



Teacher Quality

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) requires teachers who teach core academic subjects to be “highly qualified.” The law defines a highly qualified teacher as an individual who:

- Has obtained full state certification (including alternative certification); and
- Holds a license to teach in the state; and
- Has not had certification or licensure requirements waived on an emergency, temporary or provisional basis.

In addition, there are requirements for demonstrating subject-matter knowledge that vary depending on whether you are an elementary, middle or high school teacher, and whether you’re a teacher new to the profession or a veteran teacher.

1. What is the time frame for all of this? When do these requirements go into effect?

All teachers of “core academic subjects” hired after the first day of the 2002-03 school year who teach in a program supported by Title I funds must be highly qualified.

The law states that by the end of the 2005-06 school year, all teachers of core academic subjects must be highly qualified. The U.S. Department of Education extended the deadline by one year, so all teachers have until the end of the 2006-07 school year to meet highly qualified requirements.

Current special education teachers or those in eligible, rural districts who are highly qualified in at least one academic subject have until 2006-07 to become highly qualified in the

additional subjects they teach. Any newly hired special education or rural teacher will have three years from their date of hire to become highly qualified in each core academic subject they teach.

2. What are the “core academic subjects”?

The core academic subjects are English, reading, language arts, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics, government, economics, arts, history and geography.

Therefore, if you are a teacher teaching one of these core subjects, this federal law applies to you.

3. Are art and/or music considered “core academic subjects”?

The law includes “the arts” as a core academic subject, but does not provide a definition. Your state determines its definition of “the arts.”

4. I’m a vocational education teacher. Do I have to meet the “highly qualified” definition?

Only if you teach a core academic subject. For example, if a vocational education teacher only teaches a trade, such as auto mechanics, he or she would not need to meet the highly qualified teacher requirements, because auto mechanics is not a core academic subject.

5. I’m a special education teacher. Does this law apply to me?

Special education teachers who are providing instruction in core academic subjects must meet the “highly qualified” definition in all subjects they teach.

On the other hand, special educators who do not directly instruct students in any core academic subject, or who only provide consultation to highly qualified teachers of core academic subjects in adapting curricula, using behavioral supports and interventions, and selecting appropriate accommodations, do not need to meet the same “highly qualified” subject-matter competency requirements that apply under NCLB to teachers of core academic subjects.

6. I teach English language learners (ELLs). Do I have to meet the “highly qualified” definition? If my program is funded by Title III, do I have to meet additional requirements?

ELL teachers must meet the “highly qualified” definition in all subjects they teach. In addition, if you teach in a program funded by Title III, you must be fluent in English and any other language used for instruction, including having written and oral communication skills.

7. I’m a new teacher. How do I know if I meet the new “highly qualified” definition?

To meet the definition, teachers who are new to the profession must hold at least a bachelor’s degree and demonstrate subject-matter competency.

- *Elementary school teachers* who are new to the profession must demonstrate subject knowledge and teaching skills in reading, writing, mathematics and other areas of the basic elementary school curriculum by passing a rigorous test. Your state certification or licensure test may count toward meeting this requirement.

- *Middle and high school teachers* who are new to the profession must demonstrate competency in each of the academic subjects they teach by passing a subject matter test in each subject *or* by successfully completing an academic major, a graduate degree, coursework equivalent to an undergraduate major, or advanced certification or credentialing. Again, your state certification or licensure test may count toward meeting this requirement.

8. I’ve been teaching for years. What steps do I need to take to make sure I meet the “highly qualified” definition?

Veteran teachers are required to hold at least a bachelor’s degree and be licensed by the state. They must also either meet the requirements for teachers new to the profession or demonstrate competence in each academic subject they teach based on a “high, objective uniform state standard of evaluation” (HOUSSE). Each state has determined what this evaluation option looks like. Check with your local union president, district office, or state department of education to find out the evaluation option being offered in your state.

9. What is the “high, objective, uniform state standard of evaluation” (HOUSSE)?

The law identifies seven characteristics of a teacher evaluation system that meets the HOUSSE definition. Such a system:

- Is set by the state for both grade-appropriate academic subject-matter knowledge and teaching skills;
- Is aligned with challenging state academic content and student academic achievement standards and developed in consultation with core content specialists, teachers, principals and school administrators;

- Provides objective, coherent information about the teacher’s attainment of core content knowledge in the academic subjects in which a teacher teaches;
- Is applied uniformly to all teachers in the same academic subject and the same grade level throughout the state;
- Takes into consideration, but is not based primarily on, the time the teacher has been teaching in the academic subject;
- Is made available to the public upon request; and
- May involve multiple, objective measures of teacher competency.

