

May 2011

# Recommendations for the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

## REMOVING THE ROADBLOCKS:

## How Federal Policy Can Cultivate Effective Teachers



National Council on Teacher Quality

*The National Council on Teacher Quality is a non-partisan research and policy organization working to ensure that every child has an effective teacher.*



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# SUMMARY/OVERVIEW

## NCTQ Recommendations for the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

Given the tremendous impact teachers have on learning—they are the single most important school-based determinant of student achievement—the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) believes that no education improvement strategy states and districts take on is likely to have a greater impact than one which seeks to maximize teacher and principal performance. Joining the chorus of advocates calling for moving from highly qualified to highly effective teachers, NCTQ offers recommendations for the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) so that Congress and the U.S. Department of Education can help states:

- ▶ **Develop value-added measures and teacher evaluation systems to determine teacher effectiveness.** The federal Race to the Top program demanded that states, in exchange for a piece of the \$4.3 billion pie, improve teacher evaluations, compensate highly effective teachers, develop rigorous and transparent procedures for granting tenure and dismissing teachers, ensure the equitable distribution of effective teachers, and hold higher education institutions accountable for the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs. These same principles for improving teacher effectiveness should apply to ESEA reauthorization.
- ▶ **Fix highly qualified teacher (HQT) requirements.** As the emphasis shifts to effectiveness, there's one qualification we shouldn't ignore: ensuring that all teachers know their subject(s) as demonstrated by performance on a rigorous content test. Congress needs to scrap HOUSSSE and stop allowing college majors to suffice for HQT. A reauthorized ESEA must make sure that licensing content tests are rigorous and require that ALL teachers pass them – whatever route they take into the profession.
- ▶ **Collect meaningful data and develop workable policies to ensure that all students have access to effective teachers.** States should be required to report school-level data reflecting teacher performance publicly and regularly. Parents, the public and education stakeholders deserve access to these important data, which will hopefully drive both recognition that good teaching really does matter and policy reforms demanding more effective teachers in more schools.
- ▶ **Remove any remaining barriers to alternate routes.** Allowing alternative certification opportunities should be a pre-condition for receiving ESEA funds. With strong HQT and performance evaluation and management policies, states will have the kinds of mechanisms in place to monitor and ensure teacher quality without unnecessarily restricting the profession.
- ▶ **Strengthen accountability for all teacher preparation programs.** When it comes to colleges of education—the primary institutions that prepare America's teachers—a lack of accountability won't cut it. ESEA has driven accountability for schools and districts, and we are moving towards more accountability for individual teachers and principals. The institutions and programs responsible for preparing our nation's supply of teachers (higher education-based or run by local school districts or other providers) too must bear some responsibility for the quality of teaching and learning in our schools.
- ▶ **Tie federal grant opportunities to the adoption of “break the mold” state and district policies.** Such policies include compensation tied to teacher effectiveness that can help identify, recruit and retain effective teachers.



# NCTQ Recommendations

## for the Reauthorization of the ESEA

President Obama has asked Congress to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act—last authorized in 2001 as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act—before the beginning of the 2011–12 school year. Based on the National Council on Teacher Quality’s work during the decade of NCLB and our mission to help ensure that every child has an effective teacher, we offer our thinking on how federal law can best help to cultivate a more effective teacher workforce.

To begin, we think it is important to give NCLB some credit when it comes to teacher policy. While largely in the shadows of student testing and school accountability policies, NCLB put more emphasis on teacher quality issues than previous iterations of ESEA, with requirements that states demonstrate that teachers are “highly qualified” and report such information publicly. NCLB also pushed accountability for teacher preparation and concerns over the inequitable distribution of the best and brightest teachers among the neediest students onto the public policy radar.

*What NCLB got right on teacher quality:*

**Putting a new focus on content knowledge.** While it didn’t solve the many entrenched teacher quality issues, NCLB did make a difference on some fronts. At the time NCLB was passed into law, only 29 states required teacher candidates to pass a relatively simple subject matter test that would provide an objective measure of teacher knowledge. Today, 49 states require content knowledge tests.

**Exposing the depth of our teacher quality problem.** On other fronts, NCLB’s best service may have been to show just how deep some problems were, including: how much ground there was to make up to ensure that students were assigned teachers trained in the specific subjects they were teaching; how difficult it would be to bring teacher preparation programs into the fold of accountability for teacher performance; and how far we still needed to go to ensure that every student had not just a qualified teacher, but an effective teacher.

*But NCLB also missed the boat on some issues:*

**Valuing teacher credentials over performance.** The highly qualified teacher (HQT) provisions in NCLB continued the almost exclusive focus of teacher quality discussions on qualifications to teach which, while useful, are no stand-in for attending to the bottom line: demonstrating that teachers have mastered the content they are expected to teach and are effective in the classroom. And while NCLB helped push states towards demonstrations of content knowledge, the rigor of the required assessments and the standards states set for teachers to demonstrate that they are “HQT” have been disappointingly low.

