

Talking about Teacher Quality Provisions in NCLB

Background

Under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) all teachers must be “highly qualified” by the 2005-2006 school year. Annual report cards issued this school year will alert parents if their child’s teacher is not “highly qualified” under the law, which means teachers must:

- 1) Hold a diploma from a four-year college;
- 2) Hold full or standard state certification; and,
- 3) Be able to “demonstrate competency” in their subject area, which can include having a major in the subject they teach or passing a subject matter test.

According to Stateline.org, teams of federal education experts will be available to provide technical assistance to states this summer to help them meet the new requirements. A new U.S. Education Department report to Congress illustrates how difficult it will be for states to comply. Using an approximation of the highly qualified teacher definition, only about half of the English and math secondary teachers and 55 percent of science and social studies teachers are considered “highly qualified” under the new law, even though they may be fully licensed and hold a bachelor’s degree.

The report’s definition of “highly qualified” did not include teachers who have demonstrated subject competency by meeting high standards of evaluation or teachers who would be considered highly qualified if they are assigned to teach the subject areas in which they have a major.

A General Accounting Office (GAO) report warns that most states’ teacher quality data systems and records are out of date and unable to track NCLB requirements. “Officials from 7 of the 8 states we visited said they did not have data systems that could track teacher qualifications by subject, which they needed to determine if a highly qualified teacher taught each core subject ...” (page 8).

The GAO study also reveals the difficulty states face in meeting the goals, citing low teaching salaries, a lack of incentive programs and an absence of career ladders. Twenty-three of the 37 states surveyed reported teacher shortages in high-need subject areas — math, science and special education. Rural states face particularly acute problems meeting the certification challenges, since teachers are often assigned to teach multiple subject areas.

Parent and voter perceptions

Teachers and teaching are not seen as the top problems, but they are seen as the logical solutions to improving schools

- Six in 10 parents and 7 in 10 voters said “no matter what the school does to help, most students that are having difficulty will not meet state standards in reading and math until more parents get involved with their children’s education.” (The Business Roundtable, 2003)

Know where your state stands

- **Education Week’s Quality Counts 2003** provides state-by-state assessments of teaching quality, using a range of indicators, including teacher qualifications, state incentives to recruit and retain teachers, and the number of nationally board certified teachers: www.edweek.org/sreports/qc03
- **Department of Education Report to Congress** reports the percentage of teachers in each state who are on emergency waivers and the number of “highly qualified” teachers in each subject area: www.title2.org
- **General Accounting Office report on state capacity to comply with NCLB**: www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-631
- **Education Commission of the States** reports on state compliance with NCLB: www.ecs.org

Messages and Messengers

1. Lead with solutions that treat teachers like the competent, deeply committed professionals they are.
2. Acknowledge the value of teaching and thank standout teachers in your state.
3. Cite research showing that good teaching is critical to student success.
4. If possible, use teachers as messengers.
5. Explain differences between the new federal rules and the state's current system.

- 93 percent favor testing teachers on knowledge of subject/teaching skills
- 91 percent favor continued training programs for teachers
- 83 percent favor increased salaries for teachers even if it means paying higher taxes
- 73 percent support testing student achievement and holding teachers and administrators responsible for learning
- 64 percent reject lowering standards to hire more teachers

**A National Priority: Americans Speak on Teacher Quality, Hart-Teeter, 2002*

Voters are concerned that students with the most need have less-qualified teachers

- Eight in ten Californians say there are too few qualified teachers and understand that the state's poorest communities are most likely to have the least experienced teachers
- Two in 10 white parents think it is common to hire teachers without credentials (4 in 10 Latino parents think it is common practice to hire teachers without credentials)
- More than 75 percent think it is an excellent or good idea to pay teachers more to take assignments in high-poverty communities

**Focus on Quality: Californians' Views on Teachers and Teaching, Belden Russonello & Stewart for the Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning, 2002*

