



MISSING THE MARK:

An Education Trust Analysis of Teacher-Equity Plans

This summer, education leaders in each state were called upon to confront and remedy a fundamental inequity in public schools: the practice of disproportionately assigning inexperienced, unqualified and out-of-field teachers to poor and minority children. Although long a requirement of the No Child Left Behind law, states had never been forced to tackle this issue before. But on July 7, each state submitted their data on the problem to the U.S. Department of Education – along with their plans to fix it.

Sadly, very few states used this opportunity to right an injustice. Most states failed to follow instructions and analyze inequity in a way that tells the public whether both groups of children – those of color and those living in poverty – get their fair share of teaching talent. Most failed to propose strong plans for addressing inequities. And almost no states submitted “equity plans” that proposed meaningful, measurable goals for achieving fairness in the distribution of teacher talent.

It’s important to note that the equity plans that states were required to submit last month go beyond the highly qualified (HQT) provisions of the No Child Left Behind law.¹ First, the equity-plan provisions represent the only place in NCLB that requires states to focus specifically on the opportunities afforded to *minority* students, whereas the HQT provisions are focused only on disparities between poor students and their more affluent peers. In addition, the equity provisions look beyond the question of whether all *teachers* are highly qualified to ask whether poor and minority students are taught disproportionately by out-of-field teachers. Finally, the equity provisions oblige states to ensure that poor and minority students don’t have more than their fair share of *inexperienced* teachers, a subject which is not addressed in the highly qualified definitions.

States clearly seem confused about what they were supposed to do in preparing the equity plans. Some of this can be attributed to the fact that the teacher-equity plan provisions have not previously received much attention. The U.S. Department of Education all but denied the existence of these provisions for four years, demonstrating disregard for the rights of poor and minority students. The state submissions make clear that guidance and leadership from the Department still is lacking.

The Education Trust examined teacher-equity plans from all states and the District of Columbia. What follows is an analysis of what the states included (and what they did not), some examples of particularly good plans and recommendations for moving forward. Ultimately, we conclude that the overwhelming majority of states should be required to start over, with clearer guidance and more assistance from the Department of Education, to get this process moving in the right direction.

Why Is Equity In Teacher Quality So Important?

The simple truth is that this country cannot close achievement gaps without closing teacher-quality gaps. While the available measures of teacher quality are far from a perfect indication of teachers’ strengths, the equity-plan requirement represents the will of Congress that the states actively pursue justice for poor and minority students. As much as we recognize the acute need to develop more sophisticated measures of teacher quality, there is no excuse for ignoring inequality we know exists based on the measures we have.

When all of the proxies for teacher quality, imperfect as they are, place poor and minority students at a disadvantage, there is a professional and a moral obligation to act.² The equity-plan provisions in NCLB, along with the highly qualified teacher provisions, add a legal obligation.

Failure to Acknowledge Injustice

Most states either could not or simply did not measure inequality as required by the law.

For the past three years, states have been required to submit data on the percentage of core academic courses taught by highly qualified teachers. The states were supposed to report this data on classes in all schools and also to compare teacher quality in high- and low-poverty schools.³ Both data quality and the substance of state definitions have been problematic.

This year, the USDOE required each state to submit its equity plan by July 7, outlining how the state would measure, address, and publicly report progress in eliminating the unfair distribution of teacher talent. To comply with the law, each state had to look at inequality in four areas:

- Whether *low-income students* are more likely than other students to be assigned to *unqualified* or *out-of-field teachers* in core academic courses;
- Whether *minority students* are more likely than other students to be assigned to *unqualified* or *out-of-field teachers* in core academic courses;
- Whether *low-income students* are more likely than other students to be taught by *inexperienced teachers*;
- Whether *minority students* are more likely than other students to be taught by *inexperienced teachers*.

The majority of states (34) merely restated the “highly qualified” data they had previously reported. Only 10 states appropriately analyzed whether minority students were taught disproportionately by teachers who were not “highly qualified.”⁴ Only four states looked at whether students growing up in poverty were taught disproportionately by inexperienced teachers, and just three states – Ohio, Nevada, and Tennessee – looked at inequality in all four domains. (See Table, p. 6).