**Letting states off the hook on teacher content knowledge.** The law’s provisions for declaring veteran teachers highly qualified – the High Objective Uniform State Standard of Evaluation (HOUSSE) – were, to be kind, extremely weak. NCTQ’s December 2004 report, *Searching the Attic*, showed that the strategies states employed in their HOUSSE plans demonstrated a near-universal disregard for the goals of the highly-qualified teacher provision. Though there were many different HOUSSE routes adopted by states, nearly all of them were remarkably similar in one sense: they provided loopholes for the very teachers most in need of improving their subject matter knowledge. And HQT loopholes weren’t limited to HOUSSE. Under pressure from states and districts to allow flexibility, the U.S. Department of Education relaxed expectations for teachers to demonstrate mastery of a specific science field, instead allowing teachers with “broad field” certification to be considered HQT for any science discipline.<sup>1</sup>

**Being too permissive about uses of Title II funds.** The class size reduction and professional development programs that consumed the bulk of ESEA Title II funds in the past largely continued under NCLB. For 2009–2010, the U.S. Department of Education reported that the majority of the funds were used for professional development activities (42 percent) and to reduce class size (36 percent). Only 5 percent of funds were reportedly used for promoting growth and quality in teaching.<sup>2</sup>

Given that research shows general reductions in class size are expensive with little or no systematic relationship to improvements in student achievement and typical professional development programs are poorly designed,<sup>3</sup> it is not surprising that Title II has been largely ineffective at generating the kinds of teacher reforms most likely to make a difference to student achievement. Title II will continue to consume precious federal funds unless Congress sets stronger and clearer priorities.

## Envisioning the Next ESEA Reauthorization

All that said, NCLB very much laid the foundation for—and the Obama Administration’s \$4.3 billion Race to the Top program has pushed the envelope on—an important shift in thinking about teacher quality. The demand for highly qualified teachers is slowly, but surely, being replaced by a call for highly *effective* teachers.

The change is more than just semantics. Accountability for student learning and strong research confirming the important impact teachers have on student achievement are beginning to move the field towards a decidedly performance-based focus on teacher quality.

Based on what we know about the effects of teacher quality on student achievement and what we know from very consistent research on the effects of student academic performance on future earnings, recent findings by Eric Hanushek indicate that an effective teacher instructing a class of 20 students might generate as much as an additional \$400,000 in future student earnings *every year*. Looking at the bigger picture impact of student performance on economic growth, Hanushek estimates the present value added to our Gross Domestic Product (GDP) from closing even a little less than half the gap between student performance in the U.S. and the top-performing Finland at \$44 trillion.

<sup>1</sup> See NCTQ, *The All-Purpose Science Teacher: An Analysis of Loopholes in State Requirements for High School Science Teachers*, [http://www.nctq.org/p/publications/docs/NCTQ\\_All\\_Purpose\\_Science\\_Teacher.pdf](http://www.nctq.org/p/publications/docs/NCTQ_All_Purpose_Science_Teacher.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> See findings from 2009–10 Survey on the Use of Funds Under Title II, Part A, available at <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/teacherqual/resources.html>.

<sup>3</sup> See Hanushek, Eric A. (1989). “The Evidence on Class Size.” W. Allen Wallis Institute of Political Economy, University of Rochester. Hanushek, Eric A. (2002). “Evidence, politics, and the class size debate.” In Lawrence Mishel and Richard Rothstein (eds.), *The Class Size Debate* (pp. 37–65). Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute. Wei, Ruth Chung, et al. (2009) *Professional Learning in the Learning Profession: A Status Report on Teacher Development in the U.S. and Abroad*. Stanford, CA: School Redesign Network.

The good news is that no matter how you cut it, the United States can achieve huge economic gains by improving teacher quality. The bad news is that our teacher policies must do much more to ensure teacher effectiveness.

So where do we go next? We believe that successful performance management—comprehensive systems that give educators the tools they need to be effective, support their specific development needs, reward their accomplishments and hold them accountable for results—is essential to the fundamental goal of all federal education programs: eliminating achievement gaps and ensuring that all students achieve to their highest potential.

We think the general reauthorization principles the Obama Administration has laid out for excellence in the teaching profession in *A Blueprint for Reform* are sound. We do need more effective pathways into teaching, to get effective teachers to the students who need them most and to recognize, encourage and reward excellence in teaching. However, NCTQ believes we ought to be clear and honest about the full range of policies needed to transform the profession. Cultivating excellence and truly improving access to effective teachers will mean not only growing more effective teachers, but also attending to ineffective teaching—ideally, right from the start—in programs that prepare prospective teachers and later by making politically difficult but necessary choices about tenure, promotion and dismissal for teachers who are consistently ineffective.

Joining the chorus of advocates calling for moving from highly qualified to highly effective teachers, NCTQ offers ESEA reauthorization recommendations on the following key issues:

- I. Developing **value-added measures and teacher evaluation systems** based on teacher effectiveness;
- II. Fixing HQT requirements to ensure that a qualified teacher is a teacher who knows his/her subject as demonstrated by **performance on a rigorous content test**;
- III. Collecting meaningful data and developing workable policies around ensuring that all students have **access to effective teachers**;
- IV. Removing any remaining barriers to **alternate routes** into the teaching profession;
- V. Strengthening **accountability for teacher preparation programs**; and
- VI. Tying **discretionary grant opportunities** to the adoption of “break the mold” state and district policies that can help identify, recruit and retain effective teachers.

Not all teacher policies ought to be mandated from on high from Congress, of course. We conclude by offering some cautions against Congress’ inclination to intervene in states and districts in ways that could lead to unanticipated consequences and counterproductive results and/or may be based on little evidence of contributing to teacher effectiveness.

## I. Develop value-added measures and teacher evaluation systems based on teacher effectiveness

*Congress should require states, and reserve Title I funds, to develop sophisticated state data systems that can track student growth and allow value-added measurement.*

At present, not every state and district has the capacity or will to use student growth measures to evaluate their teachers and make employment decisions. But most states recognize that student growth and value-added are performance measures worth examining when it comes to teaching and learning. With that in mind, states must continue to grow and refine their capacity to collect, analyze and make available sophisticated data on the progress of teaching and learning in their schools.

