

Implementing NCLB: Key Teacher Quality Provisions

Why Focus on Teacher Quality?

A large and growing body of research makes clear the dramatic impact teachers have on student achievement. Effective teachers can help students make enormous gains, while ineffective teachers can do lasting damage.¹ Research also shows that low-income and minority students are disproportionately taught by underqualified teachers, including teachers who are out-of-field, inexperienced, or fail to meet their state's teacher licensing and certification standards.²

Recognizing the data on both the importance of good teaching and the inequality in the distribution of teacher talent, Congress set out, when it passed No Child Left Behind (NCLB), to take some real steps to improve the quality of the teaching force in general and, most importantly, the teaching force in schools receiving Title I funds.

The teacher quality provisions of NCLB require states to adopt minimum standards for who can be considered a "highly qualified" teacher, measure the extent to which the state provides such teachers to all students, and adopt goals and plans to ensure that all students are taught by qualified teachers. In addition, the law calls on states to publicly report their plans and their progress on teacher quality.

Key Teacher Quality Provisions in NCLB

STEP ONE: Define what it means to be "highly qualified," for new and veteran teachers.

Each state needs to define its requirements for "highly qualified" teachers. While states have broad discretion in setting these requirements, they must include a college degree; demonstration of subject-matter knowledge; and, if applicable, meeting any state licensure/certification requirements.

- New elementary teachers must demonstrate subject-matter knowledge by passing a state-adopted test of at least verbal and math abilities.
- New middle and high school teachers must demonstrate subject-matter knowledge specifically in each of the subjects they will be assigned to teach. Subject-matter knowledge can be shown through majoring in the subject in college (or completing courses equivalent to a major), earning an advanced degree or credential in the subject, or passing a rigorous state test in the subject.

Veteran teachers also need to demonstrate subject-matter knowledge. While they don't have to take the same tests as new teachers (although that is one way to satisfy the requirement), states need to develop objective evaluations to ensure that experienced teachers have the subject-matter knowledge the state has determined teachers need in order to teach students up to state standards.

Note: While states have total discretion in setting the level of subject-matter knowledge that both new and veteran teachers need to demonstrate, it's important that states avoid the temptation to set these standards too low to ensure the depth and breadth of knowledge required to help students meet high standards.³

STEP TWO: Determine how many teachers do not currently meet standards.

The next thing states and school districts need to do is determine how many teachers currently don't meet the state's standards for what constitutes a "highly qualified" teacher. By September 2003, each state needs to submit its most current data to the U.S. Department of Education.

¹ See *Good Teaching Matters: How Well-Qualified Teachers Can Close the Gap*, Education Trust, Summer 1998.

² See *All Talk, No Action: Putting an End to Out-of-Field Teaching*, Education Trust, August 2002, and *Honor in the Boxcar: Equalizing Teacher Quality*, Education Trust, Spring 2000.

³ For an analysis of state teacher licensure exams, see *Not Good Enough: A Content Analysis of Teacher Licensing Examinations*, Education Trust, Spring 1999.

Recognizing the problem of the uneven distribution of teacher talent, NCLB also requires states and school districts to measure the disproportionate assignment of unqualified, inexperienced and out-of-field teachers to low-income and minority students.

STEP THREE: Establish goals and plans for raising teacher quality.

NCLB sets the goal of all teachers meeting their state's qualifications by the end of the 2005-2006 school year. After analyzing their data, the next step for states and school districts is to adopt goals and develop plans for increasing teacher quality—and remedying maldistribution. Goals for increasing teacher quality must be submitted to the U.S. Department of Education by September 2003. State plans also must include:

- professional development to assist veteran teachers and new teachers alike to meet the state's standards by 2006; and,
- information on how states and districts will measure and address disproportionate assignment.

To begin to address the disproportionate assignment issue, starting in 2002-03, schools that receive federal Title I money must hire only teachers who meet the state's definition for a "highly qualified" teacher.

ONGOING: Report teacher quality and distribution data.

Report Cards. Starting whenever they publicly report data from the 2002-2003 school year in institutional "report cards", states and districts must:

- report their progress on increasing teacher quality overall, down to the school level (i.e. What percentage of the state's, district's and each school's teachers are "highly qualified"?)
- report the percentage of classes that are NOT taught by qualified teachers, and compare those percentages in schools with the highest and lowest concentrations of students in poverty.

Distribution of Teacher Talent. In addition, states and school districts need to report their progress on ensuring that low-income and minority students get their fair share of highly qualified teachers (this is not required to be part of the report card).

Principal Reports. Principals in Title I schools must file written certifications every year that say whether the school has complied with the teacher quality provisions of the law.

Parent Right to Know. Schools must notify parents in writing when their children are taught for four or more consecutive weeks by a teacher that doesn't meet the state's definition of "highly qualified." In addition, parents have expanded rights to know about the qualifications of their children's teachers.

A few teacher quality questions worth asking - (What states should be able to tell you...):

1. What does the state require to be considered a "highly qualified teacher?"
2. What system has the state put into place to measure and address the disproportionate assignment of poor and minority students to unqualified, out-of-field, and inexperienced teachers?
3. What kinds of schools or particular subject areas have the most underqualified teachers? What strategies have been put into place address these challenges? (This is also something you can ask of universities/teacher preparation programs – what are they doing to help the state meet these challenges? What plans do they have in place to increase the quality and quantity of teachers they attract and graduate – especially in high-need areas?)
4. How is the state/school district implementing the parent right-to-know provisions?
5. What system is in place to ensure that principals have filed the required annual certification of compliance with the teacher quality provisions?
6. How exactly is the state going to identify which veteran teachers do not meet the definition of "highly qualified?" Who will help those teachers meet the standard by 2005-2006?

Timeline of Some Key Teacher Quality Provisions in NCLB

Beginning in 2002-2003 (although not yet implemented in most jurisdictions):

- Schools receiving Title I funds must hire *only* teachers who meet the state’s definition for a “highly qualified” teacher.
- Schools must notify parents when their children are taught for four or more consecutive weeks by a teacher who doesn’t meet the state’s qualifications.

September 2003:

- Each state must submit to the U.S. Department of Education its most current data on how many teachers don’t currently meet the state’s definition of “highly qualified” teachers.
- States must report the percentage of *classes* not taught by highly qualified teachers in the state as a whole and report the different percentages for the highest- and lowest-poverty schools.
- Each state must adopt and submit goals for increasing teacher quality.

When Publicly Reporting 2002-2003 Data (dates will vary by state):

- States and districts must report (on their report card) progress on increasing teacher quality overall, down to the school level.
- States and districts must report (on their report card) the percentage of classes NOT taught by a qualified teacher, and compare teacher qualifications in the highest- and lowest-poverty schools.
- States and districts must report progress on ensuring that low-income and minority students get their fair share of “highly qualified” teachers (this is not required to be part of the report card).

2005-2006:

- ALL teachers must meet the state’s definition of “highly qualified” by the end of the 2005-2006 school year.