

Governors and Legislators Leading for Improved Teaching
A Concept Paper
By the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices
And the National Conference of State Legislatures

Introduction

Research confirms what many parents and educators have long known—that teacher quality matters most for improving student achievement. Current efforts to raise academic standards and improve student learning cannot succeed without teachers who are well prepared for the rigors of today’s classroom. Greater accountability in education and the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) have raised the stakes for students, schools, and education leaders. To help all students succeed, state policymakers must take steps to ensure that classroom teachers have the ability to meet this challenge.

Governors and state legislators have largely embraced the notion that they have a responsibility for the quality of the education in their state’s schools. Strategies to improve student achievement depend, in large part, on strengthening teacher capacity, and governors and legislators recognize this. Many governors have made education a priority, and legislators have consistently indicated that it is the top issue on legislative agendas. In fact, where progress has been made, a strategic and effective partnership between governors and legislators has been developed. Governors often lead the way in articulating state priorities and pushing a state agenda. Legislators can appropriate necessary funding and design legislation for a state policy framework that enables reform. These roles have been particularly evident in recent years regarding education policy. Over the past several years, the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) Education Program have been partners in these state efforts to define and improve teaching quality.

Over the last five years, governors and legislators have focused significant attention on teaching quality. Can we get this number—not sure it was very significant number—might want to cite survey of GEPAs instead??# of Governors mentioned teaching as a priority in their state of the state addresses. Over 3000 bills dealing with improving teachers and teaching have been introduced and discussed in legislatures since 2000.

The increasing focus on educational accountability will hasten calls for states to improve their systems of teacher preparation. The requirements of defining “high quality teaching” under NCLB are pushing state policymakers to think in new and different ways about reform of the teaching profession and the teacher preparation system. Governors have a unique role to play in creating urgency, thinking systemically, and applying pressure on other state leaders to come together to ensure that tomorrow’s teachers are ready to respond to the demands of the classroom. Legislators have a responsibility for creating realistic policies and practices and design mechanisms to hold the system accountable for results.

The guiding principles of the Carnegie Corporation’s *Teachers for a New Era* initiative can inform such efforts by reminding state policymakers that teacher preparation and other teacher quality reforms should be evidence-based, focused on student learning, provide teachers with content-area subject knowledge, and rely on strong partnerships between schools and colleges of education. Furthermore, policymakers need good information for measuring teacher performance and the impact of state policies for revising current policy and designing future policy. In the current fiscal and political environment, this is a message that resonates with state policymakers.

This concept paper outlines “Governors and Legislators Leading for Improved Teaching”—a three-year project during which the NGA Center for Best Practices and the NCSL Education Program will work

with state policymakers to make systemic change in their systems of educator preparation. The NGA Center and NCSL will be strategic partners with Governors and legislators to (1) build the relationships that can result in meaningful and lasting reform; (2) communicate with a broad policymaking audience about what change looks like and how it happens; (3) bridge the gap between research on best practices and public policy; and (4) work in-depth with three states to increase the capacity of their teacher preparation systems to produce teachers who can meet the challenge of closing the achievement gap and increasing achievement for all students. Specific project deliverables include a National Forum on teacher preparation, a State Policy Institute, a policy audit and a statewide summit in the three states, and a series of working papers or action briefs.

Problem Statement

Highly-Qualified Teachers

NCLB is challenging states to define what constitutes a “highly qualified” teacher and ensure that all teachers of core subjects meet this requirement by the 2005–06 school year. NCLB also is helping to spark conversations about broader changes to systems of teacher development. The law’s accountability measures and requirements for adequate yearly progress demand increased capacity from teachers—both from veterans and those new to the profession. And while many of these issues were already on state policy agendas, the federal law has made them more urgent and imperative. NCLB also provides some flexible funding for states to use as they begin working to meet the requirements.

Around the country, education leaders are talking about what it means to be highly qualified and highly effective at various stages of a teaching career. Many states already have adopted standards that define what teachers should know and be able to do at various stages in their careers. Most test teachers for acquisition of the requisite knowledge, but few have developed assessments or evaluations of teacher classroom performance, particularly ones that are aligned with professional teaching standards. Fewer still have created comprehensive systems of teacher development based on established standards of knowledge and skill that inform recruitment, preparation, licensure, hiring, induction, evaluation, professional development, or program approval and accountability. NCLB is pushing this conversation to new levels and in new directions—some of them positive and others less so. States need assistance and guidance as they move forward.