Through the reauthorization process, Congress can ensure that states, districts, schools and school leaders have the kinds of education data they need to make informed decisions. The good news is that states have come a long way in developing their education data systems. The bad news is that many states won't use the data they have to bring about change unless Congress demands it.

To set the foundation for more accurate and nuanced school accountability policies under Title I as well as policies to ensure that students are taught by effective teachers, Congress should require that, as a condition of states receiving ESEA funds, every state develop a data system with the capacity to link individual teachers to students and individual assessment results to school personnel records.

States should be required to establish a longitudinal data system with at least the following key components:

- ▶ A **unique statewide student identifier number** that connects student data across key databases across years;
- ▶ A **unique teacher identifier system** that can match individual teacher records with individual student records; and
- ▶ An **assessment system** that can match individual student test records from year to year in order to measure academic growth.

These data systems are largely in place or within reach in states. But there are still some technical issues with which states will grapple and around which states would benefit from some very transparent “hold harmless” flexibilities from the U.S. Department of Education. This is especially the case where some short term flexibility serves the interest of furthering the teacher quality agenda.

## Removing the Roadblocks:

- ▶ **Defining the “teacher of record.”** One of the things states will need to do to implement reliable data systems that measure teacher effectiveness is to develop sound definitions of “teacher of record.” If student achievement data are to be tied to teacher evaluations, it is essential that a student’s information is tagged to the teacher(s) actually responsible for that student’s learning. Now that some states are moving forward on using data to make decisions of consequence about teaching and learning, such definitions are imperative. But the development of new statewide definitions of teacher of record will likely reveal some problematic patterns in state HQT data to date.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, 96 percent of academic classes in our nation’s public schools were staffed by HQTs during school year 2008–09. Whether due to a lack of consistent definitions within states, or in some cases a manipulation of data to take advantage of inconsistencies to look better for HQT requirements, HQT data trends are likely to show lower numbers of highly qualified teachers of record than have been reported to the Department over the course of NCLB when new teacher of record definitions are put into place. Under current law, states should face sanctions as a result. But this is the kind of issue where the federal government may want to allow some short-term flexibility for states that have a clear end goal as well as consistent and improved data systems that will, among other things, improve tracking for HQT.

- ▶ **Providing financing for state data systems.** The U.S. Department of Education should be directed to use its technical assistance programs and funds to help states with the direct costs associated with developing these systems. Establishing the student-teacher data link should be a required use of direct grant funds for this purpose.
- ▶ **Linking to a high quality assessment system.** Congress can explicitly direct the two new assessment consortia, in which the Department has invested \$330 million to develop new statewide assessments in math and English/language arts linked to the Common Core State Standards under the Race to the Top Assessment grant program, to ensure that solid and comparable value-added systems are deliverables of each consortia.
- ▶ **Ensuring the reliability and validity of state systems.** Value-added data systems are complicated, and we shouldn’t expect states to thoughtfully and carefully develop and implement these systems without technical expertise. Congress should consider requiring a review process in which each state’s value added system undergoes a rigorous technical peer review before it is used for statewide school accountability or teacher evaluation purposes.

*Congress should convert Title II to a competitive grant program modeled after the “Great Leaders and Teachers” priorities of Race to the Top, requiring states that want Title II funds to develop performance-based teacher evaluation systems aimed at improving teacher effectiveness.*

Race to the Top demanded that states, in exchange for a piece of the \$4.3 billion pie, improve teacher evaluations, compensate highly effective teachers, develop rigorous and transparent procedures for granting tenure and dismissing teachers, ensure the equitable distribution of effective teachers and hold higher education institutions accountable for the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs.

*These same principles should guide ESEA reauthorization.* There are states already heading in this direction. In 2010, NCTQ identified 10 states (Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Louisiana, Maryland, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee and Texas), as well as District of Columbia Public Schools, with legislation and/or teacher evaluation systems under development or in place where evidence of student learning is the preponderant criterion. An additional six states (Arizona, Connecticut, Illinois, Michigan, New York and Ohio) require that student achievement data be included in teacher evaluations. As of spring 2011, six states (Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Oklahoma, Rhode Island and Tennessee) have pushed even further and intend to require that tenure decisions depend on student learning results.

