



# NCTQ reports

## Necessary and Insufficient

### RESISTING A FULL MEASURE OF TEACHER QUALITY

By Christopher O. Tracy and Kate Walsh

*For all the conflict generated by various K-12 education reform efforts, there is one principle everyone agrees on: teachers need to know the subject matter they teach. This principle makes sense to parents, educators, and policy makers alike. On the importance of a teacher's knowledge the views range from those who believe that subject knowledge to be of paramount importance to those who believe it to be a "necessary but not sufficient" condition for effective teaching.*

While this principle may generate broad agreement, putting it into practice is another story. Traditionally Institutions that train teachers and the states that license them have emphasized teachers' pedagogical training over subject matter knowledge. This preoccupation,

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The teacher quality provisions in No Child Left Behind may represent an unprecedented (and largely unwelcome) intervention of the federal government in teacher quality issues, but there is no question that they address a real problem ignored by many states.

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warranted or not, has produced an alarming number of teachers who are insufficiently grounded in the subjects they teach.

There is no shortage of evidence that training in subject matter knowledge has taken a back seat to pedagogical training—even at the secondary level, where there is strong consensus about the credentials teachers need to earn. The U.S. Department of Education reported in 2003 that although nearly 94 percent of teachers had been

certified by their states to teach, approximately half of all secondary teachers did not have a college major in their assigned subject. A quarter of secondary teachers lacked even a minor (equivalent to as few as five college courses) in their assigned subject. The problem is even more pronounced in districts serving children who are poor. One study found that one in three secondary classes are taught by a teacher without a minor in the subject (Ingersoll, 2002).

#### Leading Up to Federal Intervention

Responsibility for rectifying this problem rests with states, the institutional bodies that regulate and grant teacher licenses. Yet even as they are daily confronted by evidence that teacher subject matter mastery is shockingly weak, states have been slow and ineffective in their response. At the time the No Child Left Behind act (NCLB) was passed into law, less than half of all states required *high school* teachers to have majored in their subject area. Only a slim majority of states (29) required teacher candidates to pass a relatively simple subject matter test that would provide an objective measure of teacher knowledge.

The teacher quality provisions in No Child Left Behind may represent an unprecedented (and largely unwelcome) intervention of the federal government in teacher

### The Federal Law Requires State Standards ...

1

Be set for grade appropriate subject matter knowledge and teaching skills.

2

Be aligned with K-12 learning standards.

3

Provide objective, coherent information on teachers' subject matter competency.

4

Be applied uniformly.

5

Take into consideration, but not be based primarily on, the time a teacher has been teaching a subject.

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Be made available to public.

7

(Optional) Involve multiple, objective measures of teacher competency.

quality issues, but there is no question that they address a real problem ignored by many states.

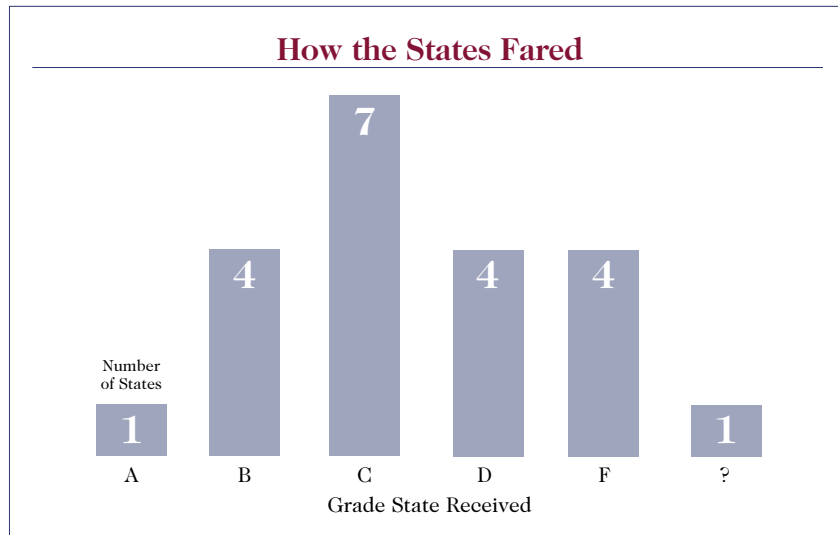
### Mixing Good Policy with Political Reality

In fashioning the teacher quality provisions of NCLB, Congress made an important but politically charged decision: not only would new teachers have to meet the new standards, but experienced teachers would as well. Congress could have opted to grandfather in experienced teachers, exempting them from meeting NCLB's "Highly Qualified Teacher" provisions. That option would have been the more politically tenable move, one that would also have avoided requiring unenthusiastic states to collect whole new kinds of data on their teachers and held at bay the constant press reports about teachers feeling degraded by having to prove their competency.

Congress decided against exempting experienced teachers, presumably because it agreed with many policy makers, researchers, and school districts that the problem was acute enough that the nation could not simply wait for teacher turnover and retirement to provide the solution. However, Congress did not go so far as to make experienced teachers (generally having at least three years of experience) meet the same criteria as new teachers, who are now required by law to either possess a major in their subject area or to pass a subject matter test.<sup>1</sup> In a concession to flexibility, Congress decided to let experienced teachers elect to use a third route not available to new teachers.

The specifics of this third route are only loosely described in the federal law. Essentially, each state is charged with designing its own set of standards for teachers with at least three years of experience, provided federal guidelines are followed (see box). These standards are called the HOUSSE, meaning *High Objective Uniform State Standard of Evaluation*. As of March 2004, 30 states had finalized their HOUSSE standards.

