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NEW REPORT FINDS THAT STATE TEACHER POLICIES SHARE MUCH BLAME FOR POOR TEACHER QUALITY IN AMERICA

-- National Council on Teacher Quality Releases the *State Teacher Policy Yearbook*, a Three-Year Research Project That Rates and Reviews all 50 States' Teacher Policies; Report Finds That States Fail to Meet Goals That Could Improve the Quality of Teaching in America --

June 27, 2007 (Washington, DC)— A new report released today by the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) finds that state regulations are currently doing more harm than good when it comes to their impact on teacher quality. The *State Teacher Policy Yearbook*, which was released today at an event in Washington, D.C., finds that states must revamp regulations in order to improve teacher quality and offers specific guidelines for doing so. Each state's comprehensive *Yearbook*, as well as a national summary, is immediately available for free download or hard-copy purchase on June 27 at www.nctq.org.

NCTQ President Kate Walsh said, "There have been countless reports about the impact of the No Child Left Behind Act on teacher quality, but what many of these reports truly leave behind is the reality that State governments – not the federal government – have the greatest impact on the work of America's 3.1 million teachers."

Walsh continued: "The *State Teacher Policy Yearbook* unfortunately finds that states are by-and-large failing to meet key goals that could improve quality of teaching. States' policies determine which teachers enter the profession, who qualifies for a license, and who can stay. What we found is that the current state policies not only do not help to improve the overall quality of the nation's public school teachers, they actually hinder this goal. Nevertheless, with leadership and will, these policies are eminently fixable and we hope that the *Yearbook* report will spur change."

NCTQ spent the last three years studying the policies that determine how teachers are prepared, certified, hired, paid, evaluated, encouraged and dismissed – in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. NCTQ found that in spite of good intentions at the state level, many state policies actually impede efforts to ensure that every classroom is led by a quality teacher. State regulations, many of them fashioned in a different era when the supply of talented teachers was plentiful, fail at many levels and actually intrude on schools' ability to recruit and hire good teachers. The deficiencies found in states run the full gamut of teacher-related policies, from ensuring that teachers are well prepared to ensuring that they are evaluated each year; from reporting data that could reveal gross inequities in teacher assignments to counterproductive certification policies that tie the

hands of districts; from lockstep teacher pay plans to overly generous tenure policies – much improvement is needed across the board.

Massachusetts Education Commissioner, David P. Driscoll, has this reaction to the report: "Whether or not states agree or disagree with everything in the Yearbook, NCTQ is successfully challenging states to address real problems. It's time that we as states engaged in much more self-evaluation, conducting the sort of comprehensive review that has long been in order."

NCTQ, in consultation with over 150 leading thinkers, organizations, and teachers in the country, identified 6 broad areas in which states need to improve: **1) Meeting NCLB Teacher Quality Objectives; 2) Teacher Licensure; 3) Teacher Evaluation & Compensation; 4) State Approval of Teacher Preparation Programs; 5) Alternate Routes to Certification; and 6) Preparation of Special Education Teachers.** While no one state comes even close to being a national model for change, there are states with strong and effective policies—notably New Jersey, Massachusetts, Texas and Tennessee—in particular areas.

Key findings include:

- **State policies are remarkably inflexible and outdated:** Considering that human capital is the essential component of the teaching profession, states still cling to policies that reflect neither the flexibility nor the reality of today's workforce. *Most states do not require that teachers receive annual performance evaluations, which is counter to the norm in most professions. Only 14 states require annual evaluations, and only 7 direct districts that they can dismiss teachers after two unsatisfactory evaluations.*
- **States are not paying enough attention to who goes into teaching:** States provide significant funding to teacher preparation programs, particularly in state funded universities, yet there is little oversight of candidates' academic caliber. *Although 41 states require programs to administer a basic skills test, 24 of these states delay testing until completion of the preparation program. Programs that accept aspiring teachers who cannot pass a basic skills test may lower the rigor of their courses, forced to spend time remediating instead of preparing teachers for the classroom.*
- **States do not appropriately oversee teacher preparation programs:** A major weakness in the teacher quality equation is linked to the fact that states fail to hold teacher preparation programs accountable for their admissions standards, efficiency of program delivery or, most importantly, the quality of their graduates. *The majority of states rely on site visits and syllabus reviews to determine approval of teacher preparation programs. Only 18 states include any meaningful objective data in their approval process, such as the first-year evaluations of a program's graduates, or the academic achievement of the students of graduates.*