All told, 40 states did not analyze whether minority students were being shortchanged in teacher quality. This can’t help but cast doubt on the public commitment to closing achievement gaps.

100% Highly Qualified Teachers: Necessary But Not Sufficient

More than half the states (27) asserted that they would comply with their equity obligations by focusing exclusively on compliance with the highly

Focus on *Inexperience* not *Average Experience*

Experience is not equivalent to effectiveness, but concentrating novice teachers with poor and minority students is bad for students and bad for the teachers themselves. Of course, there are the first-year teachers who are extraordinary, and veteran teachers who are in need of improvement. However, the research is consistent, clear and compelling: First- and second-year teachers aren’t as good as they will become. There is a range in new teachers’ effectiveness. Some are better than others, but all of them have a steep learning curve once they are in the classroom. Indeed, teachers themselves often look back on their first year and vividly recall the foibles and deficiencies to which their students were exposed.

If we continue to cluster inexperienced teachers in the schools with mostly poor and minority students, we are levying a heavy burden on the students who most need practiced, skilled, tested -- and proven -- teachers. We cannot continue to pretend that we’re committed to closing achievement gaps while turning a blind eye to the practice of throwing brand new teachers into schools with poor and minority students without a cadre of more experienced teachers to guide them, to support them, to induct them into the school and into teaching.

None of this should be interpreted to diminish the contributions of Teach For America or other programs that bring new teachers into the classroom. The fact is that every teacher was once new, even the best. The point is that students should not be assigned to novice teachers for multiple years in a row, or assigned to schools where most of the teachers are new every year.

The first step in fixing the problem is to create a definition of “inexperienced” teachers. Very few states did so in their equity plans. While the research in this area is evolving, our reading of the best studies suggests defining “inexperienced” as teachers with up to two or three years of experience.¹⁷

Whatever the definition, states need an accurate picture of the distribution of inexperienced teachers, plans to address any inequality and goals for measuring and reporting progress. States and districts must avoid the temptation to analyze the average years of experience in high-poverty and high-minority schools compared to other schools—average years of experience can conceal disparities between schools in the percentage of novice teachers. Finally, states must report these data to the public so they know whether low-income and minority children get their fair share of experienced teachers.

qualified teacher provisions. This misses the mark. First, it ignores inequality in the distribution of inexperienced teachers. Second, it appears that four states, Colorado, Hawaii, Kentucky, and North

Carolina, conflated *teachers* being highly qualified with all *classes* being taught by teachers who are specifically qualified in the subject.⁵ This means states have to focus on connecting the classes to the teachers who are teaching them, not just on teachers' qualifications generally.

It is possible for every teacher in a school to be “highly qualified” and still have classes taught by out-of-field teachers. For instance, a teacher might be considered highly qualified to teach social studies but is assigned to teach math classes. States need to examine whether each class is taught by a highly qualified teacher who has *demonstrated content knowledge in the subject of the course*.

“Highly qualified” represents the minimum standard for determining whether a teacher is qualified. While states need to strengthen the definitions of what it takes to be highly qualified, this is one of the few measures we have available right now. Therefore, states need to use this measure to assess whether educational opportunities are equal.

Brand New Analysis of Brand New Teachers

The equity plans require states to examine the assignment of inexperienced teachers – that is, novice teachers who have yet to fully develop their skills. They do not require states to look at the distribution of *experienced* teachers, or to compare average *years of experience* across schools.

Research leaves no doubt that teachers' classroom effectiveness climbs steeply over their first few years in the classroom.⁶ Under the equity plans, states have a legal obligation to end the practice of using classrooms of poor and minority students as testing grounds for brand-new teachers who learn to teach at the expense of these children, then transfer to teach in schools that serve fewer of them.

Only four states looked at the connection between poor students and inexperienced teachers – Nevada, New York, Ohio, and Tennessee. Worse, only three of those four states – Nevada, Ohio, and Tennessee – reported on the distribution of inexperienced teachers to minority students.