<sup>1</sup> In lieu of a major, teachers may also provide evidence of a sufficient amount of relevant course work, through "the successful completion, in each of the subjects in which a teacher teaches, of either": 1) a graduate degree, 2) course work that is equivalent to an undergraduate major, or 3) advanced credentialing.



## THE FINDINGS

More than two years later, the nation has just passed the halfway mark toward the January 2006 deadline when most teachers will need a “highly qualified” designation to stay in the classroom. This report from the National Council on Teacher Quality is the first of several reports on this topic that will be issued in the months leading up to this deadline. For this first report card we have reviewed the

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standards of 20 randomly selected states, most of them in final form, though a few are still considered to be drafts and are still fairly malleable.

Each state was given a grade for the quality of their standards. State standards were graded on the basis of their rigor; the likelihood that they will identify teachers weak in subject knowledge; the degree to which they reflect that a state is serious about addressing the problem; their clarity; and, finally, on how readily accessible they are to the public. (Appendix 1 describes the grading process in detail.)

States have generally adopted two kinds of standards. Most states decided to employ a point system. States have predetermined what activities are legitimate and how many points each activity is worth. When a teacher has acquired 100 points, the state deems the teacher highly qualified. Other states use an evaluation system that is loosely or strictly based on their existing teacher evaluation systems. The one exception to states’ use of one of these two systems of standards is Idaho, which has decreed that any certified teacher is highly qualified.

All of the states selected here for this first review were given the opportunity to comment and make corrections. Most states did submit comments and this report reflects their input. In subsequent reports, NCTQ will review the standards of the remaining states and also revisit any changes made to the standards of these original 20 states.

The results are decidedly mixed. The average grade is a dreadful D+, though the grades varied from A to F (with one “incomplete”). The standards range from reasonable and responsible attempts to meet the spirit of the law to approaches that can best be described as indifferent and fractious.

States getting high marks devised standards that respect the law’s intent. Illinois and Oregon, for example, recognize that short of a test, college- or graduate-level course work is the most reliable, objective measure of content knowledge. These states have created standards that compel teachers to document their knowledge via content-area

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course work. Oregon, in fact, does not even allow its high school teachers to use its “HOUSSE” standards in order to be judged highly qualified, requiring them instead to take a test in the content area.

States getting low marks appear to believe that their own teaching force is somehow immune from a problem that plagues the nation as a whole and that “business as usual” is an appropriate response. States have also proved wildly inventive at coming up with an array of activities that are supposed indicators of teacher subject matter knowledge, but which can at best be said to bear only slight relation to such knowledge.

### WHERE THE STANDARDS GO WRONG

With remarkable consistency, state HOUSSE standards fell victim to five common problems:

#### 1 Irrelevancy

This problem permeates most of the state standards: teachers may elect from a menu of options that at best tortuously relate to subject matter competency. For example, many states permit such activities as serving on a curriculum development team or mentoring a new teacher to count toward subject matter knowledge. Alabama teachers can count learning how to become better managers of their classroom as evidence of being highly qualified. A few states give credit to teachers who head an academic club. Three states (California, Michigan, and West Virginia) give credit for completing a National Board application, even if the teacher fails to earn certification. Oklahoma teachers can rest on the laurels of their own students who place “first, second, or third in an academic competition.”

In some states, jargon replaces hard evidence and clear goals. For California teachers, the ambiguous skill of “communicating learning goals” counts. Equally ambiguous, South Carolina teachers earn credit for “assessment planning” and “monitoring and enhancing learning.” Virginia veers the opposite direction providing an atomic level of direction, giving credit for an “educational project,” which might include “exchange of assignments by an elementary reading specialist and a local public librarian.”

#### 2 Why Change?

Many states seem to think themselves immune from the challenge of insufficient teacher quality. Their standards neither identify nor help teachers in need. For example, South Carolina has merely tweaked its existing teacher evaluation system to include subject matter competency as one of the skills principals should look for evidence of during two classroom observations. Idaho takes each aspect of the federal guidelines (see box above) and explains how their current certification process ensures that their teachers have strong content knowledge. In so doing, Idaho is essentially making the argument that

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...teachers may elect from a menu of options that at best tortuously relate to subject matter competency.

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they are so confident in their certification program that developing a plan for teachers who fall through the cracks is not necessary—which may or may not be the case.

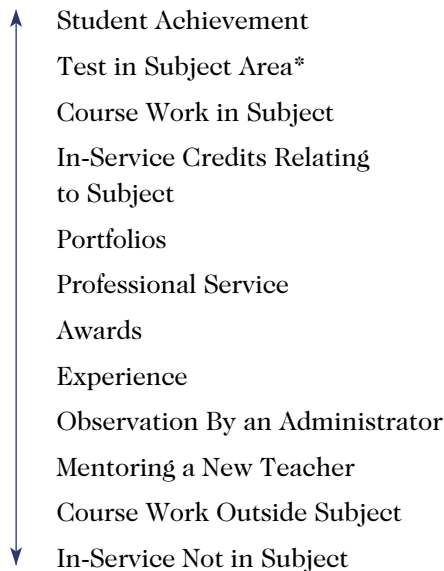
#### 3 Say What?

In many states, the standards are inordinately complex, leaving teachers and administrators hard pressed to know what to do. Consider this language from one of three options within the Michigan plan:

[Teachers must] have at least 3 years of teaching experience and, before the end of the 2005-06 school year, have completed an individual professional development plan approved by the local school improvement team, including completion of professional development activities that are aligned with the state professional development standards and consisting of at least 90 contact hours or 6 semester hours of course work in a standards-based (in accordance with the SBE-approved standards that are aligned with the applicable Michigan Curriculum Frameworks) subject/content subject area program related to the current teaching assignment, and documented with the local district in a form approved by the MDE.