Teacher Preparation: Quality and Accountability

Amidst the growing concern about teacher qualifications is a growing sense of dissatisfaction with the preparation teachers receive in schools of education. Teachers and administrators report that new teachers are rarely as well prepared as they would like. New teachers are particularly under-prepared for the challenges of high-poverty, low-performing schools. Few states have the kind of assessment tools and data systems that can measure the value added by preparation programs or that can track numbers of graduates leaving their universities and taking jobs in their schools—let alone how long they stay, why they leave, and where they go when they leave. Further, at a time of critical shortages of qualified science, math, and special education teachers in particular, there is concern about higher education’s overproduction of teachers with specializations in lesser demand.

In response to frustrations with traditional schools of education, states have begun to allow or create alternative routes of preparation or certification. Some of these routes offer relatively traditional training—albeit outside the traditional baccalaureate program—yet serve as a more flexible alternative to post-baccalaureate teaching candidates. Others award a license based on an academic record or previous work experience and expertise, and provide on-the-job training with various levels of supervision. Some of the programs have proven quite successful at luring nontraditional candidates with deep subject expertise, providing them with training and support, and keeping them in the profession. Others have proven less successful and have high attrition rates and poor reputations. Like traditional programs, states have little capacity for measuring the quality of these alternative programs.

States are also concerned about recruiting adequate numbers of highly-qualified individuals to the education profession, and keeping them for the long haul, especially in hard-to-staff schools and high-demand subject areas. The most promising strategies for improved teacher retention include better preparation as a component. Teachers need more intensive preparation in the content they teach, in instructional strategies for teaching students with different learning styles and needs, and in managing their classroom environment. They do not necessarily need more preparation, but do need better preparation and continued support and learning opportunities as they begin their teaching careers.

The Governor's and Legislator's Role

Many governors and legislators have made teaching issues a top priority. The goals of ensuring teacher competency and measuring the value of teacher education have not escaped their attention. They are increasingly concerned about the “bang” they get for their “buck.” They seek indicators and measures of performance that tell them what is working and what is not. They want strategies for replicating successful policies and practices and changing the unsuccessful ones. In the current state fiscal environment, governors and legislators must find strategies that make state dollars go further and have greater impact.

But *authority* over higher education, education school or teacher preparation program approval, and licensing varies from state to state, and many governors and legislators are not quite sure how to tackle the problem. Systemic change in teacher preparation will require leadership at the highest state levels. Not only must governors be involved, but also they must demonstrate the kind of relationships that must exist to create long-term reform. They can also insist that higher education leaders, education school faculty, arts and sciences faculty, K-12 education leaders, alternative providers, and other key stakeholders work with one another to facilitate change.

The levers for enacting reform will vary from state to state. Some states will focus on legislation; others on regulation or executive order. Some may tackle the program approval process, some licensing rules, and others may focus on education finance. Some may create standards, assessments, and evaluation tools that can help measure the value-added by various preparation, training, and professional development policies and programs. Some states already have begun to address these challenges:

- *Louisiana Blue Ribbon Commission on Teacher Quality*: The Blue Ribbon Commission was a joint effort led by Governor Mike Foster, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Board of Regents that sought to identify strategies to effectively recruit, prepare, retain, and support Louisiana teachers. Commission members included state policymakers, school leaders, teachers, higher education officials, and community members. The Commission met from 1999 to 2001 and released two sets of final recommendations that focused on partnerships between schools and teacher colleges, teacher recruitment, teacher preparation, school environment, school leadership, and professional development. The NGA and NCSL assisted Louisiana in its efforts. In January 2002, Governor Foster and state officials launched Louisiana's Teacher Quality Initiative, bringing together all the state's efforts toward improving teacher quality with one goal in mind—to improve P-12 student achievement. The catalysts for this initiative were the Commission's recommendations and Louisiana's Title II Teacher Quality Enhancement grant. The NGA Center and NCSL provided some assistance to Louisiana specifically around some the issues addressed by its Title II grant and the commission.
- *Ohio Governor's Commission on Teaching Success*: Ohio Governor Bob Taft convened the Governor's Commission on Teaching Success in November 2001. Its 46 members included teachers, principals, superintendents, school board members, students, legislators, higher education officials, business leaders, and community leaders. Governor Taft charged the Commission with answering two