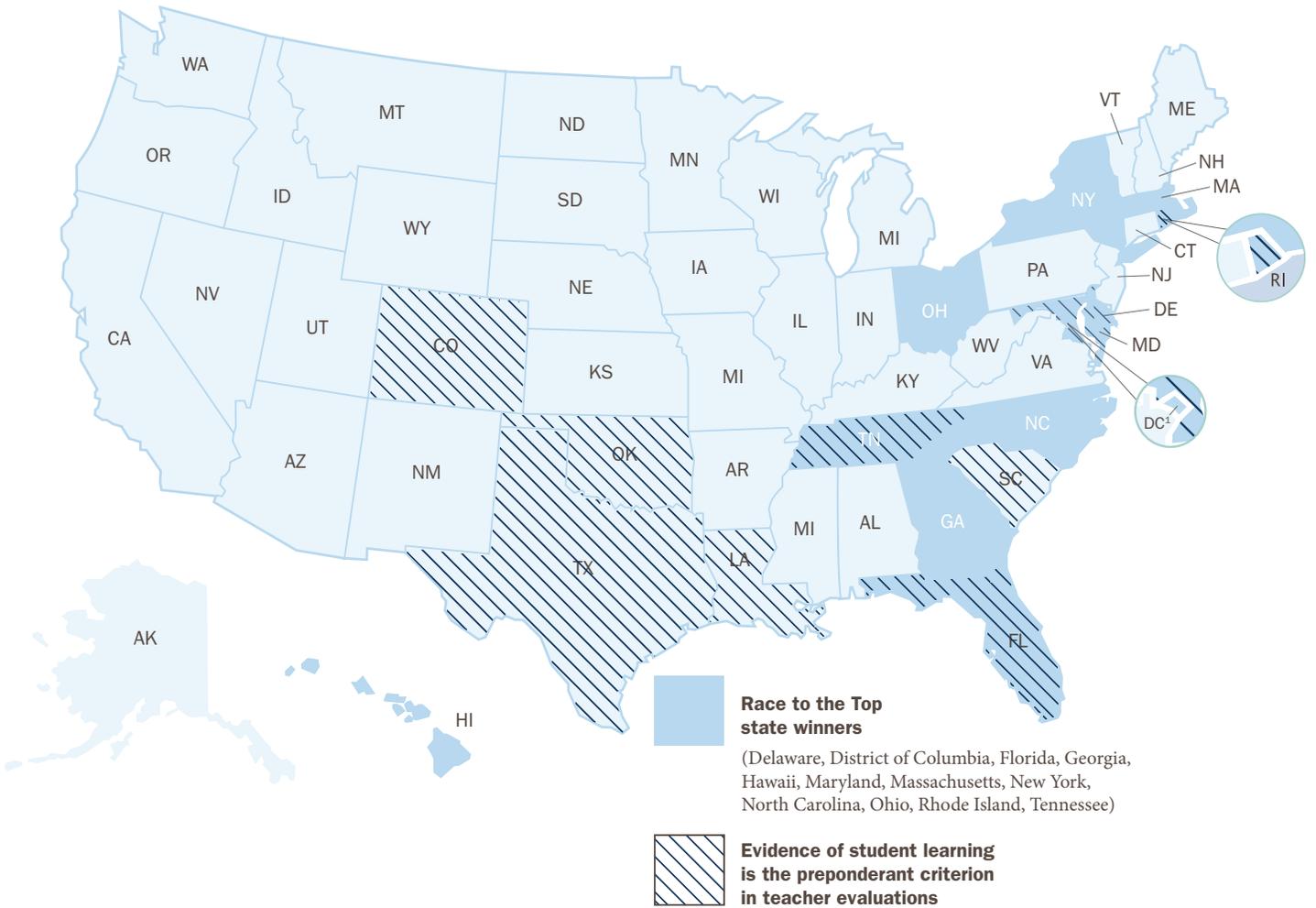
### **Removing the Roadblocks:**

▶ **Setting absolute priorities for Title II funds.** These should include that states:

- **Define “highly effective” teaching**, with evidence of student learning as the preponderant criterion;
- **Require annual teacher evaluations** for all teachers regardless of tenure status, with clearly defined levels (at least four levels, but preferably five) that differentiate teacher performance;
- **Require that teacher evaluation ratings be based to a significant extent on objective student data** and are not limited to standardized test scores. Objective student data includes sources such as value-added data, examination of formative assessments, progress in the curriculum, random sampling of student work, or common exams;
- **Require that performance evaluation systems generate consequences** – that is, ensure that such systems are designed to advance the highest performers, develop the middle and deny tenure to and dismiss the lowest, absent improvement; and
- **Require that districts and principals provide support structures for teachers identified as poorly performing** and set a pre-established timeline for how long such support should last before other consequences kick in.

Figure 1

States requiring that student learning be the preponderant criterion in teacher evaluations



1 The District of Columbia has no state-level policy, but District of Columbia Public Schools requires that student academic achievement count for 50% of evaluation score.

Congress must be clear that Title II funds previously allowed for reducing class size and professional development activities too often of poor quality and poorly targeted will now be devoted to ensuring that comprehensive teacher evaluation systems measuring teacher effectiveness are implemented well. This includes directing substantial Title II resources towards reviewing and validating these new systems, as well as providing professional development and training on performance-based evaluation systemwide. Title II could be used to provide for third party peer reviewers to help implement and validate teacher evaluations. Title II funds must be directed towards professional development that is targeted to teachers' identified needs, with specific emphasis on helping teachers who perform poorly to improve.

*Congress should require that competitive Title II funds be used to develop performance evaluations and performance management systems for assessing the effectiveness of school principals.*

If we want better teachers, we have to insist on better principals. Principals cannot be left out of a comprehensive performance-management system. Congress should seed innovations for fair and reliable ways to assign a performance rating to principals on a range of possible measures, including student achievement data, teacher attendance, teacher turnover, student attendance and disciplinary actions. A key feature of the performance management systems Congress should require for principals is accountability for the quality of the faculty performance evaluations conducted in their buildings. The successful implementation of teacher evaluation should sit squarely on the shoulders of principals.

*Congress should tie strong teacher and principal performance management systems to increased flexibility and autonomy for schools and districts under Title I.*

With a performance management system in place—including evaluations that assess classroom effectiveness and policies to make important decisions about teacher promotion, compensation, tenure, professional development and dismissal based on that information—for both teachers and principals, the foundation is laid for improvements in classroom effectiveness and school management. Across the states, however, NCTQ has consistently found that states are complicit in keeping ineffective teachers in the classroom by failing to articulate that poor performance is grounds for dismissal, creating roadblocks for districts seeking to dismiss poor performers and providing loopholes that allow ineffective teachers to stay in the classroom.

## Removing the Roadblocks:

- ▶ **Revising policy that prevents common sense human capital decisions.** In addition to making consequences for teacher effectiveness an absolute priority for Title II funding, Congress should demand that School Improvement Grants (SIG) be awarded only to states and districts that have put or are willing to put a sensible set of human capital policies in place. If principals are to be held accountable for the performance of their teachers, proposals that give school and district leaders more control over staffing decisions, such as mutual consent in hiring and placement of teachers, are worth prioritizing.