- **States use false proxies as measures of teacher quality:** Across many policy areas, states rely on inappropriate indicators that do not provide meaningful information about the qualifications or effectiveness of teachers. Seventeen states rely on reviews of college transcripts to decide whether to award licensure to a teacher already licensed in another state. A good employment record and licensing tests are more valid ways to verify the qualifications of teachers, yet only 16 states even require all out of state teachers to pass their licensing tests, with most providing waivers on the basis of teaching experience.
- **States do not appreciate the dual nature of licensing tests.** Licensing tests can serve both as the gatekeeper on minimum qualifications and as a tool that helps states to be more flexible. However, while European and Asian systems depend heavily on tests, states in this country are often reluctant to do so. *At best, states screen only for the most minimal standards when individuals apply to undergraduate teacher preparation programs. Only 24 states require teacher candidates to pass a common test in basic reading, writing and arithmetic that is estimated to assess middle school level skills. No states require subject area tests as a criterion for entry, a useful mechanism that would also allow programs to exempt qualified candidates from some core academic requirements.*
- **States continue to neglect content preparation for teachers:** Despite continuous concern about improving the content preparation of America's teachers, states are still failing to ensure breadth, depth and relevance to the classroom in content preparation. *States' content standards and coursework requirements for elementary teachers fall well short of the mark, omitting critical areas of knowledge. For example, 19 states make no mention of geometry and 42 states do not require teachers to demonstrate core knowledge of American history. Only 3 states require the study of American literature, 6 of children's literature and only 3 the study of art history.*
- **States do not ensure that special education teachers are well prepared to teach students with disabilities:** States contribute to special education teacher shortages by providing too little guidance to teacher preparation programs and by not taking steps to assist special education teachers in meeting highly qualified requirements. *State standards for the preparation of special education teachers are woefully inadequate. A mere 4 states have strong standards that are clear, explicit and comprehensive about what teachers should know in order to teach students with disabilities.*
- **State policies are not geared towards increasing the quality and quantity of math and science teachers:** While states have put in place many boutique initiatives to address these shortages, structural adjustments would provide a greater yield. *By not focusing on the equitable distribution of teachers, states shortchange the neediest children of qualified math and science teachers. Only 12 states have made even some progress to achieve this goal.*

- **States’ alternate routes to teacher certification lack “truth in advertising:”** Despite the perception of a proliferation of alternate routes, in reality, alternate routes often mirror traditional routes or appear to be emergency certificates in disguise. *Of the 48 states that claim to have alternate routes, only 6 states offer a genuine alternate route to licensure. 15 states offer alternate route programs that need significant revision, while 27 states offer disingenuous alternate routes that more closely resemble traditional or emergency routes than alternatives.*
- **The interests of adults frequently come before the needs of the children:** Far too many accommodations are made for teachers in the areas of testing, tenure and evaluations, risking the possibility that too many children could suffer significant academic harm from a bad teacher. *Only 3 states require teachers to pass licensure examinations before beginning to teach, with many states allowing three or more years to pass exams. This proves unfair to the students in these teachers’ classrooms, who may not be learning from knowledgeable educators.*

For more information on *Yearbook* findings at the national and state level, methodology, and background on the report, go to www.nctq.org.

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About NCTQ

NCTQ—comprised of reform-minded Democrats, Republicans, and Independents—advocates for reforms in a broad range of teacher policies and seeks to lend transparency and accountability to the three institutions that have the greatest impact on teacher quality: state governments, colleges of education, and teachers’ unions. A list of the Board of Directors and Advisory Board can be found on the NCTQ website, www.nctq.org