



*A Union of Professionals*

## **REACHING THE GOAL OF A HIGHLY QUALIFIED TEACHER IN EVERY CLASSROOM**

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## **REACHING THE GOAL OF A HIGHLY QUALIFIED TEACHER IN EVERY CLASSROOM**

Teacher quality is a subject that is near and dear to AFT members. Our teachers know what recent research has affirmed—that quality teaching is one of the most important in-school factors affecting school achievement. Our members want qualified and well-prepared teachers as colleagues. The vast majority of our teachers are caring, dedicated and skilled professionals who know that schools and students suffer when unprepared and ineffective teachers are in their midst.

Our commitment at the AFT has always been to high standards, not simply for students, but for teachers as well. We have advocated for rigor in the preparation and licensing of teachers, and in the design and implementation of demanding standards for entry into the profession—standards that cannot be lowered or skirted due to ineffective administrative recruitment and induction processes, inadequate pay incentives, and working conditions that handicap students and teachers alike. Indeed, we were hopeful that the NCLB “highly qualified teacher” provisions would address persistent and inexcusable practices, such as emergency certification and out-of-field assignment that undermine the teaching profession and shortchange students.

### **Teacher Quality and the No Child Left Behind Act**

There are three main teacher quality issues this law and its ensuing regulations and implementation are designed to address:

1. There is not sufficient rigor in the way that states prepare and license teachers, particularly in regard to teachers’ mastery of the content they teach.
2. Too many teachers are assigned to teach subjects they have not been licensed to teach, or have been given waivers to teach without any preparation.
3. Poor children and children of color are disproportionately taught by unprepared and inexperienced teachers.

Let’s look at these concerns and ask whether the current NCLB “highly qualified teacher” requirements provide a remedy.

#### **Preparation and Licensing of Teachers**

In our 2000 report, *Building a Profession: Strengthening Teacher Preparation and Induction*, the AFT documented the great diversity in requirements that states impose for teacher preparation and licensure. All states require some course of study to obtain a teaching license, and they all accredit teacher education programs. Many require subject-matter majors for secondary teachers, but only a few have such a requirement for elementary teachers. Most states require teachers to pass tests as part of the licensing process. The AFT and others have questioned the quality, breadth of knowledge and passing standards of some of those tests. In addition, most states have alternative routes into teaching. But these programs too are of varied quality and academic rigor. Although the AFT supports alternative teacher preparation programs, we believe they never should be used as a way to bypass standards and quality.

To improve teacher quality, *Building a Profession* called for higher standards for entry into teacher education programs and for teacher candidates to:

- take a rigorous general liberal arts and science curriculum;
- have an academic major in addition to their education studies;
- be exposed to a pedagogy curriculum based on the best research on how students learn;
- have access to a high-quality clinical practicum;
- pass rigorous licensure tests of both content and pedagogy; and
- undergo a meaningful induction program as beginning teachers.

But change is not easy or immediate. Despite the recommendations of our report and the subsequent requirements of NCLB, it is still the case that new teachers enter classrooms across America with widely varying skills and teaching experiences. While many enter with strong preparation, competent and confident to help their students learn, some are unprepared to meet the challenges they face. Most are recent college graduates who have gone through a formal teacher education program, but a growing number are people entering teaching from another field who receive widely varying preparation, from a few weeks to a year or more. Some teachers hired on emergency permits have had no preparation at all. Thousands of new teachers, especially those assigned to teach in low-income urban and rural areas, have had little or no exposure to basic information about children, curriculum or schools.

Of particular concern is that the overwhelming majority of new teachers, regardless of their route to the classroom, do not receive the kind of quality support necessary to help them be successful. High-quality induction for new teachers is one of the essential building blocks of teacher quality. New teachers need time to develop and perfect their teaching skills under the mentorship of more-experienced and skilled colleagues. Research shows that teachers who participate in effective induction programs are more likely to remain in the profession than those who do not.

But, why is there so little interest in preparing and supporting new teachers? There are many answers. Here are a few:

- Standards for entry into the profession are set by each state; in the face of teacher shortages, the standards are often ignored or lowered.
- Too many policymakers do not understand what it takes to be a quality teacher. They do not see teaching as a difficult and important job that requires rigorous training.
- Others, ignorant of the research on teacher practice and its impact on student achievement, believe that there is not much more to teaching than knowing the subject matter that children should learn.
- There are few incentives for policymakers and administrators to invest in improving the teacher workforce.

Those who believe there is little beyond subject matter that teachers need to know—and that pedagogy does not matter or can be acquired on the job—are calling for the deregulation of preparation and the elimination of licensure. These opponents of preparation believe teachers only need to have a few “tricks of the trade” that can be picked up on the job. They also believe that thousands of talented individuals who want to enter the profession are kept out by requirements whose sole purpose is to keep the “teacher education monopoly” of colleges and universities alive and well. Adherents of this view of teacher preparation believe that passing a test of subject matter or having a college major in the subject to be taught are sufficient for ensuring “high quality” teaching. This is a faulty assumption.