### Measuring Teachers' Subject Matter Knowledge

#### Completely Reliable Measure of Subject Matter Knowledge



#### Completely Unreliable Measure of Subject Matter Knowledge

\* Experienced teachers who choose to take a rigorous subject matter test do not need to meet any other state standards. Given that this option technically lies outside the HOUSSSE standards, the presence or absence of a test requirement did not factor into our evaluation.

## 4 Fishing with Hula Hoops

Some states have created such enormous loopholes that there is little likelihood that weak teachers will be identified and helped—and in fact, the weakest teachers are most likely to take advantage of these loopholes. While most states provide teachers with the option of taking a test or a college-level class, they also offer teachers easier ways to maneuver around these objective and generally more rigorous measures.

For example, New York's standards give teachers ten different options to prove their subject matter knowledge. One option is to take ten graduate courses in their subject. Another is to document number of years in the classroom, supervise a new teacher, or give a presentation at a professional meeting. Which are more teachers likely to choose?

## 5 Two Plus Two Does Not Equal Four

Some standards defy logic. In Georgia, teachers receive as much credit for attending two conferences as they do for earning a doctoral degree in their content area. In Oklahoma, a teacher who publishes an article in his or her discipline receives the same amount of points as a teacher who sponsors an academic club. In California, teachers receive the same amount of points for taking six to seven courses as they do for being a mentor for a year.

Though states that implemented point systems did not necessarily collaborate with each other when developing their standards, one might have expected to see some semblance of common values assigned to the various options. Instead, they assign wildly different numbers of points for the same activity. Alabama teachers earn a single point (of the 100 points needed) for each credit hour of course work they take; in contrast, Virginia teachers earn nearly 17 for the same effort.

The chart to the left ("Measuring Teachers' Subject Matter Knowledge") lists the most common options that teachers can use as evidence of their subject matter competency. From top to bottom, there is a tremendous range in their reliable correlation with teacher knowledge. For example, eleven states have approved mentoring as evidence. It is conceivable that a teacher who mentors a new teacher *might* have been selected by the principal for his or her knowledge of the subject matter. Indeed, it is also

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possible that a teacher who mentors a new teacher *might* learn more about the subject in the process of mentoring. However, as a reliable measure, there is no inherent connection between mentoring and subject knowledge.

### Course Work

Course work, which certainly varies enormously in quality, is nonetheless a much more reliable measure of a teacher's subject knowledge. Fulfilling the requirements of a college- or graduate-level course generally requires that an individual acquire knowledge of the content and

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**Some states have created such enormous loopholes that there is little likelihood that weak teachers will be identified and helped...**

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that the knowledge is assessed by an exam and reflected in a final grade. Most (if not all) professional development does not require the same level of performance; attendance is usually the only requirement. Also, even when states require professional development be "content-specific," its connection can be tenuous at best.

Some factors, like "Professional Service," fall in the middle of the spectrum since the activities that fall under this category range from writing a published textbook in the subject matter (a clear indication of teacher knowledge) to attending a conference (a clear indication of very little).

### Experience

No Child Left Behind allows states to "consider but not base" their standards primarily on the time a teacher has been teaching a specific subject. Fourteen of the 20 states elected to allow experience to be used as an indicator of teacher knowledge. In states that have set up point systems to measure whether a teacher is highly qualified, teachers generally can earn up to half their points for experience. In Georgia, for example, five years of experience is enough to earn 50 of the required 100 points. Only Alabama substantially limits credit for experience to less than a third of the required total points.

The correlation between experience and teacher knowledge is not illogical, but it remains problematic in terms of meeting the goals of the law. It is certainly true that the longer one teaches American history, the more one might learn about American history. But this connection is probably *more* likely true for good teachers who work hard each year to improve than it is for weak teachers who do not. And it is not *necessarily* true of any teacher. This concession to experience makes it even less likely that weak teachers will be identified.

Furthermore, it is a circular exercise to allow only experienced teachers to use experience as an indicator of teacher quality. Since the NCLB "HOUSSE" route is *only* available to experienced teachers (or "not new" as termed by some states) then it is odd that the law and states allow teacher experience to be effectively counted twice, once in order to be qualified to use the "HOUSSE" route and second as an indicator of knowledge.

### Student Achievement

Several states, including Tennessee, Kentucky, and Oklahoma, have taken the important step of crediting teachers for raising student achievement. Since the impetus behind the highly qualified teacher components of No Child Left Behind was the correlation between teacher knowledge and student achievement, it is only right that states use this relationship as evidence that a teacher is highly qualified. Unfortunately, only a few states have the capability to evaluate how effectively a particular teacher raises student achievement.

## GRADING THE STATES

States were assessed on the basis of how well their standards met the following five principles:

- 1 Standards should be consistently rigorous and focus on providing clear and objective evidence of teacher's subject matter knowledge.
- 2 Standards should identify teachers weak in subject matter knowledge.
- 3 Standards should reflect an understanding of the law's intent and demonstrate a commitment on the part of the state to genuinely address the problem.

Options Available to Teachers to Demonstrate Subject Matter Knowledge

Options

States	Student Achievement	Course Work in Subject	In-Service in Subject	Portfolios	Professional Service	Awards	Experience	Observation By an Admin.	Mentoring	In-Service Not in Subject	Course Work Not in Subject	Option Unique to State	Total No. of Options
Oregon		■											1
Idaho		■	■									1**	3
Illinois		■	■				■						3
Louisiana		■	■	■						■			4
New Hampshire	■	■	■	■									4
Kentucky	■	■	■		■					■			6
South Carolina								■				5**	6
Alabama		■	■		■					■			6
Georgia		■	■		■					■			6
New Mexico	■	■		■								2**	6
Maryland*		■	■		■					■			7
Michigan		■	■	■						■			7
West Virginia*		■	■		■					■			7
California		■	■	■						■			8
North Carolina	■	■	■	■						■			8
Ohio		■	■		■					■	■		8
Oklahoma	■	■	■		■					■			8
Tennessee	■	■	■		■					■			9
Virginia	■	■	■	■	■					■		1**	9
New York		■	■	■	■					■		5**	10

\* Standards are currently in draft form.

