

Steps that Congress can take to improve teacher quality—without overstepping its bounds

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Value-Added Data Analysis (NCLB)

Congress should:

1. Require every state to develop a value-added system linking individual teachers to students—and provide appropriate funding to help them do so.
 - Teacher identifier data is crucial for maximizing the utility of this data and tracking teacher effectiveness over time.
 - Relevant principals and teachers cannot be prevented from having full access to these data (as is the case in some states now.)

Highly Effective Teachers (NCLB)

The Federal government should not mandate the best way for each state to identify and address its ineffective teachers. However, the Federal government can and should require states to develop their own strategies.

Congress should:

2. Require every state to set a minimum percentage of low-performing probationary teachers that their school districts must identify every year.
 - The identification must involve some objective student learning data.
 - The focus on probationary teachers is important, as districts can intervene more successfully with them.
 - States should design and submit an-

nual plans describing how they plan to address the lowest performers.

- State data should be publicly reported identifying the number of identified teachers employed by a school and school district.
- Identification should be based on multiple years of data.
- A percentage of top performers could be identified as well.

More Accountability for Ed Schools (HEA)

Congress should:

3. Require states to assess the effectiveness of each approved ed school by aggregating and reporting value-added data for each school's graduates.
4. Require states to post annual data on the number of ed school graduates prepared to teach in shortage areas.
 - States should identify their own shortage areas and set targets for programs to meet.

HEA has yet to articulate a clear definition for collecting pass rate data on teacher licensing tests, a crucial measure of program accountability.

Congress should:

5. Require states to report more meaningful pass rate data for teacher candidates taking licensing tests.



- The current proposal requiring institutions to report the pass rate for candidates completing 50 percent of their coursework is ambiguous and capable of many different interpretations.
- The original requirement that pass rate data be submitted for program completers is clearer, and gaming of this number can be avoided by requiring the following data:
 - a. The number of candidates scheduled to complete teacher preparation in each calendar year
 - b. The number of candidates passing each licensing test on the first attempt;
 - c. The number of candidates passing each licensing test on the second attempt;
 - d. The number of candidates passing in third and subsequent attempts; and,
 - e. An explanation of any discrepancy between the total number of candidates passing tests (2-4) and the number successfully completing a program (1).

This data collection will prevent programs from requiring candidates to attain a passing score in order to complete a program, a widespread practice that makes current pass rates a highly inadequate indicator of how well programs are preparing teacher candidates.

Too many teacher preparation programs accept candidates with sub-par academic credentials, who at the very least need significant remediation and may not be cut out for teaching at all.

Congress should:

6. Require institutions accepting federal money to require applicants to pass a basic skills test (at cut score set by national commission—see the next recommendation).

Improving the “Highly Qualified Teacher” designation (NCLB)

NCLB’s requirement that teachers pass a subject matter test in order to attain licensure has been drastically weakened by low and falling standards for the scores needed to pass these tests.

Congress should:

7. Establish a national commission to set recommended cut scores on state licensing tests.
 - Congress should not require that states adopt these recommended scores, but it should require them to submit data annually showing whether they meet, exceed, or do not meet each recommended cut score

Too many low-income children are not receiving reading instruction grounded in the scientific consensus of the National Reading Panel’s 2000 report *Teaching Children to Read*.

Congress should:

8. Refine the definition of a “Highly Qualified” elementary teacher to include a proviso that all new elementary teachers must pass a distinct test in scientifically based reading instruction in order to be deemed HQT.

The U.S Department of Education has failed to provide the clarity that states need on preparing academically qualified middle school teachers. Additionally, state policies have continued to allow too many elementary teachers to teach grades 7 & 8 as long as they do so in a K-8 school.

Congress should:

9. Allow middle school teachers to be considered “highly qualified” if they complete a minor and attain a passing score on a licensing test;
10. Disallow the use of ‘generalist’ exams that cover all academic subjects as the basis for granting “highly qualified” status to anyone teaching grades 7 & 8.

Accountability and flexibility for school principals (NCLB)

The critically important issue of school leadership has been neglected, especially compared to the attention that has been placed on teachers.

Congress should:

11. Require that states make attach a rating to a principal that he/she earns over a period of several years, reflecting annual value-added or AYP performance data of any schools in which the principal has served.

Too little has also been done to see how principals are able to perform when granted flexibility from bureaucratic constraints.

Congress should:

12. Study the effect of giving greater autonomy, not less, to schools not meeting AYP, by funding the creation of innovation schools in selected districts.
 - Principals would be given the equivalent of the district's average salary of personnel in cash and the freedom to negotiate individual teacher contracts.
 - This model has been adopted and found successful in Sweden.
 - This experiment could test the benefits of granting school leaders greater flexibility, and provide a model that could work on a large scale in traditional public schools.

What not to do:

Force comparability (NCLB)

One proposal on the table would require school districts achieve comparability among schools on salary spending. It's hard to imagine a scenario where forcing this on schools wouldn't lead to staffing problems.

One response cash-strapped school districts won't have to such a provision is to come with additional resources to make sure all schools get the same amount of money. Instead, they'll achieve equity by shifting personnel around. Districts will have to

resort to transferring younger teachers out of high-poverty schools that may want to retain them and bringing in more expensive teachers, *without* regard to the relative effectiveness of either set of teachers. Teaching experience (after the first two years) is a highly flawed proxy for teacher effectiveness, and should not be made the basis of such an overarching mandate