Certainly highly qualified teachers need to be well-educated in the liberal arts and know their subject matter. It is indisputable that if you don't know mathematics, or literature or history, then you can't teach these subjects to others. But subject-matter knowledge, while necessary, is insufficient to ensure "high quality" teaching.

Effective teaching is complex. It requires knowledge and skill related to learning, human development, assessment, curriculum and pedagogy—in addition to subject matter. I believe the best way to ensure an adequate supply of well-trained teachers is *not* by narrowly testing prospective teachers and avoiding collegiate teacher education, but rather by acknowledging the faults of the current teacher preparation and licensing system and correcting them.

In recent years, we have learned a great deal about the importance of good teaching and about what effective teachers do. Far from the popular image of the teacher standing at the front of the classroom lecturing from a textbook and giving a quiz at the end of the week, we now know that teachers whose students demonstrate strong achievement do much more. Effective teachers use many different tools to assess *how* their students learn as well as *what* their students know. They use this information to help all students advance from where they are to where they need to be. Effective teachers know what students bring to the subject and what misconceptions are likely to cause them confusion—and effective teachers design lessons to overcome these misinterpretations. To acquire this knowledge, prospective teachers not only need to have an excellent liberal arts education and deep understanding of the subject matter they teach, but they also must have the pedagogical knowledge and the opportunity to apply that knowledge in a rigorous, well-supervised clinical training program.

But changing the preparation, induction and continuing education of teachers is not easy, fast or cheap. It will require serious investment and change in the scope and content of teacher preparation, the clinical training, and the induction and ongoing professional development of teachers. To promote such excellence throughout the teaching ranks, we must demand higher professional standards, more challenging college courses, and licensure examinations that require new teachers to have a thorough knowledge of their subjects *and* a deep understanding of how to teach them to students of varying ages, skills and backgrounds. Teacher testing of subject matter is a necessary component of entry into the field, but it alone does not ensure quality teaching, particularly for the neediest students.

### **Out-of-Field Teaching**

Out-of-field teaching is rampant in our schools. For example, research has shown that nationwide more than 40 percent of grade 7-12 public school math, English, social studies and science teachers have taught one or more classes in a subject in which they were not fully certified or did not have a college major/minor. These numbers are even higher in small, rural and high poverty/minority schools.

Out-of-field teaching is largely the result of two factors: lax certification requirements that allow teachers to practice out of field, and the manner in which schools are organized and teachers are assigned. If budgets are tight, or enrollments are such that full-time positions are not required, administrators often assign existing faculty to cover classes and teach in fields for which they are not certified. Teachers do not *choose* to teach subjects they are not qualified to teach. But when

administrators assign individuals to teach courses outside their licensure area, these teachers are not at liberty to decline such assignments.

### **Getting Highly Effective and Experienced Teachers To Work in Hard-to-Staff Schools**

The data are indisputable—poor children and children of color are more likely than their more affluent and white peers to be taught by the least prepared and least qualified teachers. The requirements of NCLB help focus on this issue and prevent administrators from merely sweeping this nasty, age-old problem under the rug. Instead, they are required to publicize the problem and attend to it.

But why is it so difficult to staff these schools? The causes are complex. Some people have blamed this situation on teacher contracts and seniority provisions. It is true that more-experienced teachers who have demonstrated their expertise often move to schools with the resources that every school should have—texts, labs, gymnasiums, clean, safe buildings and orderly environments, and involved parents. But such movement is not the product of a seniority system *per se*. Indeed, there are no data to demonstrate that schools in urban districts *without* collective bargaining agreements have better ratios of experienced to new teachers in hard-to-staff schools than is the case in collective bargaining districts. In fact, a National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) analysis of late staffing (positions unfilled when schools opened—often hard-to-staff schools) indicated that five of the nine states with the highest late-fill rates were right-to-work states, and 10 of the 19 states with the lowest late-fill rates were in collective bargaining states.

The culprit is not unions or seniority provisions in contracts, but the teaching conditions in those hard-to-staff schools. Eliminating seniority or mandating assignments are not solutions. We know from experience that “forced reassignment” of veteran teachers to hard-to-staff schools does not succeed in increasing the numbers of veterans in high-needs schools. Instead, most of those veteran teachers either leave the profession or take jobs in higher-paying neighboring school districts.

Teachers, similar to other professionals, like to be successful; they want to be able to do their jobs well and be appreciated for what they accomplish. Research has demonstrated that teachers leave hard-to-staff schools for many reasons. Often the administrative leadership is weak, and teachers do not want to teach in poorly run schools with few resources. In addition, they often cite issues related to location, safety and parent involvement. The working conditions that teachers seek are the learning environments that children need.

