ability to effectively teach students from different backgrounds and differentiate instruction according to students’ needs.

Special education teachers pose the greatest challenge to meeting the highly qualified requirements, with 39 of the 47 responding states (83 percent) and 47 percent of districts reportedly having difficulty complying with the law. The most common strategies used by school districts to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers were induction/mentoring programs and content-driven professional development.

Equitable Distribution of Teachers

The report finds varying degrees of progress toward NCLB’s requirement that states ensure low-income and minority students are not taught by inexperienced, unqualified, or out-of-field teachers at higher rates than other children. Only five states reported that as a result of the law, the distribution had become more equitable to a great extent, 17 said it had become somewhat more equitable, and another 17 states said it had become minimally more equitable.

A majority (55%) of districts with more than one school reported that the distribution of experienced, well-qualified teachers has always been equitable or that no real difference exists in their district based on schools’ poverty or minority enrollments.

The report is from CEP’s *From the Capital to the Classroom* series of reports tracking the implementation of the law in its fifth year. The report includes the following recommendations drawn from what has been learned about the implementation of the teacher quality requirements not only from this year’s study, but also from the ideas that emerged from two roundtable discussions CEP hosted in the fall of 2006 as well as the previous four years of research on NCLB implementation.

- **Encourage states to develop methods to measure teacher effectiveness.** Grants and incentives should be provided to states to develop their own systems to measure and report on the demonstrated effectiveness of teachers.
- **Refine the current federal definition of a highly qualified teacher to address the special circumstances of certain types of teachers, such as** special education teachers or teachers in rural areas who teach multiple subjects.
- **Adopt a comprehensive approach to recruiting and retaining teachers in high-need schools.** The requirement for equitable distribution of experienced, well-qualified teachers among high-need and lower-need schools should be supported through ESEA by a comprehensive approach, rather than a piecemeal assortment of small, narrowly focused programs.
- **Provide federal assistance to states to develop and implement comprehensive data systems.** States and school districts could better understand which conditions contribute to teacher and student success and what supports are needed to help teachers with more comprehensive data.

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Based in Washington, D.C. and founded in January 1995, by Jack Jennings, the Center on Education Policy is a national, independent advocate for public education and for more effective public schools. The Center works to help Americans better understand the role of public education in a democracy and the need to improve the academic quality of public schools. The Center does not represent any special interests. Instead the Center helps citizens make sense of the conflicting opinions and perceptions about public education and create conditions that will lead to better public schools.