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Education Think Tank Evaluates Standards for America's Veteran Teachers; Questions Effectiveness of State Plans

*Will Sending Experienced Teachers Scrambling to Prove They're Qualified
Strengthen the Teaching Profession?*

WASHINGTON, DC—The National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ), an advocacy group committed to restructuring the teaching profession and ensuring that every child is taught by a qualified teacher, today released a report entitled *Searching the Attic: How States Are Responding to the Nation's Goal of Placing a Highly Qualified Teacher in Every Classroom*. This report, the second in a series published by NCTQ, examines states' progress—or lack thereof—in meeting the ambitious new federal requirement that by the end of the 2006 school year there will be a “highly qualified teacher” in every classroom in the nation.

Requiring that every teacher obtain “highly qualified” status has led to some significant discomfort in more than a few states. No longer are states able to decide independently what constitutes a qualified teacher; they must also consider a federally imposed standard that addresses the teacher's knowledge of subject matter. In this context, No Child Left Behind has cast a shadow over the integrity and value of the states' teacher certification systems. States are now required to separately assess teachers' subject-matter knowledge, a process viewed by many as an unwanted diversion from long-standing and well-tended certification systems.

Searching the Attic uniquely examines what states are requiring of their practicing teachers in order to comply with the law. As most current teachers were certified before No Child Left Behind was enacted, states must retrofit their old definitions of teacher quality to the federal law's new expectations. Unfortunately, this has many veteran teachers scrambling up the stairs and into their attics to dig out antiquated proof of professional development workshops, membership on school committees, or previous coursework, oftentimes completed decades ago.

“In the short term, the prospects are dim for making genuine strides in improving teacher quality,” said Kate Walsh, President of NCTQ. “The law's clarity on the academic preparation required of new teachers bodes a more promising future, but where veteran teachers are concerned the law is doomed to disappoint, save in a minority of states.” Walsh maintains that the evidence accumulated for this report suggests that the highly qualified teacher provisions will be brought down by the burden of NCLB's internal compromises and ambiguity and by states' unwillingness to cede control no matter how important the cause.

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Even with the 2006 deadline looming, only a handful of states appear willing to comply with the spirit of that portion of the law that seeks to correct the long-tolerated, widespread and inadequate preparation of American teachers in their subject areas. Some states are indifferent or even antagonistic about the prospect of declaring significant numbers of their active teachers unqualified.

“I am pleased that Hawaii placed second in the nation in the ranking prepared by the National Council on Teacher Quality,” said Governor Linda Lingle. “I urge state leaders around the nation, working with the education community, to provide all available training opportunities to ensure that teachers know their subject matter and can meet the highest possible standards. In Hawaii, my administration has offered to provide bonuses to teachers who complete the certification program of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards as a way to encourage and reward those who take this rigorous training. We are honored by this recognition.” Hawaii ranked second in the nation when it earned a B+ grade on its HOUSSE standards in this NCTQ report.

The state of Colorado earned the report's only A, standing alone in demanding that all of its practicing teachers meet an objective standard of their subject-matter knowledge. Veteran teachers there have only two choices: passing a test in the subject(s) they teach or accumulating coursework nearly equivalent to a college major. Oregon sets a similarly high standard but only for its newer teachers. Alabama, Pennsylvania, Kansas and Hawaii require that all of their teachers, no matter when they entered the profession, and no matter what the certification rules once permitted, should at least hold a college minor in the subjects they teach. Though their standard falls short of NCLB's goal of an academic major for all levels of teaching, this group of states offers a pragmatic response that other states should consider.

“We all need to step up our efforts to strengthen our teaching forces, and unless we are prepared to wait 20 years for new standards to permeate current systems that would include modifying our expectations for veteran teachers,” said Nancy S. Grasmick, Maryland State Superintendent of Schools. “If we expect to move forward, all of our state plans must do more than sustain the status quo. We need to insist on requiring relevant, comprehensive professional development and coursework for those who make a career of teaching.” Maryland is one of only a handful of states to receive an A or B grade in NCTQ's evaluation, and ranked fourth in the nation with a B+ grade.

NCTQ found that the most common are plans that require veteran teachers to earn a set number of points to be labeled "highly qualified." Others offer teachers a menu of approved activities, each of which has been assigned a point value, like participating in mentoring programs, tutoring or attending workshops. Perhaps out of desire to show flexibility or perhaps in an effort to minimize the disruption and anxiety to teachers, many states have gutted the law's opportunity to achieve meaningful reform.

Walsh concludes that, “Most states share neither the urgency nor the single-minded focus of the U.S. Congress in seeking to address the low academic standards required of American teachers, arguably the least rigorous among all developed nations.” NCTQ takes a hard look

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at the standards to which we hold our nation's teachers and raises some important questions about exactly how to go about remedying the impact of substandard, expired certification regulations and policies, many of which were developed under an outdated set of rules and markedly lower standards.

The National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) is a non-partisan non-profit organization committed to restructuring the teaching profession, moving beyond the status quo and ensuring that every child is taught by a qualified teacher.

We are supported by a diverse group of educators, policy makers and advocates for change from across the nation, equally invested in pursuing new solutions for improving the overall quality of the nation's teachers, encouraging innovation and high standards in the teaching profession, and bringing much-needed reform and respect to the nation's most honorable profession.

**For more information about NCTQ or to speak with Kate Walsh,
Governor Lingle or Nancy Grasmick visit www.nctq.org or call
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