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## News

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### Teachers might be left out under No Child Left Behind

### Law could drive some out of special education

By MIKE SHERRY The Kansas City Star

A federal law known more for its crackdown on schools with poor test scores could have a profound effect on special education as well.



NORMAN NG/The Kansas City Star

Antioch Middle School special-education teacher Diana Haynes considers it an affront that she may not be considered highly qualified in her field, despite her 13 years in the classroom. "Some teachers are highly qualified because they have been in the classroom for years," she said.

Special-education advocates fret that a lesser-known provision in the No Child Left Behind Act could worsen a shortage in a field that already has 10 percent fewer teachers than needed nationwide.

"Every answer we turn to is, 'Go back to school. Get more coursework to be highly qualified,' " said Karen Untereker, a special-education teacher in Fort Scott who recently attended a No Child Left Behind meeting in Topeka. "When (teachers) start realizing the implications of that, there is going to be a lot of moaning and groaning, and there are going to be a lot saying, 'I'm getting out of special education.' "

The source of the concern is part of the No Child Left Behind law that requires teachers — even those with years of classroom experience — to prove they are highly qualified to teach basic subjects. The provision will take effect in mid-2006.

The main question in the special-education field is whether these teachers, who have built an expertise in working with hard-to-serve children, must now in some cases demonstrate content knowledge, too.

Advocates fear that the additional requirements will discourage new teachers from entering the field and could cause an exodus of veterans. Already, experts said, the shortage of special-education teachers is causing crowded classrooms and shortchanging students with underqualified teachers.

One of those people worried about recruitment and retention is Diana Haynes, a special-education teacher at Antioch Middle School in the North Kansas City School District.

Though Haynes said she is staying put, she considers it an affront that she may not be considered highly qualified in her field, despite her schooling and 13 years in the classroom.

"Some teachers are highly qualified because they have been in the classroom for years," she said.

No Child Left Behind is perhaps best known for requiring schools to assess how well their students measure up against state-set standards on math and reading. Students in schools that continually underperform are allowed to transfer, one of many enforcement provisions in the law.

As for teachers, the "highly qualified" provisions apply to people teaching core academic subjects, including English, reading or language arts, math, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history and geography.

The requirements are largely in line with what most states now mandate. But they differ in one significant way.

They require teachers to demonstrate "subject-matter competency" in each core subject they teach.

In Missouri, that requirement affects almost 40 percent of the state's more than 66,000 teachers.

Kansas education officials were unable to provide a comparable number, but state figures indicate the provision covers almost three-quarters of the state's roughly 53,000 teacher "assignments." Some Kansas teachers have more than one assignment if they teach multiple subjects.

It was unclear what, if any, sanctions federal officials may use to enforce the provisions.

The U.S. Department of Education is making "monitoring visits" to each state to judge compliance. Officials have yet to visit Missouri or Kansas.

The special-education community is not the only group that has problems with the highly qualified provisions.

The Washington, D.C.-based National Council on Teacher Quality, for instance, argues that many states are skirting the law's intent to improve teacher training, with Missouri among them.

"Some states are making a joke out of this thing," said Kate Walsh, the group's president.

In a December report, the council graded all states on how well they were implementing the teacher portions of No Child Left Behind.

The council criticized Missouri and 10 other states that have decided that their current system for certifying teachers is rigorous enough to meet the No Child Left Behind guidelines.

The council faulted Missouri for not requiring elementary and middle school teachers to have a college major in their subject area.

Dee Beck, the state's coordinator of federal programs, disagreed with the council's conclusion. She said the council failed to recognize that Missouri requires teachers to demonstrate a mastery of content before they are accepted into a teaching program and after they complete their degrees.

Kansas, by contrast, received high marks for creating what the council called a "solid point system" that allows veteran teachers to demonstrate that they are highly qualified through a combination of years of experience, coursework, and professional development.

Other critics of the highly qualified provisions argue that they ignore the fact that knowing how to teach is just as important as knowing what you teach.

"Obviously you have to have the content knowledge," said Lisa Elliott, executive director of NEA Shawnee Mission. "But, the challenge in the classroom is getting the information out to the children in a way they can understand. The idea that you don't need to know how to teach is ridiculous."

Though the highly qualified provisions have been heavily criticized, even skeptics conceded that they might have some value.

Haynes, the special-education teacher in North Kansas City, said the provisions could be a positive step for her students. She said they might force schools to better integrate special-education students into general education classrooms.

"In the back of my mind," she said, "maybe it's a good thing because I believe in inclusion. If I can collaborate more with general education teachers, I'm all for it."

Martha Gage, director of teacher education and licensure for the Kansas Department of Education, was similarly upbeat in addressing Untereker and other special-education representatives in Topeka.

The intent of the law is worthwhile, she said, because "It's hard to teach what you don't know."

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**First glance**

- *Part of the No Child Left Behind law requires teachers to prove they are highly qualified to teach basic subjects. The provision takes effect in mid-2006.*

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