Strong Implementation

Thankfully, three states – Nevada, Ohio, Tennessee – analyzed data on all four dimensions of inequitable

distribution identified in the law. A fourth state, New York, also offered some analysis on all four measures. While New York did not include data on minority students, the state at least identified which high-poverty districts are also high-minority. New York acknowledged the problem, albeit with imperfect data.

Strong, Targeted Strategies

Two of these states in particular – Nevada and Ohio – presented both solid data and well-developed, targeted strategies to resolve the inequitable distribution of unqualified as well as inexperienced teachers in their states.

Nevada

Nevada used the equity-plan requirement as an opportunity to examine its data and to take stock of the approaches being used to improve teacher quality generally and those that are aimed specifically at inequities.

In addition to analyzing the distribution of teachers with less than three years of experience by school poverty and by minority enrollment, Nevada did something that no other state did. Nevada submitted three equity plans: the state plan and plans from the two districts that serve the most low-income and minority students in the state – Clark (Las Vegas) and Washoe (Reno) counties – where the data indicated the greatest inequity in teacher distribution.

The state and district plans all include specific, targeted strategies for balancing the teacher talent. As an example of a targeted strategy, the legislature has appropriated \$5 million per year for “grants to school districts to adopt a program of performance pay and enhanced compensation for recruitment, retention, and mentoring of licensed personnel at at-risk schools.”⁷ The two district plans include many innovative, targeted strategies to address the inequitable distribution of teaching talent. For example, Clark County monitors teacher transfer requests and “denies the transfer of out-of-field teachers to high-poverty, low-performing schools.”⁸ The district also gives principals in high-need schools an advantage in assembling their teaching faculty. They are allowed two months to consider transfer requests from experienced teachers before

principals of other schools can recruit them.⁹ This commitment to equity is especially laudable in Clark County, a district that must hire 1,000 teachers each year to cope with rapid population growth. If Clark County can focus on the twin challenges of having enough qualified teachers and ensuring poor and minority students get their fair share of teaching talent, it begs the question why other districts and states cannot follow their lead.

Ohio

Ohio's plan lays out 68 specific strategies, all "targeted on identifying, correcting and monitoring any inequitable distribution of the state's highly qualified, experienced teachers."¹⁰ Each "key strategy" is aligned with the findings from the data analyses and includes progress measures, mechanisms of public reporting and monitoring from the state. The plan concludes with specific strategies by which the state will "monitor distribution patterns in local education agencies."¹¹

Ohio and Nevada weren't the only states to propose some promising approaches. Many states included nuggets of innovation and potentially effective strategies in their plans. Montana, for example, is developing regional teacher-sharing arrangements by which selected highly qualified teachers are assigned to work in schools in adjoining districts with hard-to-fill positions in core academic subjects.¹² Several states, including Alabama, Connecticut, Maryland, and Texas, allow retired highly qualified teachers to return to the classroom without losing their retirement benefits.¹³ Although these types of targeted proposals appeared in some state plans, overall, they were sprinkled within vague plans that lacked the data to properly target the strategies or evaluate their effectiveness.

Unfortunately, many of the strategies were not at all targeted to high-poverty, high-minority schools. Instead, some states described strategies aimed at improving teacher quality overall. New York, for instance, helps teachers to get additional certification in shortage areas, but there are no provisions to encourage these teachers to work in high-poverty or high-minority schools.¹⁴ Several states described "working conditions surveys" that they planned to distribute to teachers across the state, but did not describe a plan for using the data or the findings to improve teacher quality in low-income and minority

schools. While these might represent constructive teacher policies, they won't do much to solve inequitable distribution problems for low-income and minority students *because they weren't designed to*.

No Measurable Goals

Even when state plans included clear proposals targeted to reduce inequality, almost none of the states included measurable goals, timelines, or metrics for evaluating the success of the strategies. Stakeholders – including community members, parents, business leaders, policymakers, religious leaders, and education leaders – will have no way of knowing whether the distribution problem is getting better or worse. There is no way to measure progress and no way for these communities to hold the state, district, and school leaders accountable.