Programs that break the mold by truly rethinking compensation for effective teachers and dismissal for ineffective teachers could really change the context for policymaking around “equitable distribution” of teacher quality. So could efforts to do away with seniority-based layoffs and other policies that force districts and schools to make personnel decisions with a blind eye to teacher effectiveness. Innovations in professional development that are tied to the specific content and pedagogical needs of teachers based on the student achievement results of their own students also need to be explored.

## II. Fix HQT requirements to ensure that a qualified teacher is a teacher who knows his/her subject as demonstrated by performance on a rigorous content test

*Congress should scrap HOUSSE for veteran teachers.*

Some would like to see states permanently institute HOUSSE as a method of assigning teachers highly-qualified status. Others say the system can be ditched because all veteran teachers have demonstrated themselves as highly qualified by now. We think both arguments are flawed. The key reason to scrap HOUSSE is that there is no evidence that HOUSSE has done anything to ensure that all veteran teachers are highly qualified.

When it comes to the qualifications of teachers already in the profession, NCTQ argues that teaching effectiveness must become the new benchmark of teacher quality. A teacher cadre operating within the performance management system that should be developed under the ESEA has no need for HOUSSE.

*Congress must ensure that all new teachers without exception—at the elementary, middle and secondary level—have passed content knowledge tests in order to be considered HQT.*

When it comes to new teachers, fundamental knowledge and skills set the foundation for effectiveness, especially when it comes to demonstrating content knowledge. We certainly aren't saying this is all that matters. But we do contend that, as a basic condition of employment, Title II of the ESEA should continue to require that teachers hold a bachelor's degree and pass a content knowledge test. Simply put, teachers must know the content for the grades and subjects they will teach. As a result, NCTQ believes that a rigorous subject-matter test should be required of any teaching candidate without exception—regardless of academic major, coursework or experience.

### **Removing the Roadblocks:**

- ▶ **Eliminating the option of a major as sufficient for HQT.** Under the current law, the content knowledge test requirement applies to elementary school teachers. But new secondary teachers in most states must *either* pass a state test in each core academic subject they teach *or* have completed an academic major, course work equivalent, or an advanced degree. While a major is generally indicative of background in a particular subject area, only a subject-matter test ensures that teachers know the specific content they will need to teach.

*Congress must ensure that teacher content knowledge tests are rigorous; if not, the requirement for content testing is not going to move us towards more effective teachers.*

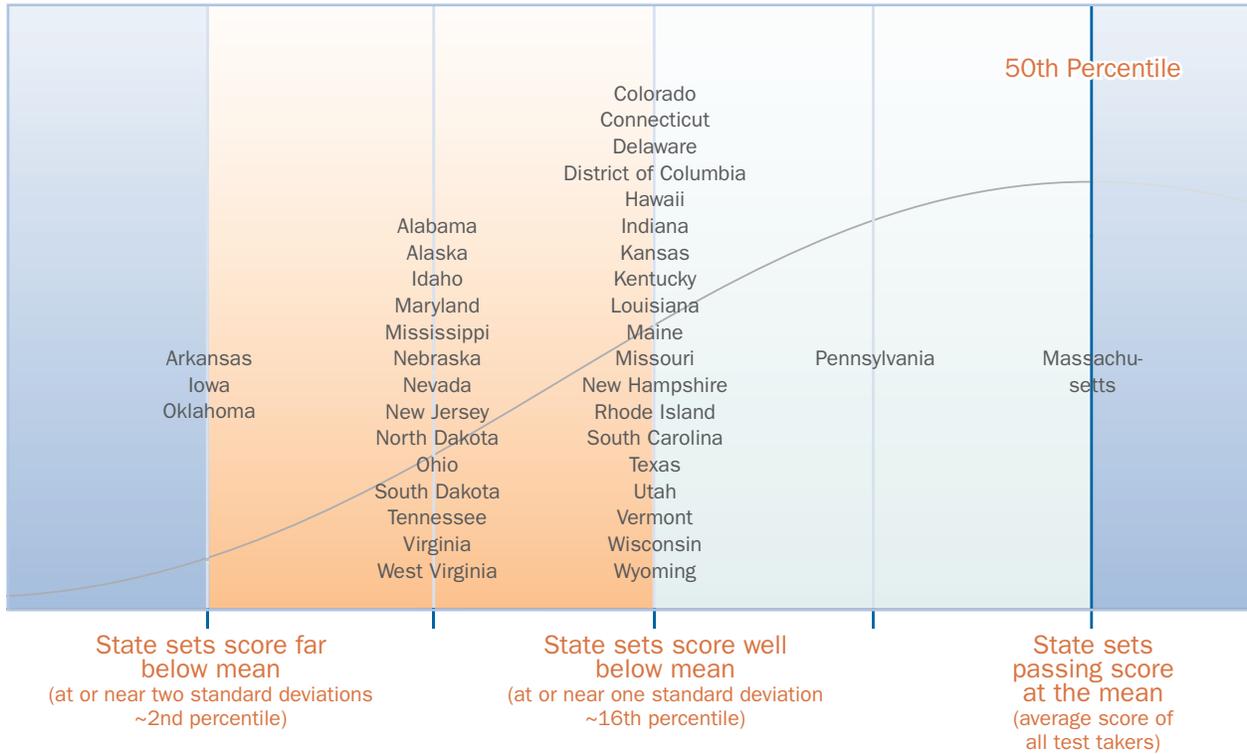
The hitch in the previous recommendation is that the requirement is meaningless if the subject matter tests new teachers are required to pass are not rigorous and if prospective teachers can pass the tests without truly mastering the content. NCTQ has serious concerns on this front, which Congress must address if the HQT requirements are to have any meaning at all.