\*\*Several states offer unique options and the number of such options is noted. They include: *Idaho*: teacher is certified; *South Carolina*: teacher exhibits skill such as long-range planning, assessment planning, using instructional strategies, providing content, monitoring and enhancing learning; *New Mexico*: teacher utilizes a variety of teaching methods and resources; teacher effectively utilizes student assessment techniques; *New York*: teacher completes a BA with a general education component, teacher completes a state approved program leading to a certificate, teacher holds a licensure in a recognized profession related to subject, submits to a formal review of subject knowledge, passes a federal or industry-standard exam in an occupational field related to the subject; *Virginia*: teacher completes an educational project.

States

## The Grades

A

### Illinois

Very rigorous; teachers become Highly Qualified primarily through a hefty 24 semester hours in content course work.

### Oregon

B+

Abundantly clear, simple, no loopholes. Teachers either pass a subject matter test (the Praxis II) or take 16 semester hours of course work. High school teachers are not permitted to use the HOUSSE route, presumably because Oregon wants to be doubly certain that these teachers know their subject.

B+

### Alabama

High marks for prohibiting teachers with fewer than 18 credit hours in content area on their transcripts from using HOUSSE route. Marked down, however, for awarding only 1 point for each credit hour of course work. As a result, teachers have little incentive to choose course work over less demanding options. Overall, a relatively strong program.

### Ohio

B

A very promising point system compromised by a risky professional development option. Point system includes an 18-credit-hour minimum in course work in subject area. But teachers can also earn more than a quarter of their required points through pedagogical course work. Professional development option appears to be rigorous, with a 90-hour minimum, but districts have a poor track record on teaching rigorous content through the less demanding medium of professional development.

B-

### Kentucky

Earns high marks for a user-friendly set of standards, offering an easy-to-use online calculator that allows teachers to gauge how many points their credentials are worth. Rigor of standards suffers from the absence of a minimum course work requirement, which makes it possible for a teacher with weak subject matter knowledge to bypass objective measures through a combination of years in the classroom, professional development (including attending a state convention), and awards.

### New Mexico

C

Standards require teachers to present evidence of subject matter knowledge to an administrator and another panelist appointed by the teacher. While stressing collaboration and support, standards depend heavily on observations—a poor tool for identifying subject matter knowledge. Biggest positive is that teachers must submit evidence of student achievement.

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## The Grades (continued)

C

### Oklahoma

Like many states with point systems, half of the points a teacher needs can be earned by documenting years in the classroom and the other half through a combination of professional development, professional service (including sponsoring an academic club), and awards. Good marks for giving points for raising student achievement.

### Georgia

C

Some of the strangest provisions of all the HOUSSE standards. Teachers who author a textbook in their subject area earn one-third of the points they need. Teachers who earn a *doctorate* in their subject matter earn a mere one-tenth of the required points. Apart from these lapses in logic, Georgia makes it relatively difficult for weak teachers to avoid course work.

C

### New Hampshire

One of the strongest set of standards in terms of encouraging collaboration, and attempts to identify teachers needing help in a non-threatening manner. Unfortunately, while the system is long on explanation of how collaboration should occur, it says little about what amount of evidence of teacher knowledge is sufficient. It suggests teachers use good objective measures but how much evidence is needed is unclear. Apparently, the state recognizes this and is working to clarify it. Low marks also for lack of clarity and use of somewhat silly jargon (e.g. teachers should “participate in a reflective dialogue with partner”).

### Maryland

C

Does a lot right but then a lot wrong. State limits the points that can be earned via professional development and awards and sets an ambitious 30-semester-hour *minimum* for subject matter course work. But this is undermined by a glaring loophole: Maryland exempts any teacher who has earned its advanced professional certificate, which teachers can get with as little as 3 years of experience and a master’s degree. The certificate requires that only two graduate courses in the requisite master’s program need to be related to the teacher’s specific discipline.

C-

### North Carolina

Teachers must prove competency by meeting 80 percent of the ten “content indicators” (experience, course work, activities, awards, etc.) but it is somewhat unclear about what is sufficient to meet the indicators. Many of the suggested means for meeting indicators are of questionable relevance to subject matter knowledge, including “membership in a content-related professional organization.” Other options, including classroom observations, are poor indicators of content knowledge. On the positive side, North Carolina does offer credit for documented student achievement.

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## The Grades (continued)

**D+**

### Tennessee

Offers three options: a point system, student achievement data, and a performance evaluation (currently unfinished). Unfortunately, more than half of the HQ points can be earned through eight years of experience and two positive performance evaluations. However, standards offer only limited points for less objective measures like professional leadership. Most promising is the second option, which allows teachers to bypass the point system using value-added data that demonstrate significantly improved student achievement. A proposed third option using a performance evaluation could potentially send the plan off course.

### West Virginia

Still in draft stage. Suffers from having no minimum course work requirement as well as no ceiling on more questionable measures called “activities related to content area,” such as attending a conference or completing a National Board assessment. Up to half of the required points can be earned for “service” that is very loosely correlated with subject matter knowledge, including being a “faculty sponsor for a content area club.” State is unwisely considering giving HQ points for positive performance evaluations.