The public values "softer" qualities (kindness, concern for students) as much as certification

- It is as important for teachers to be patient (92 percent consider it essential) as it is for them to be trained in how to teach (88 percent consider it essential). A sense of humor in a teacher is just as important (70 percent) as experience as a student teacher (72 percent)

**Focus on Quality: Californians' Views on Teachers and Teaching, Belden Russonello & Stewart for the Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning, 2002*

Teachers are the most credible messengers to talk to parents about education reforms (favored above academic, political and business leaders)

**The Business Roundtable, 2000*

Teachers' views

- 70 percent of teachers want more information about incorporating standards and testing in their lesson plans. (Belden Russonello & Stewart poll for *Education Week*, 2000)
- 60 percent of teachers say they feel unprepared to teach to higher standards and increased use of technology (National Center for Education Statistics, 1999)
- 76 percent of teachers surveyed believe teachers are the "scapegoats for all problems facing education." (Public Agenda, 2003)
- 91 percent of teachers surveyed believe they are doing the best job they can, considering low levels of parent involvement. (Public Agenda, 2003)

New Jersey Gov. James McGreevey hosted town halls across the state to listen to teachers and parents. Based on what he heard, he initiated:

- partnerships with colleges to implement uniform standards for teacher preparation programs,
- raising the grade point average required to meet teacher certification in 2004,
- demanding an end to out-of-field teaching, citing findings from the Education Trust that one of eight high school classes in New Jersey is taught by teachers without a major or minor in the subject area.



Managing the teaching quality message

Some of the tumult and attention around the new NCLB teaching quality provisions can be an opportunity to highlight the importance of teaching quality and to inform parents and voters about what your state is doing to recruit and retain the best teachers. Following are some best practices and lessons:

- **Lead with solutions.** Be proactive and positive and showcase your state's action to improve teaching quality. Some solutions include: creating partnerships with local colleges and/or online courses to improve teacher preparation and provide teachers with more opportunities to sharpen their skills, providing alternative routes to certification to encourage second-career high-quality professional development opportunities, preserving teaching salaries from budget cuts, improving conditions for teaching (new teacher induction programs, stronger school leadership, safer schools, better parent involvement, etc.), and offering a clearinghouse of research and “what works” resources for teachers and administrators.
- **Acknowledge the importance of teaching quality and appreciation for teachers.** In her 2003 state-of-the-state address **Montana Gov. Judy Martz** said: “I asked the legislature to focus on the 3R's — recruiting, retaining, and rewarding our outstanding teachers. There is no greater profession than the education of our children and no greater gift an individual can give than to positively impact the life of a child ... We must encourage the best and brightest teachers to stay here. We have partnered with School Superintendent Linda McCulloch to bring forward legislation to help repay student loans for new teachers who choose to make Montana home.”
- **Find ways to communicate directly with teachers** or support efforts by your education department and local superintendents to do so. The most common complaint among teachers is that they are devalued and the last to know about important state and district developments affecting them. A recent outreach campaign by ETS in California showed remarkable gains in teachers' support for statewide testing, mainly because teachers appreciated getting this information firsthand.
- **Cite research that shows how important teaching quality is in boosting student achievement.** Research provides compelling support for more attention to quality. Studies show a

Georgia Gov. Sonny Perdue recently convened an education summit of parents, teachers and principals.

The governor and state education chief used the venue to listen to ideas and gain policy feedback from those closest to the students. The forum invested key stakeholders in developing good education policy.

direct relationship between the qualifications of teachers and student performance. Research also shows just how pervasive the problems of teacher turnover and “out-of-field” teaching are.