key questions: (1) What can we do to improve the quality of teaching? and (2) How can we ensure that every Ohio students receive high-quality instruction taught by a qualified, capable teacher? In February 2003 the Commission released its final report—*Achieving More: Quality Teaching, School Leadership, Student Success*—which outlines 15 recommendations that the Governor, the legislature, the state board of education, and the state board of regents can take to improve the quality of teaching in Ohio. Governor Taft’s Office is currently reviewing the Commission’s recommendations in anticipation of future policy action. The *NGA and NCSL -- in partnership with other* organizations focused on teaching quality issues—provided extensive assistance to the Commission in the course of its work. The governor and legislators are now working to implement the recommendations.

The Role of the NGA Center for Best Practices and the NCSL

Governors are leaders on education reform and many have made improving teacher quality a top priority on their education reform agendas. Governors and their staff know and trust the NGA Center for Best Practices as a reliable source of information and assistance on education reform in general and on teaching quality issues in particular. The NGA Center has been working with Governors and their advisors on education reform issues for a couple decades, and on teaching quality issues for nearly as long. NGA Center staff offer expertise on research, promising practices, and other national and state initiatives around teacher preparation and teaching quality to states who wish to develop and implement policies that will strengthen the readiness of beginning and veteran teachers to serve as effective instructors and classroom managers.

The NGA Center works in several ways with Governors and their advisors to embrace a reform agenda and take policy action. First, the NGA Center is a strategic partner in states poised to make major policy change by serving as a one-stop center for national expertise, and a respected, neutral convener of stakeholders. The NGA Center is also a catalyst in states with emerging gubernatorial leadership by providing customized technical assistance to the Governor’s office as it designs an agenda and strategies for taking action. Last, the NGA Center is a disseminator of best or promising practices and research, helping governors develop short- and long-term strategies for meeting the challenges and requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act and to build gubernatorial interest in more systemic reforms aimed at improving educator capacity.

The National Conference of State Legislatures is a bipartisan, nonprofit organization that serves the nation’s legislators and staff. NCSL was formed in 1975 to improve the quality and effectiveness of state legislatures, to foster interstate communication and cooperation, and to ensure states a strong, cohesive voice in the federal system. NCSL is a prime source of information on state policy issues and state-federal relations. NCSL provides research and publications, consulting services, and the opportunity for policymakers to exchange ideas and communicate with each other on the most pressing problems state face as well as solutions that work.

NCSL works with state legislators in several ways. First, NCSL is a clearinghouse of information for legislators, by serving as a “one stop shop” for details about legislation and programs in other states; and research and policy analysis on effective practices. NCSL staff regularly coordinate and participate in in-state activities, such as providing workshops, seminars and meetings; or testimony to legislative committees. Throughout the year NCSL brings legislators together and disseminates information through meetings and seminars.

Project Description

Purpose

The primary goal of “Governors and Legislators Leading for Improved Teaching” is to assist state policymakers in developing strategies and taking action that strengthens the capacity of the teacher

workforce and more specifically the capacity of teacher preparation programs to produce educators who demonstrate a positive impact on student achievement. Through this three-year project, the NGA Center and the NCSL Education Program will help governors and legislators identify levers they can use to make systemic changes that improve the capacity of teachers and schools leaders in their states. Specifically, governors and legislative leaders must identify opportunities to improve the systems that prepare, support, and provide continuing education to teachers and school leaders. We recognize that these levers will vary from state to state and hope to identify models of action based on different state governance and finance structures. All models will take into account what we know about what constitutes effective preparation for the classroom, including the principles established by the Carnegie Teachers for a New Era project.