Plan to Have a Plan

Three states – Missouri, New Mexico and Utah – still have not analyzed their data or come up with any equity plans at all. Instead, they have plans to have plans, but no action on this agenda right now. This requirement has been around since the law was signed four years ago, and more than six months have elapsed from the time USDOE put states on notice that the equity plans had to be submitted. Yet these states haven't found the time or the will to confront these issues. One hopes the delay at least leads to a more thoughtful process and better product in the end.

Flawed Analysis

Other states used flawed data analysis to conclude that no inequities existed. For example, Iowa examined the average years of teaching experience in the Title I schools compared to the state average – not the percentage of inexperienced teachers – and concluded that there is not an equity problem: "More experienced teachers are teaching in schools with higher percentages of low-income students."¹⁵ North Dakota did not report any data and explained, "[the] state has achieved 100% compliance with its annual measurable objective of fully meeting the provisions of the Highly Qualified Teacher law."¹⁶

Conclusion

It is clear that a lot of thought and a lot of time went into the state submissions, but it's just as clear that states did not understand their obligations or were unprepared to meet them. Either way, the plans that emerged from most states do not comply with the law, nor hold much promise that poor and minority students will finally get their fair share of teacher talent.

Public education cannot achieve its mission without addressing the pervasive inequality in teacher distribution. If we let this moment pass without addressing these issues, it will undermine the progress of poor and minority students and fuel skepticism about the sincerity and seriousness of efforts to address inequality in educational opportunity. Officials from the U.S. Department of Education, state leaders from inside and outside government, and advocates for poor and minority communities must all come together to craft new solutions to these old problems.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **The U.S. Department of Education should issue much more explicit guidance regarding what is required under the law, and the overwhelming majority of states should be required to submit new equity plans.** Guidance should include a detailed rubric of the questions states need to answer, level of specificity required in data analysis, measurable goals, and commitment of resources and technical assistance. New plans should be required before the end of 2006. If states propose to extend this timeline (e.g., for the consideration of legislative changes in furtherance of the equity plan), it should be granted on a case-by-case basis with an interim report due no later than the end of the year.
- **States should convene new working groups to develop equity plans.** With additional guidance, the states should analyze the required data needed to produce the equity plan; encourage public participation in crafting the plans, with a special emphasis on including advocates from communities of color and low-income communities; propose targeted strategies to ameliorate inequities; commit financial and human resources to their plans; and set goals for measuring and publicly reporting progress.
- **Acknowledge the role and responsibilities of districts.** States need to understand their responsibility to hold local school districts to their equity obligations, but also to help districts to meet them. States cannot sit idly by if there are districts that can't recruit and retain the teachers they need. One of the underlying goals of NCLB is to place responsibility at the state level. States should follow the lead of Nevada and consider district-level equity plans to be integral components of their own equity plans. If a district is in need, the state must step up with resources, technical assistance, and an ongoing commitment to addressing the situation.
- **Title I and Title II administrative funds should be conditioned on states entering into compliance agreements with clear timelines.** The USDOE should demand that states adopt a schedule for completion of the plan, benchmarks of good-faith implementation, an ongoing reporting schedule, and measurable progress goals on which the state will routinely report.
- **The Secretary of Education should create a new, high-level position to advocate for the teacher quality agenda both outside and within the Department.** States need consistent, specific, and sound advice in this area. We call on the Secretary to appoint a high-profile officer to coordinate all of the Department's teacher quality-related initiatives, and to report directly to the Secretary on the progress or lack thereof on this issue.
- **Elevate equity in public reporting.** First, the data from the equity plans should be added to the Consolidated State Performance Reports that states must submit to the federal government annually to demonstrate compliance with NCLB. The Department thus far has chosen not to include data required for the equity plans. In order to elevate these issues to their rightful place on the agenda, the data should be annually reported to USDOE. In addition, regulations should articulate state obligations to publicly and regularly report progress. Finally, Congress should consider adding data to school and district report cards that would indicate the percentage of novice teachers and the percentage of annual teacher turnover as compared to the district and/or state averages.
- **Ensure data systems that can support the equity analyses we need.** The lack of data in the state's equity plans is indicative of the state's lack of good data generally. Having reliable, longitudinal data is critically important to diagnosing problems and evaluating success. Many states reported that they did not have data systems that could answer all four questions. Just as NCLB required states to administer additional assessments and *added significant resources to cover associated costs*, so the NCLB reauthorization should require states to build and maintain longitudinal data systems and *should include resources to get this job done*. This would allow the Department to set some basic quality standards and could ensure that teacher records are matched with student achievement records over time.