**D**

### New York

Point system weighted heavily towards years spent in the classroom and professional activities such as mentoring. One of the options for earning 50 of the required 100 points is essentially a recycled performance evaluation plan, called a “formal review of subject knowledge.” The value and effectiveness of such an option is highly dubious, especially since the state suggests choosing from among the following assessment tools for evaluating teachers: a classroom observation, a videotape assessment, peer review, portfolio review, and most troubling of all, a self review.

### Louisiana

Offers two fairly mediocre options that are both largely dependent on teachers submitting either a plan for professional development in subject matter or a portfolio, neither of which are generally effective means to improve or demonstrate subject matter knowledge.

**F**

### Michigan

One of the three options available to teachers wisely emphasizes course work. The other encourages teachers weak in subject matter to create professional development plans to be completed by 2006. Rigor is undermined, however, by the fact that the plan can be bypassed by taking only two content-specific courses. Teachers may also prove subject knowledge using a portfolio.

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## The Grades (continued)

F

### Virginia

Numerous options and little rigor. Teachers need to take only two classes to prove subject matter knowledge and one of the courses can be in working with students with disabilities or in educational technology. Even this paltry amount of course work can be bypassed through options like an educational project or mentoring/supervision. Furthermore, teachers with advanced degrees, regardless of whether they are in the content area or not, are deemed HQ.

### California

F

Rigor and clarity of standards is almost entirely undermined by the excessive number of options teachers have to prove they are HQ, including the possibility of earning 90 percent of the points for leadership and service. In the unlikely event that a teacher is unable to earn a sufficient number of points through professional development, leadership, and service, a significant number of points are available through classroom observations and all 100 points can be earned through a successful portfolio review.

F

### South Carolina

Like a handful of other states, recycles their performance evaluations with some minor changes. Four of the five criteria on which the evaluation is based have nothing to do with subject matter knowledge, including evidence of “assessment planning.” The one criterion related to subject matter is “*Providing Content*” (emphasis added). There is no mention of *knowing* it, and the means by which this criterion is assessed (including a five-question post-observation worksheet that the teacher fills out) offer little assurance that teachers with poor subject matter knowledge will be identified.

### Idaho

I\*\*

Standards simply refer the reader to their certification requirements. Idaho clearly believes that their certification process is sufficient to ensure all teachers have strong content knowledge. To what degree this is indeed the case is debatable (and would require an entirely different type of investigation); however, not having a plan in place to address teachers who may for one reason or another have slipped through the cracks is likely not a prudent course of action. In any case, since for all intents and purposes Idaho has not come up with new standards to evaluate, we have given them a grade of I for “incomplete.”

\* Still in draft form

\*\* ‘I’ denotes “incomplete”

- 4 Standards should be presented in a manner that permits both teachers and the general public to easily understand what needs to be done to meet the highly qualified teacher provision.
- 5 Standards should be readily accessible to teachers and the general public.

Each state's standards were evaluated on how well they aligned with the five principles (see Appendix 1 for the full detail of how the states were graded).

## CONCLUSION

With a few exceptions, states have shown insufficient willingness to create clear, rigorous, and relevant standards for identifying high quality teachers. Lest there be any illusions, the result of this failure will almost certainly be that the nation's weakest teachers will continue to be identified by word of mouth only, whispered truths spoken by fellow teachers and the savvier parents who have studiously avoided having their children assigned to their classrooms. Accurate though these informal judgments may be, they have hardly proven to be a sufficient measure by which to hold weak teachers accountable for their deficiencies and offer them real assistance. The notion that states can offer a menu of options and expect teachers with weak subject knowledge to choose the most rigorous route that requires them to pass a test (no matter how simple) or subject themselves to the demands of an upper level college course is naïve at best and disingenuous at worst.

One cannot underestimate the extent to which states have failed—willingly or not—to live up to the spirit of NCLB. But, Congress also deserves some measure of the blame—specifically, for drafting a law that enacted politically palatable compromises at the expense of meaningful solutions. The rhetoric—that even experienced teachers should not escape scrutiny—does not match the reality. The quasi-exemption given to experienced teachers via the law's HOUSSE provision serves to undermine the integrity of the law, and not address the nation's chronic problem of poor teacher quality.

As press reports have emphasized, many teachers feel that the nation has its collective finger pointed right at them. The US Department of Education has overlooked

an essential aspect of its public relation campaign to sell No Child Left Behind to the public: enlisting the support of teachers in the cause. Teachers need to hear two messages from *both* Washington and state leaders: first, that the nation has a well-documented and chronic problem of teacher quality, specifically in teachers' knowledge of subject matter. Second—and this is the message that has been lost in the fray—that good teachers need to contribute to the solution, even if it unfortunately means having to justify their own place in the classroom. Good teachers can always point out the weaker teachers in their schools. They need to know that the teacher quality provisions of NCLB will not only help to identify those teachers needing assistance, but will also help to provide that assistance.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1 Amend NCLB to Phase Out “HOUSSE” Standards

After 2006, the federal government should phase out the No Child Left Behind provisions that have fueled the creation of these roundabout alternative sets of standards. All teachers, experienced and newly licensed, should have to demonstrate that they know their subject matter via college-level course work or testing.

### 2 Eliminate State “HOUSSE” Standards

With or without a federal willingness to do away with these provisions, states should do what is right and employ only objective measures of subject matter knowledge. Practically speaking, this would include college-level course work indicating a college major, minor, or advanced degree; advanced credentialing such as National Board or American Board certification; or a subject matter test. While many teachers take exception to these requirements, there is plenty of precedent in other professions for such a move. Doctors, nurses, accountants, and even real estate agents must continue to prove competency through objective measures such as course work or exams. We must demand the same of our nation's teachers.

