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## Class Notes

### **State policies hinder teacher quality**

*New report looks at the uneven landscape of policies across the U.S.*

The patchwork of state policies designed to promote teacher quality are doing more harm than good in advancing that goal, according to a comprehensive new report from the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ). The three-year research project, which NCTQ calls the "2007 State Teacher Policy Yearbook," includes detailed reports and analyses on every state, as well as a national summary.

Unlike many other reports, which have focused on federal policies and No Child Left Behind, this study looks at the specific policies, laws and regulations in the 50 states and the District of Columbia. In one respect, the report is like many others—it awards letter grades based on how each state is doing in meeting goals in six broad areas, which include 27 subgoals.

The study finds that no state comes close to being a national model for change in the six areas: meeting NCLB teacher quality objectives, teacher licensure, teacher evaluation and compensation, state approval of teacher preparation programs, alternate routes to certification and preparation of special education teachers. As a group, the states meet or come close to meeting 21 percent of the goals. The authors do single out Massachusetts, New Jersey, Tennessee and Texas for their "best practices" in some areas.

"State policies determine which teachers enter the profession, who qualifies for a license and who can stay," says NCTQ president Kate Walsh. "What we found is that the current state policies not only do not help to improve the overall quality of the nation's public school teachers, they actually hinder that goal. Nevertheless, with leadership and will, these policies are eminently fixable, and we hope that the 'Yearbook' report will spur change."

Among the report's key findings:

**State policies are remarkably inflexible and outdated.** Most states do not require that teachers receive annual performance evaluations. Only 14 mandate annual evaluations, and only seven require districts to dismiss teachers after two unsatisfactory evaluations.

**States are not paying enough attention to who goes into teaching.** Forty-one states require teacher preparation programs to administer a basic skills test, but 24 of those states delay testing until the candidates complete the preparation program.

**States do not appropriately oversee teacher preparation programs.** The majority of states rely on site visits and syllabus reviews to determine approval of teacher preparation programs. Only 18 states include meaningful objective data, such as first-year evaluations of a program's graduates.

**States continue to neglect content preparation for teachers.** For example, 19 states make no mention of geometry, and 42 states do not require teachers to demonstrate any core knowledge of American history.

**States do not ensure that special education teachers are well prepared to teach students with disabilities.** Only four states have strong standards that are clear, comprehensive and explicit about what teachers should know to be able to teach students with disabilities.

**State policies are not geared toward increasing the quality and quantity of math and science teachers.** Only 12 states have made some progress toward this goal.

**States' alternate routes to teacher certification lack "truth in advertising."** Of the 48 states that claim to have alternate routes, only six offer a genuine alternate route to licensure. Fifteen states offer programs that need significant revision, while 27 offer routes that more closely resemble traditional or emergency routes than alternatives.

The authors also call into question the overall value of having such a state-based, decentralized system. "If states still believe there are 51 distinct systems for the teacher profession, it is illusion. In fact, there are generally two or three systems, at most four versions," the report says. "For the most part, states look remarkably similar to one another."

The full yearbook, available online at [www.nctq.org/stpy](http://www.nctq.org/stpy) (<http://www.nctq.org/stpy>), includes reports on every state. The Web site also includes an interactive map that allows quick comparisons with a click of the mouse.

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