First, we have very serious doubts about the rigor of most current content-knowledge assessments. At the elementary level, most states administer general subject-matter exams that combine different subject areas into an overall composite score. Such tests have questionable standards for performance and make it possible to pass an overall assessment without mastering all subject areas.

NCTQ's 2010 *State Teacher Policy Yearbook* presents data on where states set their passing scores on elementary level content licensing tests. Most states set the bar for allowing teachers in the classroom too low on tests that are of questionable rigor to begin with. (Massachusetts, the highest performing state on national and international assessments, is a notable exception.) The combination of very general content tests and below average expectations for teacher performance across the states calls into question whether many or most current state teacher licensing assessments (certainly for elementary school teachers) are capable of providing any assurance whatsoever of content knowledge.

Figure 2

Where do states set the passing score on elementary content licensure tests?<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Data not available for Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, and Washington. Montana does not require a content test. Colorado cut score is for Praxis II, not PLACE.

At the secondary level too, there are important questions about the rigor of content assessments. Most states permit general-knowledge exams in science, for example, which simply can't ensure subject-specific content knowledge for individuals teaching, say, biology versus chemistry or physics. The table below breaks down the topics covered by the Praxis 2 General Science: Content Knowledge assessment:

Figure 3

*Overview of Praxis 2  
General Science: Content Knowledge Test*

CONTENT CATEGORY	# QUESTIONS
1. Scientific Methodology, Techniques and History	12
2. The Physical Sciences	48
3. The Life Sciences	24
4. The Earth Sciences	24
5. Science, Technology and Society	12
Total Number of Questions	120

Even without knowing whether a state's passing score sets a suitably high bar, a simple look at the breakdown of the various topics as a percentage of the test's total questions is telling. A test taker could presumably flunk a section like biology or Earth science, or incorrectly answer many or even all chemistry or physics questions, and still be in a position to teach those subjects to high school students.

**Removing the Roadblocks:**

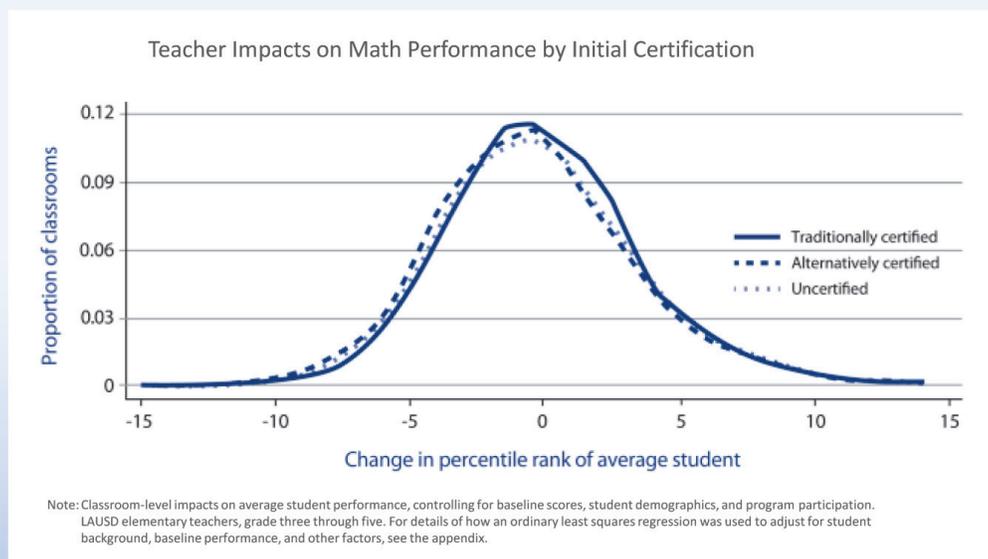
- ▶ **Requiring stand-alone tests in reading instruction and mathematics.** Congress should require that all new elementary teachers must pass stand-alone tests of scientifically-based reading instruction and elementary content mathematics. Despite compelling evidence about the most effective ways to teach young children how to read, NCTQ identifies only six states with policies in place to ensure that elementary teacher candidates enter the classroom with these essential skills. But such requirements alone aren't enough. NCTQ also finds that in states with such requirements, few teacher preparation institutions address the science of reading. In math, we've found that 49 states fail to ensure that teachers have adequate preparation in math and further fail to administer assessments that have anything but a superficial treatment of math. That is why requiring rigorous, stand-alone tests is essential to assessing whether a teacher is prepared to teach reading and mathematics.
- ▶ **Requiring separate scores on multi-subject tests.** At a minimum, Congress should require that any content assessments for new elementary school level teachers be able to provide separate scores or performance results by individual subject area, particularly reading/language arts and mathematics. The goal here is to improve assessment quality by ensuring transparency about where states set the bar for entry into the teaching profession and ensuring that a teacher's limited knowledge of a critical subject area, such as mathematics, isn't masked by a composite score.

- Demanding separate scores for secondary level content assessments.** Congress should require transparency in the states about whether these assessments adequately measure the knowledge teachers are authorized to teach—whether through separate tests or separate scores and by explaining the meaning of passing scores.
- Setting national recommendations on cut scores.** Congress also might consider establishing a national commission that recommends subject-by-subject passing scores that ought to be expected for new teachers to have the content knowledge required to teach, at both the elementary and secondary level, aligned with the new Common Core State Standards. This commission could examine the nation’s widely-used commercial teacher licensing tests, as well as the assessments used by those states that have their own tests. While this commission need not require that states adopt the recommended scores, Congress could require states to report whether their states meet, exceed or do not meet the cut scores recommended to ensure that teachers have the content knowledge to teach to the Common Core. At the very least, Congress should require states to report data that show what their cut scores actually mean in terms of percentage of questions answered.