Scope of Work/Activities

Our proposed scope of work is designed to impact governors and legislators at several levels. The urgency of the NCLB requirement, the widespread interest in teacher quality reform, and the number of governors and legislators who are new to their positions argue for a strategy that is directed to a broad policymaker audience in many states. We seek to have a significant national impact on the dialogue about improved teacher quality and aligned policy initiatives that improve preparation, recruitment, retention, licensure, and professional development.

An important goal of our effort is to move states forward in their policy process. To that end, we have included another strategy that identifies several states ready and willing to embark on policy reform around teacher quality and teacher preparation. In these states we will focus on building relationships, expanding knowledge, and identifying policy priorities and action steps.

Finally, we are particularly interested in making significant progress toward teacher quality and teacher preparation policy reform in a small group of states. Our final strategy focuses on working intensively with three states with involvement of multiple stakeholders, but particularly the governor's office and state legislators, to support large-scale policy reform around teacher quality.

National Forum

At the outset of the project, the NGA Center for Best Practices and the NCSL Education Program will convene several governors, legislators, other state leaders and policymakers, representatives from the foundation community, and additional national teacher preparation experts at a national forum to launch this initiative. The forum will: (1) lend attention to the leadership of the NGA Center, NCSL, and the Carnegie Corporation on teacher preparation; (2) explore the nature of the relationship between a state and its institutions of higher education and their schools of education and the responsibilities of each to the other; and (3) examine the future potential for governors and legislators to align their teacher preparation programs with the needs of schools and strengthen the impact those programs' graduates have on student achievement.

The Forum will coincide with the release of a request for proposals (RFP) to participate as one of three state partners in this NGA Center/NCSL initiative. The NGA Center and NCSL will produce a descriptive project brochure for inclusion in the RFP packet and for public dissemination at the Forum.

Strategic Partner and Catalyst for Change

The NGA Center and NCSL proposes to work intensively with three states—mainly governors, governors' advisors, state legislators and legislative staff, but also other key state educational leaders and policymakers, such as a chief state school officer, a state higher education executive officer, university provosts or academic officers, deans of education and arts and sciences, and alternative preparation provider—who are committed to tackling issues of teacher capacity. Selected states will be expected to demonstrate a commitment to policy change at the outset and progress toward or accomplishment of policy change by the conclusion of the project. The NGA Center and NCSL will work with each state

over a period of two years to determine and implement a course of action for achieving its objectives. NGA Center and NCSL staff—together with our network of state leaders and national partners—bring expertise and objectivity to a state’s attempt to shape an agenda, convene stakeholders, determine strategies, and take policy action.

The NGA Center and NCSL propose a framework through which selected states must work to accomplish their objectives. These activities include a state policy audit; convening a statewide summit; and follow-up assistance that could include convening a post-summit strategic planning group of key stakeholders, forming a state commission or council, issuing policy recommendations, and drafting potential legislation, regulation, or other policy documents. At a minimum, each state will undergo a policy audit and convene a statewide summit. NGA staff will work with the governor and his or her staff to determine additional activities that will help the state achieve policy change that leads to improved teacher preparation and classroom teaching. NCSL will work closely with legislative leaders to identify and provide the particular activities needed at the legislative level.

- *Policy Audit:* A policy audit would look at a state’s governance, finance, educator preparation, licensure, professional development, and data infrastructure systems to identify gaps in state policy and leverage points where the governor and legislators can exert influence and take the lead developing a vision and plan for change. We will encourage leaders to improve data systems and use data garnered from the audit and elsewhere to inform future policy decisions.
- *Statewide Summit:* In effort to build public urgency and political will for change, the NGA Center and NCSL would help convene a statewide summit that would assemble a broader range of stakeholders from around the state to learn about the governor’s vision and offer strategic and practical feedback as well as insight about local practices and reform efforts. NGA Center and NCSL staff will encourage leaders and speakers to use available data to illustrate the need for policy reform and create a sense of urgency among the public and fellow policymakers for improved teacher preparation and attention to other teacher quality issues. In addition to a statewide summit, state leaders might want to convene a commission to study the issue more in depth and make recommendations for further action, as was done in Louisiana and Ohio.
- *Customized Follow-Up Assistance:* The NGA Center and NCSL will work with each of the three governors, his or her staff, and legislative leaders, to design a series of follow-up activities that will help advance the developing agenda on teacher preparation and teaching quality and move leaders toward action. Activities might include convening post-summit planning meetings of key leaders; shaping a gubernatorial commission on teacher preparation; designing a teacher preparation agenda for an existing body, such as a P-16 council or business-education roundtable; compiling policy recommendations; or helping draft legislation, regulations, or other policy documents. Technical assistance will be focused directly on helping governors and state legislators and their staff and on taking policy action.