Simply giving college graduates a subject-matter test and calling them “highly qualified” is not going to address the issue of getting truly qualified teachers to work in hard-to-staff schools; nor are eliminating seniority or reassigning veteran teachers likely to fix this problem. The underlying causes must be addressed: Facilities must be up to date and well maintained. Resources—textbooks, computer labs, libraries, gymnasiums, adequate supplies and the like must be available. And first-class, excellent school leadership must be present if we are to attract and retain veteran, high-quality teachers in schools that serve large numbers of poor children and students of color.

Competitive compensation must also be in place. If we are serious about teacher quality, we cannot avoid this issue because inadequate compensation underlies many teacher quality problems. Improved compensation will do more than anything else to help us meet the teacher quality goals of NCLB. Despite the rhetoric on the importance of education in our nation, current teacher salaries do

not recognize the pivotal role teachers play in educating our children. The AFT's 2003 Teacher Salary Survey indicates that average salaries for beginning teachers start well below those of many other professions. For example, the survey shows that the average new teacher earns \$29,564. However, our 2004 Public Employees Compensation Survey indicates that beginning accountants and engineers make an average of \$38,895 and \$47,191 respectively. In addition, this gap is maintained, and in some cases even grows, over time as the average salary for a teacher is \$45,771 compared to \$56,804 for an accountant and \$68,649 for an engineer. These figures make a strong statement about the value our country places on teaching.

Money matters. When New York City teachers' salaries became more competitive, particularly at the entry level, they attracted a higher percentage of qualified teachers into city classrooms--96 percent of the 9,480 newly hired teachers in 2002, the year the increased salaries were in place, were certified, compared to only 50 percent in fall 2001 before the salary increase.

If we are to get experienced, qualified teachers into all of our classrooms (particularly those in high-poverty neighborhoods) the current NCLB efforts, although helpful for calling attention to this critical issue, are nevertheless insufficient because they do not address the underlying problems in preparation, licensure, working conditions and compensation that create the difficulties in the first place.

### **NCLB Implementation of the Highly Qualified Teacher Provisions**

With that caveat, let me now turn briefly to some specific problems with current implementation of the NCLB highly qualified teacher provisions, in particular, the definition of highly qualified special education teachers and middle school teachers, and the application of highly qualified teaching status to charter school teachers and to supplemental service providers—and then focus on the high, objective, uniform, state standard of evaluation or (HOUSSE) for veteran teachers to demonstrate their subject-matter competence.

#### **Definition of “Highly Qualified” Special Education Teachers**

As NCLB is currently being implemented, special education teachers who are fully certified in their field must also meet separate subject-matter requirements for each core academic subject they teach. This interpretation is problematic for special education teachers, who, because of the nature of their work, may be required to teach several different subjects and/or grade levels during the day. For example, a special education teacher in a self-contained classroom might teach four or five content areas each day. In addition, special education teachers often do not know what subjects or grade levels they will be teaching before being hired, and their assignments frequently change from year to year, depending on the fluctuating needs of the students enrolled. Under the current interpretation of NCLB, a special education teacher would be required to meet separate subject-matter requirements for each core academic subject she might be asked to teach. Not only is this unreasonable, but the burden placed on special education teachers by these requirements is likely to exacerbate the already serious shortage of teachers in this field:

- “The U.S. Department of Education estimates the nation will need more than 200,000 new special educators during the next five years, but colleges and universities currently have the capacity to prepare only about half that number” (*Education Week, Count Me In: Special Education in the Era of Standards, “Highly Qualified?” January 2004*).

- 98 percent of U.S. school districts report special education teacher shortages, and special education is the area with the greatest teacher shortage in the 200 largest U.S. cities (*Center on Personnel Studies in Special Education*, “The Supply and Demand for Special Education Teachers,” *October 2003*).
- During the 2000-01 school year, approximately 47,500 special education positions were filled by uncertified personnel—a 23 percent increase from the previous year (*Center on Personnel Studies in Special Education*, “The Supply and Demand for Special Education Teachers,” *October 2003*).

Fully certified special education teachers draw on their knowledge of the disciplines to design and deliver instruction, facilitate student learning and assess student progress. They also draw on their specialized knowledge of specific disabilities and the instructional issues such disabilities pose in order to set meaningful goals for their students and appropriately instruct them. For this reason, the AFT believes that a teacher who is fully certified as a special education teacher by the state should be considered “highly qualified” under NCLB.

### **Definition of “Highly Qualified” Middle School Teachers**

In its teacher quality policy guidance issued in September 2003, the U.S. Department of Education stated that middle school generalist exams could not be used to meet the subject-area requirements of the “highly qualified” definition. This policy is unfair to veteran middle school teachers who have already demonstrated their competence in subject areas by passing the generalist tests that were offered when they received their licenses. In guidance released in January 2004, the department modified its position somewhat, but it still does not adequately clarify the issue. The AFT believes that if veteran middle school teachers passed the state licensure test when they were certified, no further testing should be required and they should be considered highly qualified.

