



from the August 30, 2007 edition - <http://www.csmonitor.com/2007/0830/p13s02-legn.html>

## How should teachers be graded?

### Debate rises over how to identify and keep qualified teachers.

By **Stacy Teicher Khadaroo** | Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor

As the curtain opens on a new school year, the spotlight is on teachers. Off in the wings, a noisy debate ensues about how to ensure that public school teachers are well qualified – and receive enough support – to do their jobs.

There is some consensus on the situation: Students with experienced, highly skilled teachers tend to do better academically. And schools with high concentrations of minority or low-income students have a more difficult time attracting and keeping those teachers.

Agreeing on solutions isn't so easy. Some advocates urge tying pay to performance. Others say more good teachers will stay when the profession gets more respect and pay, and when school leaders improve. Some clamor for tighter staterules on how teachers are educated and certified. Others want more flexibility.

Stirring the current debate is the fact that Congress is expected to take up reauthorization of the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) this fall. One part of the law requires states, districts, and schools to have 100 percent "highly qualified" teachers for key subjects. That generally means they need to have a bachelor's degree, demonstrate knowledge of their subjects, and be state-certified.

As of last winter (the latest data available), 17 percent of US school districts did not expect to meet the June 2007 deadline for highly qualified teachers, according to a new report by the Center on Education Policy (CEP) in Washington. In addition, 33 states were not on track for all teachers in their state to be "highly qualified."

Whatever the level of compliance, the utility of the NCLB teacher requirement is being challenged:

- More than half the states and two-thirds of the school districts in the nationally representative survey by CEP say the requirement is having minimal or no impact on student achievement.
- Too many states simply put window dressing on inadequate emergency licensing to appear to satisfy the law, says Kate Walsh, president of the National Council on Teacher Quality, a nonprofit advocacy group in Washington.
- Last week a group of parents and advocates in California filed a lawsuit against the US Department of Education for what they consider loopholes in NCLB that result in their children being taught by people not yet qualified.

### Qualifications vs. performance

Even if all states and districts fulfilled this part of the law, it wouldn't suffice, according to the Commission on No Child Left Behind, a bipartisan group that solicited input from educators and the public. "It was very clear to us in traveling the country ... that HQT [the high-quality teacher section of NCLB] focuses on the wrong thing – it's about qualifications to enter the classroom and tells you nothing about performance in the classroom," says commission director Gary Huggins.

To shift the focus to effectiveness, the commission recommends that the federal government provide \$400 million over the next four years and help states build systems to track individual student performance. Such "growth models" are already being used in a handful of states and can show the gains students make with a particular teacher. That, Mr. Huggins says, should be used to target professional development and to ensure that

disadvantaged students have equal access to effective teachers.

Huggins says student gains on state tests should account for at least half of the measure of teacher quality, with the remainder based on "evaluations by principals or peer-review panels – because we also want to see principals empowered to run their schools." A proposal along these lines is included in the "All Students Can Achieve Act," introduced this summer by Sens. Joseph Lieberman (I) of Connecticut, Mary Landrieu (D) of Louisiana, and Norm Coleman (R) of Minnesota.

"It is absolutely critical that teachers be able to demonstrate subject-matter competence ... teaching ability, and so on before they get in front of a classroom," says Reg Weaver, president of the National Education Association, a teachers union in Washington. But he draws the line when asked if student-growth data should be used to measure teacher effectiveness. "Absolutely not," he says, citing factors that affect learning but are out of teachers' control, such as class size and school safety.

Policymakers need to look at the whole puzzle, Mr. Weaver says, which includes not just standards and testing, but also the "economic structure and tax base and adequate and equitable funding."

The NEA supports pay incentives for teachers who work in hard-to-staff schools. But pay alone is unlikely to keep teachers in high-needs schools, says Tom Carroll, president of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, a Washington nonprofit. His organization estimates that teacher turnover costs public schools \$7.3 billion a year.

What drives teachers out is "unacceptable conditions," and for young teachers, it's often because "they feel they've been thrown in, sink or swim," Mr. Carroll says. "The good news is you can turn this problem around." Cities such as Boston and Chicago have improved retention rates through coaching new teachers, he says.

At the very least, Carroll argues, schools should be required to report their teacher-turnover rates, which would expose the unstable learning environment faced by some students, particularly minorities.

Better school leadership can stem turnover, says Ms. Walsh of the National Council on Teacher Quality. If principals "created an atmosphere of collegiality and were effective at their own jobs, that would attract a better caliber of teachers." States also need to do better overseeing the quality of education schools and certification, she says. "Only 14 states require annual evaluations [of teachers]," and in some of those states, "you can get a 'Satisfactory' and be a terrible teacher."

## **New efforts to find good teachers**

Finding qualified teachers for certain subjects is particularly difficult. But a number of programs have sprung up to help. One is The New Teacher Project, a national nonprofit in New York. Through an immersion program for people with some math background, the group has increased New York City's supply of math teachers by 500 percent, says CEO Ariela Rozman. "On every measure – from retention to principal satisfaction with how they are doing in the classroom – these folks are as strong or stronger than math majors," she says.

There is no one right way, but creating clear, fair evaluation systems is essential, Ms. Rozman says, "not just because you want to be able to identify teachers who are not performing up to par, but because you want to be able to distinguish the ones who are doing an excellent job."

[Full HTML version of this story which may include photos, graphics, and related links](#)

---

[Home](#) | [About Us/Help](#) | [Feedback](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [Archive](#) | [Print Edition](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Special Projects](#) | [Corrections](#)  
[Contact Us](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Rights & Permissions](#) | [Terms of Service](#) | [Advertise With Us](#) | [Today's Article on Christian Science](#)

---

www.csmonitor.com | Copyright © 2007 The Christian Science Monitor. All rights reserved.