State Policy Institute

Once state selection is completed, we will convene a State Policy Institute of officials from the three states. In addition, Governors’ advisors, state legislators and other policymakers from 8-10 other states who have expressed interest in addressing teacher preparation (and may have submitted a project application) will also attend. NGA Center and NCSL staff, with assistance from other state and national experts, will provide an intensive professional development seminar for these key policymakers on the current status of state teacher quality, the role of useful data and statistics for states to better understand the current conditions in their states, the nature of teacher preparation today, state policy levers to change the existing system, new and emerging research on teacher preparation and the impacts on state policy,

specific leadership opportunities for governors and legislators, and guidance about how the NGA Center and NCSL can help states develop and implement policy changes.

The large turnover in governors and state legislators in the 2002 elections resulted in a significant number of new governors, governors' education advisors, and legislators who can benefit from this kind of professional development on policymaking. Building their knowledge is essential for developing policy that recognizes what we have learned from research, other states' experiences, and projects like Carnegie's *Teachers for a New Era*. By the end of the meeting, governors' advisors, legislators, and other state leaders will leave with specific ideas and strategies to advance the teacher quality and preparation agenda in their home states. After the meeting, NGA Center and NCSL staff will provide intensive technical assistance to the three states as well as follow-up support to other states in attendance that wish to pursue teacher preparation reform.

Publications

The NGA Center and NCSL will produce several brief publications as part of this project. These publications will be disseminated to a fifty-state audience and used in on-going and regular organizational activities such as special meetings and seminars. NGA staff will take the lead on three publications, following an Issue Brief format to make them useful and relevant for Governors and other state policymakers. Together they will address some of the critical issues states should consider in their work to build a fully integrated system encompassing teacher preparation, professional development, professional teaching standards, accountability, school leadership, and student achievement. The first brief will be a framing paper that outlines the issues of teacher capacity, strengths and flaws in the current systems of teacher development, and the role of traditional programs and alternative routes in improving teacher capacity. The paper will also examine the role Governors can play in addressing these issues at a state policy level. The second brief will discuss a more defined issue, such as: innovative state models of teacher preparation, including university-district partnerships, new modes of accreditation, and accountability for program quality; or best practices in addressing NCLB/teacher quality mandates and raising teaching standards above the "highly qualified" definition. The final brief will highlight models and lessons from the three partner states and will offer recommendations that other states can consider. In these publications, the NGA Center will look for opportunities to provide new data or data analyses that offer insight on the topics covered. One example might be data on the progress states are making on the number of teachers who meet definitions of highly qualified

NCSL staff will take the lead on a set of five brief publications. These publications will discuss issues and strategies for legislators on major components of reform, such as finance; legislative models; highlights from recent research and implications for policy; legislative leadership techniques; and innovative policy models.

Rapid Response Technical Assistance and Information Sharing

Particularly given the large number of new governors, governors' advisors, and legislators, the NGA Center and NCSL have a critical role to play in the dissemination of good information about research and promising practices. Further, incumbent policymakers are increasingly interested in issues of quality in teacher education, induction, recruitment, retention, and professional development. THE NGA Center and NCSL are trusted sources of information and expertise among our constituents and can provide valuable assistance as they seek to act on these issues. While we want to work intensively with just a few states, we also know that it is critical to offer information, expertise, and other supportive assistance to any of our constituents wanting to take action on these issues. Without good information, policies may be developed that do not reflect what we know from research and other states' experiences.