### 3 Respect the Intent of the Law

The teacher quality problem was not created overnight nor will it be solved overnight. Instead of trying to prove to the U.S. Department of Education, the media, and the public that their own state is immune to this national problem, state education officials should be trying to identify accurately teachers in need. States should develop or revise their options to encourage teachers to prepare as necessary to show (either through a test, course work, or value-added data) that they are sufficiently knowledgeable of their subject matter. States should acknowledge that HOUSSE is an unsatisfactory but temporary compromise, setting an expiration date for their own HOUSSE of January 1, 2006.

### 4 Make Compliance Less Threatening to Teachers

To achieve the goals of No Child Left Behind, states should devise an alternative option that balances accountability with collaboration and assistance. To date, despite other shortcomings, New Hampshire's HOUSSE stands out for its collaborative approach. As states work toward the highly qualified deadline of January 2006, they should empower schools do what is necessary to work with their teachers, avoiding both draconian measures that publicly shame teachers and measures that will almost certainly fail to identify weak teachers. Let teachers find out where they stand by taking a subject matter test, but let the results remain between the principal and the teacher. Let the principal and the teacher, not the states, develop a plan to address shortcomings within a specific time frame. Finally, once the plan is completed, let the teacher prove by course work or by test that he or she has sought remedy and is now fully qualified to teach. Such standards would encourage improvement in a less heavy-handed manner but also assure subject matter competency through objective and uniform means.

### 5 Respect Teachers and Engage Them in the Cause

For their part, the federal government and states need to do a much better job of enlisting teachers in the implementation of these reforms. Too often, well-meaning but heavy-handed rhetoric has predictably and understandably put teachers on the defensive. For real change to occur, the federal government and the states need to explain more effectively not only *what* is being required but why. Instead of being bombarded with empty threats and misinformation from all levels, teachers need to hear consistently the considerable evidence that led to this unprecedented action on the part of the Congress. In short, teachers need to feel they are part of the solution, not just part of the problem.

### 6 Measure Quality by Results

The phasing out of HOUSSE would be an opportunity for the federal government and the states to realign teacher quality provisions to emphasize what is most important: improved student performance. In place of HOUSSE, the federal government should institute and encourage states to prepare for and adopt a plan that would allow teachers to bypass test or course work requirements if, and only if, they could document appropriate gains in their students' achievement. States who either feel tests and course work are poor measures of subject matter knowledge or simply do not believe subject knowledge is critical to teacher quality should immediately begin developing the capability to assess teacher quality through value-added data. States that have already developed that capability should continue to expand its use and make it *the only* alternative option for experienced teachers. In the final analysis, we will only get the results we want if we insist on measuring quality by the result that matters most: student achievement.

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- U.S. Department of Education, *Meeting the Highly Qualified Teachers Challenge: The Secretary's Second Annual Report on Teacher Quality*, Office of Planning and Innovation (Washington, D.C., author, 2003).

## Appendix 1

### PRINCIPLES AND INDICATORS FOR GRADING THE STATES

#### Principle I – Rigor

35 percent of overall grade

*Standards should be consistently rigorous and focus on providing clear and objective evidence of a teacher's subject matter knowledge.*

##### ■ Indicator A:

- Standards compel teachers to employ only objective measures of subject matter competency (student achievement, graded course work, and subject matter tests<sup>1</sup>) instead of less objective measures (professional awards, professional service, professional activities etc.)

##### Explanation:

- Many states offer options that have little or nothing to do with demonstrating subject matter knowledge—from “effective communication” to having a student who wins first, second, or third place in an academic competition.

##### Grading:

- Standards compel teachers to employ only objective measures of subject matter competency: 2 points
- Standards compel teachers to employ some objective measures of subject matter competency: 1 point
- Standards do not compel teachers to employ any objective measures of subject matter competency: 0 points

##### ■ Indicator B:

- State sets a minimum course work requirement that is likely to significantly improve teacher subject matter competency.

##### Explanation:

- Several states, including Illinois and Maryland, wisely

set minimum course work requirements to ensure teachers earn a significant portion of their credit through a rigorous option like course work.

##### Grading:

- State has a minimum course work requirement that is likely to significantly improve teachers' subject matter competency: 1 point
- State has a minimum course work requirement but it is so small or so easily bypassed that it is unlikely to significantly improve teachers' subject matter competency: 0.5 points
- State does not have a minimum course work requirement: 0 points

##### ■ Indicator C:

- State gives credit toward subject matter competency only for course work in the subject area(s) (or in a related subject area) to which a teacher is assigned.

##### Explanation:

- Several states give credit for taking courses in area outside of the subject matter. For example, in Alabama, teachers can earn up to 35 points for courses in learning theory and learning styles. This is exactly what this aspect of the law was trying to prevent: evaluating subject matter knowledge based on pedagogical course work.

##### Grading:

- State gives credit toward subject matter competency only for course work in the subject area(s) (or in a related subject area): 1 point
- State is either unclear with regards to whether or not it gives credit towards subject matter competency for course work outside of subject area(s) or limited credit is given for any non-content specific course work including subject area pedagogy: 0.5 points
- States gives credit toward subject matter competency for course work outside of subject area(s): 0 points

<sup>1</sup> The HOUSSE provision is technically a route that teachers with three or more years of experience can use in lieu of taking a test to prove they know their subject matter. Therefore, states generally don't include a testing option in the alternative standards. Thus, we have not included the use of a test as an indicator. Nevertheless, states that create more rigorous standards compel teachers to take an exam instead of using the often more time-consuming HOUSSE route.