STATE	Measured and reported the percent of classes taught by HQTs in high-poverty versus low-poverty schools	Measured and reported the percent of classes taught by HQTs in high-minority versus low-minority schools	Measured and reported the percent of inexperienced teachers in high-poverty versus low-poverty schools	Measured and reported the percent of inexperienced teachers in high-minority versus low-minority schools
Alabama				
Alaska	✓			
Arizona				
Arkansas	✓			
California	✓			
Colorado				
Connecticut	✓			
Delaware	✓	✓		
District of Columbia	✓			
Florida	✓			
Georgia	✓			
Hawaii				
Idaho				
Illinois				
Indiana				
Iowa	✓			
Kansas	✓			
Kentucky				
Louisiana				
Maine	✓			
Maryland	✓			
Massachusetts				
Michigan	✓			
Minnesota	✓			
Mississippi	✓			
Missouri				
Montana	✓			
Nebraska				
Nevada	✓	✓	✓	✓
New Hampshire	✓			
New Jersey	✓			
New Mexico	✓			
New York	✓	*	✓	*
North Carolina				
North Dakota				
Ohio	✓	✓	✓	✓
Oklahoma	✓			
Oregon				
Pennsylvania	✓	✓		
Rhode Island	✓			
South Carolina	✓	✓		
South Dakota	✓	✓		
Tennessee	✓	✓	✓	✓
Texas	✓	✓		
Utah				
Virginia	✓			
Vermont	✓	✓		
Washington				
West Virginia	✓	✓		
Wisconsin				
Wyoming	✓			

* New York represents a special case. New York placed all the districts into poverty deciles, using the percentage of low-income students. Then, the state calculated the percentage of minority students for each poverty decile. The state then identified a positive correlation between high-poverty and high-minority school districts and then examined the distribution of inexperienced teachers. While New York went further than any other state besides Ohio, Nevada, and Tennessee, it ultimately did not have sufficient data because (1) its analysis focused on the school-district level, not on individual schools or students and (2) New York's analysis does not specifically include minority students and therefore, cannot speak to teacher equity for minority students.