### **Qualifications for Charter School Teachers**

Under the law, teachers in charter schools are not required to meet all requirements of the “highly qualified” definition. Specifically, they are not required to be certified if the state’s charter school law does not require certification of charter school teachers. Charter schools are public schools, and their teachers should be required to meet the same standards as other public school teachers. *All* public school students—whether in charter schools or not—deserve to be taught by fully certified, highly qualified teachers.

### **Qualifications for Teachers in Supplemental Services and Extended Learning Time Programs**

In a similar vein, the law and the Title I regulations do not require supplemental service providers to employ “highly qualified” teachers, and the regulations go so far as to prohibit states from requiring that they do so. The department also has said that third-party contractors and teachers in extended learning time programs are not required to adhere to the “highly qualified” teacher provisions in the law.

This makes no sense and sends contradictory messages. The requirement that public school districts ensure that every classroom has a “highly qualified” teacher is a core component of the law’s goal to guarantee that every child receive a high-quality education. Excusing these providers from having to hire “highly qualified” teachers will undermine the quality of the services provided to students participating in these programs.

## **Demonstrating Subject-Matter Knowledge Through the HOUSSE**

The AFT believes that all teachers should be qualified. Prospective teachers should be required to have an academic major and pass a rigorous test of subject matter and pedagogy. Veteran teachers should be fully licensed in their field. NCLB, however, goes a step further by requiring more of these veteran teachers with respect to demonstrating mastery of core academic subjects.

Under NCLB, veteran teachers may demonstrate subject-matter knowledge in several ways: by passing a test of subject-matter knowledge, or in the case of middle and secondary teachers, by completing an academic major or graduate degree or by obtaining some form of advanced credentialing, such as certification through the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. National Board Certification is a voluntary performance-based assessment process through which candidates demonstrate in-depth content knowledge and teaching practices measured against high and rigorous standards. Candidates are required to demonstrate subject-matter knowledge by taking a test and submitting a portfolio of evidence—including student work samples and videotaped classroom teaching.

All veteran teachers also have the option of completing the high, objective, uniform state standard of evaluation (HOUSSE). Although each state develops its own version of the HOUSSE, the law specifies that it:

- Cover grade appropriate academic knowledge and teaching skills;
- Be aligned to state academic content and student achievement standards;
- Provide objective and coherent information;
- Be applied uniformly to all teachers by grade and subject;
- Consider years of teaching in the subject;
- Be available to the public; and
- Involve multiple objective measures.

One of my co-panelists, Kate Walsh from the National Center on Teacher Quality, is co-author of a publication which argues that states have not established rigorous HOUSSE procedures for veteran teachers to demonstrate they are qualified to teach in their subject areas. While I agree with her assessment that state implementation of the HOUSSE option has been uneven, I would argue that the states which have given careful thought to creating their HOUSSE models have, in fact, developed viable options for veteran teachers to demonstrate their subject-matter knowledge. These states—and the models they have created—serve as an example of how other states should proceed, particularly the 10 states that still have not established a HOUSSE model.

So what do states include in their HOUSSE option? Most states require multiple measures as part of the evidence, including higher education courses, professional development activities and teaching experience, to name a few. Many states have developed a rubric model where teachers score points for each of the elements and are considered to have met the standard by amassing a certain number of points (usually 100 points).

For example, Ohio has developed a rubric HOUSSE model, that includes:

- College coursework related to content area of teaching assignment;
- Professional development in content area that meets the definition of high-quality professional development;

- Professional activities in teaching assignment (e.g., writing curriculum for the district, writing assessments for the district, teaching a quarter or semester course in the content areas for a local college or university, etc.);
- Recognition in the content area (awards and publications); and
- Years of experience in the content area as a fully licensed teacher.

It is clear from this example that HOUSSE models are being developed that permit veteran teachers to show content mastery and that evidence can be more extensive and more meaningful than merely passing an entry level test of content knowledge.

### **In Sum**

The AFT believes that the best way to recruit and retain high-quality teachers is professionalism: outstanding preparation, rigorous licensure tests of pedagogy and content knowledge, strong induction programs, competitive pay, administrative support and ongoing opportunities for professional growth.

We will continue to monitor implementation of the law's teacher quality provisions to make sure they are applied in ways that are fair to teachers and that will benefit the children they teach. If we are to truly strengthen the teacher workforce, more must be done and greater investments made. As a society, we do not invest seriously in the lives of children, most especially poor children and children of color. It will take political will, resources and a greater seriousness of purpose among all involved in the policies and practices related to the preparation of teachers to ensure a highly qualified teacher in every classroom.