## NCTQ reports

### Principle II – Effective Identification and Support

30 percent of overall grade

*Standards should ensure that teachers weak in subject matter knowledge are identified.*

#### ■ Indicator A:

- Standards allow states to identify teachers in need of subject matter support.

#### Explanation:

- Standards that are filled with loopholes and options that are irrelevant to subject matter knowledge do not offer any assurances that teachers in need of support will likely be identified.

#### Grading:

- Most teachers in need of support will be identified: 2 points
- Some teachers in need of support may not be identified: 1 point
- Most teachers in need of help will not be identified: 0 points

#### ■ Indicator B:

- Standards are set up or weighted so that objective measures are given more weight than less objective measures.

#### Explanation:

- Several standards are weighted so that they include various kinds of *disincentives* for choosing objective measures of subject matter competency. For example, Alabama’s standards provide so few points for subject matter course work that teachers will likely choose to earn as many points as possible through less objective measures for which they can earn more points for doing less. This disincentive to objective measurement (particularly in states without minimum course work requirement) will increase the likelihood that teachers in need of support will not be identified.

#### Grading:

- Objective measures are more heavily weighted than less objective measures: 1 point

- Objective measures and less objective measure are approximately equally weighted: 0.5 points

- Less objective measures are weighted more than heavily than more objective measures: 0 points

- In some cases, the lack of options themselves serves as an incentive to utilize objective measures (e.g., in Oregon, teachers don’t have to choose between objective and less objective measures, so the lack of choice is their “incentive” to use an objective measure).
- Standards for which it is difficult to discern how different measures are weighted receive 0.5 points.

### Principle III – Commitment to Addressing the Problem

20 percent of overall grade

*Standards should reflect an understanding of the law’s intent and demonstrate a commitment on the part of the state to expediently address the problem.*

#### ■ Indicator A:

- Standards are separate from the certification process.

#### Explanation:

- The reason the new law separates demonstration of subject matter competency from certification is to emphasize the importance of subject matter knowledge. Some state standards do not reflect this change.

#### Grading:

- Standards are separate from certification process: 2 points
- Standards are somewhat, but not entirely, distinct from certification process: 1 point
- Standards are part of the certification process: 0 points

#### ■ Indicator B:

- Final standards have been developed.

#### Explanation:

- States have known for over two years that such a plan would need to be developed. The majority of states have come up with a final plan. Some still have not.

## NCTQ reports

### Grading:

- A final draft of the standards have been developed: 1 point
- Standards are still in draft form: 0.5 points
- No standards have been developed: 0 points

### ■ Indicator C:

- Standards have *not* been simply recycled from a previous performance evaluation program.

### Explanation:

- While some states have developed a draft, it is clear they have simply tried to pass off their performance evaluation plans as their HOUSSE. This does not show a sustained commitment to addressing the problem.

### Grading:

- State has clearly developed a new plan: 1 point
- State has developed a new plan that relies heavily on performance evaluations: 0.5 points
- State has simply recycled a performance evaluation plan: 0 points

## Principle IV: Clarity

10 percent of final grade

*Standards should be presented in a manner that permits both teachers and the general public to easily understand what is expected of teachers.*

### ■ Indicator A:

- The options offered within the standards are not so numerous as to be confusing and, likely, less effective.

### Explanation:

- Some states have offered so many options that the quality of the standards will likely be negatively impacted by their increasing complexity.

### Grading:

- 1-3 options are offered: 1 point
- 4-6 options are offered: 0.5 points
- 7 or more options are offered: 0 points

### ■ Indicator B:

- It is clear how teachers can meet the standards.

### Explanation:

- Some states list the standards but provide little or no clear explanation of *how* the standards can be met. For example, New York says its teachers can earn 50 points for a formal review of subject knowledge but provides little explanation as to what that would look like other than to say that “reviews must cover at least one of the following: instructional goals, objectives and plans; instructional delivery; student achievement; or self-assessment.” A “field memo” buried deep in the New York Department of Education website explains that the formal review of knowledge is part of their annual performance evaluation which uses eight criteria, one of which states: “the teacher shall demonstrate a thorough knowledge of the subject matter area and curriculum.” How this will be assessed is left up to the school district or Board of Cooperative Education Services (BOCES). The state’s only suggestion for assessment is to utilize one of the following assessment approaches: classroom observation, videotape assessment, self review, peer review, and portfolio review.

### Grading:

- Clearly explains how standards can be met<sup>2</sup>: 1 point
- Somewhat clear how competencies will be demonstrated: 0.5 points
- Unclear how competencies and knowledge will be demonstrated: 0 points

## Principle V – Accessibility

5 percent of final grade

*Standards should be readily accessible to teachers and the general public.*

### ■ Indicator A:

- Standards are easily located on the state’s department of education website.

### Grading:

- Standards easily located on the website: 1 point

<sup>2</sup> States are given one point if their standards are so clear that no explanation is needed. In Oregon for example, you must have 16 semester hours in the subject matter. It is obvious how a teacher meets such a standard.

## NCTQ reports

- Standards found after some searching: 0.5 points
- Standards were not able to be located on the website: 0 points

### Bonus Principle – Support and Collaboration

Bonus points only

*Standards should offer collaborative support that helps teachers improve subject matter competency.*

Note: Ideally, an effective HOUSSE system should also elucidate how support will be provided for teachers identified as in need of support. However, because HOUSSE does not require states to explain such a support plan within the standards themselves, it is unfair to mark states down for not offering such a plan within their standards. For this reason, states not meeting the following indicators are not penalized and states that did meet them are awarded a small number of bonus points.

- **Indicator A:**
  - State explains in their standards how support will be provided for teachers who need subject matter help.

**Explanation:**

- New Hampshire, for example, clearly explains the process by which teachers in need of support meet with a principal and devise a plan to get the help they need.