Endnotes

- ¹ In order to be eligible for Title I funds, each state must have a plan to “ensure that poor and minority children are not taught at higher rates than other children by inexperienced, unqualified, or out of field teachers.” ESEA Section 1111(b)(8)(C). The provision for school districts can be found at ESEA Section 1112(c)(1)(L).
- ² For a recent analysis of this problem, see “Teaching Inequality: How Poor and Minority Students are Shortchanged on Teacher Quality” at <http://www2.edtrust.org/EdTrust/Press+Room/teacherquality2006.htm>
- ³ For these Consolidated State Performance Reports, please see: <http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/consolidated/index.html#csp2003>.
- ⁴ New York represents a special case. New York placed all the districts into poverty deciles, using the percentage of low-income students. Then, the state calculated the percentage of minority students for each poverty decile. The state then identified a positive correlation between high-poverty and high-minority school districts and then examined the distribution of inexperienced teachers. While New York went further than any other state besides Ohio, Nevada, and Tennessee, it ultimately did not have sufficient data because (1) its analysis focused on the school-district level, not on individual schools or students and (2) New York’s analysis does not specifically include minority students and therefore, cannot speak to teacher equity for minority students.
- ⁵ There is legitimate concern about whether states have asked teachers to demonstrate adequate content knowledge. These concerns apply both to licensure tests as well as alternate systems set up for veteran teachers. See, “Telling the Truth (Or Not) About Highly Qualified Teachers: New State Data” by The Education Trust at www.edtrust.org; “Searching the Attic: How States Are Responding to the Nation’s Goal of Placing a Highly Qualified Teacher in Every Classroom” by the National Council on Teacher Quality at www.nctq.org; and Not Good Enough: A Content Analysis of Teacher Licensing Exams by The Education Trust at www.edtrust.org. For the purposes of this report, we are concerned with equity in the assignment of teachers who have met the state’s standards, whatever those might be.
- ⁶ See a recent analysis on teachers’ effectiveness in the early years of teaching, “Identifying Effective Teachers Using Performance on the Job” by Robert Gordon, Thomas J. Kane, and Douglas O. Staiger at The Hamilton Project: http://www.brookings.edu/views/papers/200604hamilton_1.pdf. For a summary of the research on experience and teachers’ effects, see *Teacher Quality: Understanding the Effectiveness of Teacher Attributes* by Jennifer King Rice.
- ⁷ Nevada Equity Plan, p. 46. Available: <http://www.ed.gov/programs/teacherqual/hqtplans/nv.doc>.
- ⁸ Nevada Equity Plan, p. 43. Available: <http://www.ed.gov/programs/teacherqual/hqtplans/nv.doc>.
- ⁹ Nevada Equity Plan, p. 52. Available: <http://www.ed.gov/programs/teacherqual/hqtplans/nv.doc>.
- ¹⁰ Ohio’s Equity Plan, p. 13. Available: <http://www.ed.gov/programs/teacherqual/hqtplans/ohep.doc>.
- ¹¹ Ohio’s Equity Plan, p. 36. Available: <http://www.ed.gov/programs/teacherqual/hqtplans/ohep.doc>
- ¹² Montana’s Equity Plan, p. 17. Available: <http://www.ed.gov/programs/teacherqual/hqtplans/mt.pdf>.
- ¹³ All state plans are available at: <http://www.ed.gov/programs/teacherqual/hqtplans/index.html#fl>.
- ¹⁴ New York’s Equity Plan, p. 17. Available: <http://www.ed.gov/programs/teacherqual/hqtplans/ny.doc>.
- ¹⁵ Iowa’s Equity Plan, p. 4. Available: <http://www.ed.gov/programs/teacherqual/hqtplans/iaep.pdf>.
- ¹⁶ North Dakota’s Equity Plan, p. 25. Available: <http://www.ed.gov/programs/teacherqual/hqtplans/nd.doc>.
- ¹⁷ See a recent analysis on teachers’ effectiveness in the early years of teaching, “Identifying Effective Teachers Using Performance on the Job” by Robert Gordon, Thomas J. Kane, and Douglas O. Staiger at The Hamilton Project: http://www.brookings.edu/views/papers/200604hamilton_1.pdf. See also, How Changes in Entry Requirements Alter the Teacher Workforce and Affect Student Achievement by Donald Boyd, Hamilton Lankford, Pamela Grossman, Susanna Loeb, and James Wyckoff at <http://www.teacherpolicyresearch.org/ResearchPapers/tabid/103/Default.aspx>. For a summary of the research on experience and teachers’ effects, see *Teacher Quality: Understanding the Effectiveness of Teacher Attributes* by Jennifer King Rice.

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About the Education Trust

The Education Trust, Inc. was created to promote high academic achievement for all students, at all levels – pre-kindergarten through college. While we know that all schools and colleges could better serve their students, our work focuses on the schools and colleges most often left behind in plans to improve education: those serving African-American, Latino, Native American and low-income students.

The Education Trust works side-by-side with policymakers, parents, education professionals, community and business leaders – in cities and towns across the country – who are trying to transform their schools and colleges into institutions that genuinely serve all students. We also bring lessons learned in local communities back to Washington to help inform national policy debates.

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