*If Congress is going to continue to require certification (or enrollment in certification programs) for teachers to demonstrate that they are HQT, then the ESEA should push to ensure that certification is meaningful.*

Figure 4

## Evidence About New Teachers



Source: Gordon, Kane, Staiger, *Identifying Effective Teachers Using Performance on the Job*, The Hamilton Project, Brookings Institution, April 2006.

While, in theory, certification should be an indicator of teacher preparedness, the reality is that certification status does not provide assurance that teachers know and can teach their subjects well. The figure above illustrates this point. There are a few obvious areas where the reality of teacher certification clearly is not aligned with the goals of HQT. Congress must ensure that the Department properly enforces the intent of the law and fixes loopholes in these areas, which are discussed below.

### Removing the Roadblocks:

- **Fixing HQT requirements for middle school teachers.** Throughout the life of NCLB, the U.S. Department of Education has failed to provide the clarity that states need on preparing middle school teachers. In our own review of state teacher policies, NCTQ found that 22 states still allow generalist K–8 teaching licenses—allowing too many elementary-trained educators to teach grades 7 and 8. Clearly, teaching kindergarten and 8th grade are not the same enterprise. Congress should allow middle school teachers to be considered highly qualified if they attain a passing score on a single subject licensing test rather than requiring that teachers have a major in the subject(s) they teach. Congress should also disallow the use of generalist exams that cover all academic subjects as the basis for granting highly-qualified status to anyone teaching grades 7 or 8.
- **Recognizing that special education teachers must *teach*, not babysit.** Congress can help ensure that special education teachers are highly qualified by requiring them to pass rigorous content-knowledge tests for the grades and subjects they teach, consistent with what is required for non-special education teachers.

All states, without exception, ignore the content preparation special education teachers need in order to be effective. While federal law sets the clear expectation that most special education students should meet the same academic standards as typical students, states have yet to get the message. All but 12 states, by NCTQ's count, allow K–12 special education certification; this is the only license offered in 22 states. NCTQ recognizes that special education teachers, especially at the secondary level, are in short supply. But we think that this failure to distinguish between elementary and secondary special education teachers and certifying them with a generic K–12 license addresses the supply issue at the expense of our most vulnerable students.



In the meantime, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) specifically permits a HOUSSE option for secondary special education teachers to demonstrate that they are highly qualified. While we think it is a lot to ask that secondary level special education teachers demonstrate mastery of *every* secondary subject area, it is worth noting that not one state requires teacher preparation programs to ensure that secondary special education teachers are highly qualified in even two subject areas upon program completion. NCTQ finds that 16 states require secondary special education teachers to be qualified in one core area. But the remainder—35 states—do not require that secondary special education teachers graduate highly qualified in *any* core academic areas.

Such state practice is strikingly incompatible with the teacher quality goals of the ESEA.

States might rethink the viability of K–12 special education certification if Congress required that incoming special education teachers pass the same requisite (and more rigorous after reauthorization) content assessments for the grade levels and subjects they teach as any other teacher. Under current law, the federal government has looked the other way while far too many special education teachers have been given no means of demonstrating their content knowledge or have been allowed to pass tests of even more dubious quality and rigor as the tests general education teachers are expected to pass. Holding firm on special education HQT requirements might help states reconsider K–12 certification for special education.

- **Fixing secondary social studies and science HQT requirements.** In a recent review of high school science licensure requirements, NCTQ finds that many states fail to guarantee that biology, chemistry and physics teachers have mastered the content they teach, clinging instead to a loose definition of “science teacher.” NCTQ finds, in fact, that all but 11 states allow secondary science teachers to obtain general-science certifications or combination licenses across multiple science disciplines. In most cases, these teachers need only pass a general knowledge science exam that does not ensure subject-specific content knowledge.

Many states have argued for, and the U.S. Department of Education has signed off on, the need for “flexibility” given STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) teacher shortages. But this so-called flexibility of the “broad field” science teacher is a fantasy. In reality, the concept of the all-purpose science teacher not only masks but perpetuates the STEM crisis, and does so at the expense of students. Without the looming shortage issue, we see very similar trends in social studies, where teachers can be social studies certified and teach a very specific content area such as American history with little to no demonstration of such knowledge.

We go back to our basic point in each of these cases. Teachers must be trained for the grades and subjects they are going to teach—that is, teacher certification must be meaningful. General, broad certification that treats teaching 5-year-old or 17-year-old special education students as all the same or fails to distinguish between the knowledge required to teach anatomy, electrical currents and Newtonian physics flies in the face of what we know it takes students to achieve, to compete and to succeed in the world. It also makes certification not a very strong foundation for ensuring that all students have access to highly qualified and effective teachers.

### III. Collect meaningful data and develop workable policies around ensuring that students have access to effective teachers

*Congress should require states to collect data on the distribution of effective teachers by implementing a Teacher Quality Index and reporting the results publicly.*

In 2005, the Illinois Education Research Council (IERC) developed a teacher quality index that used state teacher data to look at how teachers with different academic and experience attributes were distributed among different types of schools across the state. They found what we know to be a typical pattern: high minority, high poverty schools were likely to have lower quality teachers than other schools, and school performance was related to these teacher characteristics, even within types of schools with similar student demographics. They also found that the variables in the IERC index were correlated with student achievement. The index provided the state with solid, research-based teacher distribution data to inform education policy.