**Grading:**

- Support system is explained: .5 points
  - Support system is alluded to but not explained: .25 points
  - No support system is mentioned: 0 points
- **Indicator B:**
    - State explains in their standards that after assistance is provided, state has a plan for assessing teachers to verify that they now meet HQ status.

**Explanation:**

- In New Mexico, for example, teachers must present documentation to a local panel, which in turn makes a recommendation to the state department of education. It remains unclear however, what happens to teachers who are deemed not sufficiently knowledgeable.

**Grading:**

- Post-support assessment is clearly explained: 0.5 points
- Post-support assessment is mentioned but not explained: 0.25 points
- No post-support system is mentioned: 0 points

■ **Indicator C:**

- Standards state that the principals (or master teachers or instructional leaders) will play an important role in the process of identifying and supporting teachers in need of subject matter support.

**Explanation:**

- Standards should stress that the idea of the HOUSSE is to identify and support, not find and punish, teachers in need of subject matter support. Thus, principals (or master teachers or instructional leaders) who usually know better than states which teachers need help, must be involved in the process.

**Grading:**

- Standards require a large degree of involvement by a principal, master teacher, or instructional leader beyond just administering annual performance evaluations: 0.5 points
- Standards require some degree of involvement by a principal, master teacher, or instructional leader: 0.25 points
- Standards do not require any involvement by a principal, master teacher, or instructional leader: 0 points

**Options Available to Teachers to Demonstrate Subject Matter Knowledge**

	Principle 1			Principle 2			Principle 3			Principle 4			Principle 5			Bonus			Final Grade		
	A	B	C	A	B	Final	A	B	C	Final	A	B	Final	A	B	C	Final	A		B	C
Illinois	2	1	1	2	.5	2.5/3	4/4	2	1	1	4/4	1	.5	1.5/2	1	1/1	0	0	0	0/1.5	92.4% – A
Oregon	2	1	1	1	1	2/3	4/4	2	1	1	4/4	1	1	2/2	0	0/1	0	0	0	0/1.5	84.8% – B+
Alabama	2	1	0	–	.5	2.5/3	4/4	2	1	1	4/4	.5	1	1.5/2	1	1/1	0	0	0	0/1.5	83.6% – B+
Ohio	2	1	0	–	.5	2.5/3	4/4	2	1	1	4/4	0	1	1/2	1	1/1	.5	.5	.25	1.25/1.5	76.1% – B
Kentucky	1	0	1	2/4	.5	1.5/3	4/4	2	1	1	4/4	.5	1	1.5/2	1	1/1	0	0	.25	.25/1.5	72.8% – B-
New Mexico	1	.75	1	2.75/4	.5	1.5/3	3.5/4	2	1	.5	3.5/4	.5	.5	1/2	.5	.5/1	0	0	.25	.25/1.5	64.0% – C
Oklahoma	1	0	.5	1.5/4	1	2/3	4/4	2	1	1	4/4	0	1	1/2	1	1/1	0	0	0	0/1.5	62.8% – C
Maryland	1	1	1	3/4	.5	1.5/3	3/4	1	1	1	3/4	0	1	1/2	0	0/1	0	0	0	0/1.5	61.3% – C
Georgia	1	0	1	2/4	0	1/3	4/4	2	1	1	4/4	.5	1	1.5/2	1	1/1	0	0	.25	.25/1.5	60.2% – C
New Hampshire	1	0	.5	1.5/4	1	1.5/3	4/4	2	1	1	4/4	.5	.5	1/2	1	1/1	.5	.5	.5	1.5/1.5	60.0% – C
North Carolina	1	0	1	2/4	.5	1.5/3	3.5/4	2	1	.5	3.5/4	0	0	0/2	1	1/1	0	0	.25	.25/1.5	55.2% – C-
Tennessee	1	0	.5	1.5/4	1	1.5/3	3/4	2	.5	.5	3/4	0	1	1/2	1	1/1	0	0	.25	.25/1.5	53.3% – D+
West Virginia	1	0	.5	1.5/4	1	2/3	3.25/4	2	.5	.75	3.25/4	0	.5	.5/2	0	0/1	0	0	.25	.25/1.5	51.8% – D+
New York	0	0	0	0/4	1	1.5/3	3.5/4	2	1	.5	3.5/4	0	.5	.5/2	1	1/1	0	0	.25	.25/1.5	49.0% – D
Louisiana	1	.5	1	2.5/4	1	1.5/3	2.5/4	1	1	.5	2.5/4	.5	.5	1/2	.5	.5/1	.5	.5	.25	1.25/1.5	43.3% – D-
Michigan	0	.5	.5	1/4	0	.5/3	3.5/4	2	1	.5	3.5/4	0	1	1/2	1	1/1	.5	0	.25	.75/1.5	37.0% – F
Virginia	0	.5	0	.5/4	0	.5/3	3/4	1	1	1	3/4	0	1	1/2	.5	.5/1	0	0	0	0/1.5	31.9% – F
California	0	0	1	1/4	0	0/3	3/4	2	1	0	3/4	0	.5	.5/2	1	1/1	0	0	.25	.25/1.5	31.6% – F
South Carolina	0	0	0	0/4	0	.5/3	3/4	2	1	0	3/4	.5	0	.5/2	1	1/1	0	0	.25	.25/1.5	27.6% – F
Idaho																					Incomplete

States

The following grading scale was used to convert percentages into letter grades: 95-100: A+; 90-95: A; 85-90: A-; 80-85: B+; 75-80: B; 70-75: B-; 65-70: C+; 60-65: C; 55-60: C-; 50-55: D+; 45-50: D; 40-45: D-; Below 40: F