- **Cultivate a stable of teacher and principal spokespersons.** Tap your state's current or former teachers of the year and seek out articulate voices from the classroom to talk firsthand about raising standards and professional development opportunities in teaching.
- **Point to successes and schedule governor visits to summer professional development seminars** to bring focus to state action to support teachers. Recognize and celebrate successful and/or turnaround schools that have made improved teaching the centerpiece of their improvement strategies. Teachers need to see “teachers like them” getting results with students who traditionally haven't done well in school. Discuss promising efforts in states to support teachers — improving recruitment, retention and professional development.
- **Be honest about challenges facing the state and what you're doing to address them.** The lack of up-to-date data on teaching quality, shortages in certain fields, inequity in the distribution of high-quality teachers, and high turnover rates among new teachers make this an immense challenge, especially during a time of state budget deficits. **Nevada** is creating a statewide teacher exit survey to determine why teachers leave the profession and what can be done to retain more teachers. **North Carolina** conducted a working conditions survey of teachers to identify areas that need improvement.
- **Discuss how educators can best communicate with parents about teaching quality provisions.** Some of the letters and communications that come from school districts can be filled with jargon and



create bad feelings. Help school districts be clearer and convey a sense of concern and service to parents.

- **Host editorial board meetings and background briefings with reporters to discuss the challenges and opportunities your state faces** in improving teaching quality and ensuring that the students who need extra help get the best teachers.

What the research says: teacher quality matters

Research confirms what many of us know from personal experience: good teaching matters. Following are some facts and figures about the importance of teaching quality can be used in speeches, press statements, letters and opinion editorials.

- In just one year, students assigned to the best teachers improved an average of 53 percentage points on standardized tests. Students assigned to less-skilled teachers gained only 14 percentage points on these tests. (Sanders and Rivers, 1996)
- The influence of a high-quality teacher compounds over time. Students assigned to effective teachers in third, fourth and fifth grades performed at the 83rd percentile, while those assigned to the least effective teachers during this time scored in the 29th percentile. (Sanders, 1998)
- An analysis of National Assessment of Education Progress data reveals that the strongest positive predictor of student achievement is the percentage of teachers in each state with full certification and a major in the subject matter they teach. (Education Trust, 1998)
- Getting well-qualified teachers to the neediest students could close the achievement gap between white students and minority or poor students by as much as two-thirds. (Education Trust, 1998)
- The teaching practices and techniques used in the classroom have a larger impact on student achievement than any other measure of teacher quality — 7 to 10 times more than class size. (Educational Testing Service, 2000)
- Students whose teachers majored or minored in the subject they are teaching outperform their peers by about 40 percent of a grade level in math and science. (MidContinent Regional Educational Laboratory, June, 1999)
- A July 15, 2003 U.S. Department of Education report to Congress found that 54 percent of the nation's teachers met an approximate definition of "highly qualified" under NCLB.

- Nationally nearly 30 percent of teachers quit in their first three years of teaching. Induction programs that include experienced mentor teachers providing support to newcomers as they first enter the classroom are extremely valuable. These programs improve teaching practices, reduce costly teacher turnover, and increase job satisfaction for both mentors and junior teachers. (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2000)
- Incentives to retain good teachers are wise investments. The financial cost of replacing teachers can range from \$6,000 to \$52,000 per teacher. Some effective strategies to avoid costly high turnover rates include mentoring programs, higher or differentiated pay, ongoing professional development, strong school leadership, and regular opportunities to collaborate with peers on lesson planning. Some school districts also conduct exit interviews to find out why teachers are leaving.

In his 2003 State-of-the-State address, **Wisconsin Gov. James Doyle** addressed the teacher shortage issue in his state with attention to alternative routes to becoming a teacher.

"The key to great schools has always been great teachers. We're fortunate to have as many as we do — but we're also losing more than we can afford. Last year, one out of every seven teachers left the profession ... If anyone questions our commitment to kids, just ask Carol Hooker, a star fifth-grade teacher at Franklin Pierce Elementary in Milwaukee. Carol became a teacher through the Milwaukee Teacher Education Center, or MTEC — a not-for-profit teacher certification program that provides qualified, diverse educators for the Milwaukee public schools. MTEC helps career track professionals become certified teachers through on-the-job training."