States may develop a method for current, multi-subject teachers to demonstrate through one process that they are highly qualified in each of their subjects and maintain the same high standards in subject-matter mastery. Check with your union, district office, or state department of education for more information.

10. I am a veteran middle school teacher. I passed the state generalist exam in math, science, English and social studies, but was not required by the state to take separate subject-matter tests. Am I “highly qualified”?

It depends on how your state defines a highly qualified teacher. If you have one of the following for each of the subjects you teach, you are highly qualified.

- An academic major;
- A graduate degree;
- Coursework equivalent to an undergraduate academic major; or
- Advanced certification or credentialing.

Your state must decide if the generalist exam you took rigorously measures each of the subjects you teach, at the level of difficulty being taught, in order for the exam to be considered valid for demonstrating subject-matter competency. If the state determines

that the exam you took does not adequately demonstrate subject-matter competency, you must either pass a rigorous state subject test in each of the academic subjects you teach, or demonstrate subject-matter competency based on a HOUSSE.

For the purpose of demonstrating subject-matter competency, states may offer a single test that covers more than one specialty area. To be able to determine whether a teacher who passes such a test is thereby highly qualified in the subjects it covers, the state would have to determine (as it would for a single subject test) that the test questions adequately cover the entire content area and that the teacher has successfully answered a subset of those questions. The state department of education will determine how you may meet this requirement. Check with your local union president, district office, or the state department of education.

11. I am a veteran middle school teacher who is fully licensed, with a B.A. and an academic minor in the subject area I teach. Am I “highly qualified”?

No, having an academic minor does not make you highly qualified. See the answer to the previous question to find out what steps you need to take.

12. I teach seventh grade in a school that has been designated by the state as a K-8 school. Do I have to meet the “highly qualified” requirements for elementary school teachers or for middle school teachers?

It is up to the state to make the decision whether middle school teachers need to meet the secondary elementary or secondary subject matter requirements.

13. I have a general science certification and teach more than one field of science (such as physics, biology, and chemistry). Do I have to take a test or complete a HOUSSE for each field of science that I teach?

It depends on your state's science certification requirements. Based on their current requirements, states may decide to allow science teachers to demonstrate that they are highly qualified either in "broad field" science or individual fields of science (such as physics, biology and chemistry).

14. I am participating in an alternative route to certification program. How do the federal requirements apply to me?

To be "highly qualified," you must have a four-year college degree, have demonstrated subject-matter competency, and be enrolled in an alternate-route program that includes the following three provisions:

- High-quality professional development that is sustained, intensive, and classroom-focused;
- Intensive supervision consisting of structured guidance and regular ongoing support or teacher mentoring;
- Demonstration of satisfactory progress toward full certification as prescribed by the state.

Also, you are considered "highly qualified" for up to three years of participation in an alternate-route program. After three years, you must have obtained full certification to be considered "highly qualified."

15. I'm teaching on an emergency credential. What do I need to do to keep my job?

You need to take steps to become fully certified and meet the new requirements of

the law. The specifics of what you are required to do and when you need to do them depend on the subject you are teaching, how long you have been teaching, and whether or not you teach in a Title I school. Please read through the previous questions to find out the specific steps you need to take.

16. If I'm not "highly qualified" under this law and need additional training, are there resources available to help me?

Yes. The federal government has provided professional development funds to states and districts to help teachers become highly qualified through Title I and Title II. Check with your local union president, principal or district office to find out what funds are available at your school.

17. What is the AFT position on defining "highly qualified" teachers?

For years, the AFT has advocated that every child should be taught by a highly qualified teacher, with no exceptions. The "highly qualified" teacher provisions in No Child Left Behind are the first steps in ensuring that all public school children have access to a high-quality education.

Teachers who are new to the profession should pass rigorous subject-matter tests and complete an accredited, researched-based, comprehensive preparation program. Moreover, they should receive ongoing support through an effective mentoring program.

Veteran teachers, however, should be allowed to demonstrate that they are highly qualified in a number of ways. Although veteran teachers have the option under NCLB of taking subject-matter tests, the AFT believes there are better ways to determine if a veteran

teacher is highly qualified, which may include peer observations, documentation of work (such as a portfolio or individual professional development plan) or some combination of these. Asking veteran teachers to take subject-matter tests ignores the fact that successful teachers know more than content—they know how children learn and are able to link the two.