Throughout the project, the NGA Center and NCSL will provide less intensive—but nonetheless relevant and significant—assistance to any states interested in receiving assistance on issues related to improving

teacher preparation and teaching quality *that also demonstrate a commitment to taking action*. Assistance activities will focus on providing rapid response technical assistance to states working on improving teacher preparation and to states developing policy strategies on related issues, such as meeting the challenge of having a highly qualified teacher in every classroom by 2005–2006; recruiting and retaining teachers in subjects and schools where they are needed most; reforming teacher licensure and certification to reflect research and promising practices; altering teacher evaluation and compensation systems; developing teacher induction and support policies and programs; strengthening professional development; and strengthening school leadership in support of teaching and learning.

In the course of our work, we will encourage states to embrace the federal requirements as an opportunity to go beyond the minimum requirements for creating a “highly-qualified” teaching force but also one that is highly effective at raising student achievement. While NCLB provides a basic standard of a “highly qualified” teacher (full state certification, bachelor’s degree, and demonstrated subject-area competence), it also provides significant leeway to states to further craft this definition. NGA and NCSL staff will assist states in refining their definitions and strategies for implementing it by providing best practices from other states and evidence from teacher quality research.

For example, we might work with a state on crafting an agenda for a series of meetings on strategies for improving teacher preparation and meeting the federal requirements, provide information and expertise, or help craft policy recommendations or proposed legislation creating initiatives for improving teacher preparation or aimed at meeting the federal requirements. In each case, we will ask governors and their advisors and legislators to share how the assistance will lead to policy action and to later share the outcomes related to the assistance received. Further assistance will be contingent on governors’ advisors and/or legislators providing us with evidence and a sense that the information and assistance are being used for an end—specifically taking action on these issues.

Collaboration

The NGA Center and NCSL are committed to working with other organization interested in teaching quality issues and policy. We enjoy strong relationships the Education Commission of the States, the Hunt Institute, the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, the State Higher Education Executive Officers, the Southeast Center for Teaching Quality, and the Southern Regional Education Board among others. We have collaborated with these organizations in a variety of ways over the past several years and will continue to do so, particularly where there is overlap on issues and state assistance. We plan to form an advisory group for this project that will include representation from these and other organizations and institutions, such as those involved in *Teachers for a New Era*.

We believe our proposed scope of work provides a nice complement to that of these other organizations. Specifically, the National Commission’s National Summit on Teacher Preparation is largely focused on institutions of higher education and how they can improve teacher preparation programs. The state summits look at state policy supports for institutional changes, but policy is driven from the institutions up to the state level. We propose to work more exclusively with governors, legislators, and other key state policymakers on making statewide systemic policy changes that facilitate improved teacher preparation and hold institutions accountable for such improvement. If there is overlap among the states they choose to work with and those we select, we will cooperate with Commission staff to coordinate efforts and ensure we do not sponsor competing state summits on these issues.

Similarly, we will work with the Education Commission of the States to ensure that we select separate states or at the very least collaborate on state audit and summit work if there is overlap. We will also work with the Hunt Institute to ensure that their proposed work with governors on teacher quality issues is complementary and not in conflict or competition with ours. Our understanding is that the Institute will address teaching quality among other key education issues that governors might tackle. We will work

with the Institute to share our expertise and experience and will use theirs in return. The Institute offers one more opportunity to reinforce to governors the importance of teaching quality, and our work will complement that effort by providing ongoing assistance and information to governors *and* their key education advisors.

Conclusion

For teacher quality and teacher preparation to improve, action is necessary at multiple levels— institutional, local, and state. Governors and state legislators are key actors at the state level. They bring needed leadership, authority, and funding to leverage change. The NGA Center and NCSL play a critical role in supporting these key policymakers as they take state policy action. We benefit from a unique relationship with our respective constituents. Our organizations are trusted sources of information, expertise, and assistance in state policymakers’ efforts to advance policy and education reform. We lend an important, neutral voice to these critical issues to an audience of key actors. Other organizations working on these teaching issues cannot reach our audiences as effectively. However, collaboration with these other organization is also critical. Much work has been accomplished, but much remains. The NGA Center and NCSL are proven experts at providing assistance and information to two sets of actors critical for leveraging reform in teacher preparation and in improving teaching for all students.