NCTQ has, for several years, recommended that states look at the work of IERC and consider building similar models for examining issues related to the equitable distribution of teachers. Such a tool, in partnership with performance-based evaluation systems, can be a catalyst for powerful analysis of equity as well as a powerful lever for implementing policies that ensure equitable distribution of highly effective teachers.

We believe that Congress should require all states, as a condition for Title I funding, to develop a teacher quality index to examine and publicize teacher equity issues in a uniform and meaningful way. This index should look at more than years of experience and HQT status. It should also avoid factors that have not been shown to correlate with student achievement. The IERC index, for example, includes data on teachers' undergraduate institution's average SAT or ACT scores; the percentage of teachers failing basic skills licensure tests at least once; the percentage of teachers on emergency credentials; average selectivity of teachers' undergraduate colleges and the percentage of new teachers.

We know there are other proposals out there for ensuring teacher equity, but we worry about the intrusiveness of some of those policies and the untenable requirements they may put on states to enforce the placement of teachers within individual schools and within individual districts (discussed in more detail below). NCTQ believes that we need to require states to do the things they have the most leverage to accomplish successfully. On the equitable distribution issue, states have a great deal of leverage to widely disseminate solid data and information on teacher quality (and inequities in distribution) to stakeholders across the state.

#### **Removing the Roadblocks:**

- ▶ **Shining a light on data through school profiles.** States should be required to report data reflecting the aggregate quality of school faculties publicly and regularly, not in a report to the feds buried somewhere on a state website and never revisited. As these factors are complicated, states should develop a report that translates these factors into something more easily understood by the public, such as a color-coded matrix indicating a high or low score for a school. Parents, the public and education stakeholders deserve access to these important data, which will hopefully drive both recognition of the fact that good teaching really does matter as well as policy reforms demanding more effective teachers in more schools.

Figure 6

Do states permit alternate route providers other than colleges and universities?

	Allows district run programs	Allows non-profit providers	Allows colleges and universities only
Alabama	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Alaska	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Arizona	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Arkansas	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
California	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Colorado	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Connecticut	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Delaware	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
District of Columbia	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Florida	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Georgia	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hawaii	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Idaho	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Illinois	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Indiana	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Iowa	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Kansas	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Kentucky	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Louisiana	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Maine	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Maryland	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Massachusetts	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Michigan	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Minnesota	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Mississippi	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Missouri	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Montana	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Nebraska	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Nevada	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
New Hampshire	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
New Jersey	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
New Mexico	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
New York	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
North Carolina	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
North Dakota	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ohio	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Oklahoma	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Oregon	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Pennsylvania	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Rhode Island	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
South Carolina	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
South Dakota	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tennessee	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Texas	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Utah	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Vermont	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Virginia	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Washington	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
West Virginia	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wisconsin	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wyoming	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	19	23	21

## IV. Remove any remaining barriers to alternate routes into the teaching profession

*Congress should require that states remove barriers to alternate routes to teacher and principal certification.*

One of the pre-conditions for state Race to the Top proposals was that states remove barriers to alternative pathways for teacher and principal certification and provide for preparation diversity by allowing providers other than traditional university-based teacher preparation programs. NCTQ’s 2010 *State Teacher Policy Yearbook* finds that there are 23 states that either don’t have alternate routes or that restrict those routes to traditional college or university providers or the state department of education itself.

Congress could solidify opportunities to broaden alternate route usage and providers—thereby opening the pipeline to the teaching profession—by making these changes a pre-condition for states to receive Title I funds and an absolute priority for states applying for Title II funds. At the very least, Congress should prohibit practices that treat alternatively certified teachers as hires of last resort. At present, many states require a district to certify that no traditionally certified teacher was available for a given position.

When it comes to attracting and retaining sufficient numbers of qualified STEM teachers, this strategy is an important point of attack on shortages in these fields.

With strong performance evaluation and management policies, along with appropriately rigorous policies for allowing teachers into the profession only if they can demonstrate knowledge of the subjects they will teach on subject-matters tests as a condition of licensure, states will have the kinds of mechanisms in place to monitor and ensure teacher quality without unnecessarily restricting the profession.



## V. Strengthen accountability for teacher preparation programs

*Congress should strengthen accountability for teacher preparation programs under Title II to publicly report on their selectivity in admissions and the effectiveness of their teaching candidates in the classroom.*

When it comes to teacher preparation institutions, NCTQ recognizes that many of the key requirements are part of the Higher Education Act (HEA) rather than ESEA. But it is critical that these laws work in tandem. When it comes to colleges of education—the primary institutions that prepare America’s teachers—a lack of accountability won’t cut it. ESEA has driven accountability for schools and districts, and we are moving towards more accountability for individual teachers and principals. The institutions responsible for preparing our nation’s supply of teachers too must bear some responsibility for the quality of teaching and learning in our schools. As the map above shows, only a few states are beginning to link teacher preparation program evaluations to the effectiveness of their graduates in the classrooms. Colleges of education have yet to prove that they are graduating teachers who truly advance student achievement in the classroom. Congress should take action and require states to assess the effectiveness of each approved education school. The best way to do this is by aggregating and reporting value-added data for each school’s graduates. Congress should also require states to post annual data on the number of recent education school graduates who are prepared to teach in shortage areas, and require states to identify these areas and set targets for programs to meet.

NCTQ finds current proposals, such as the Presidential Teaching Fellows program, to be promising if scholarship funding is sufficient enough to incent states to make changes that would improve teacher preparation programs. But we caution that the feds already require states to identify and consider shutting down low-performing teacher preparation programs and states have been loath to set meaningful admission requirements for their approved teacher preparation programs. In the most recent reporting, a mere 15 institutions had programs that were identified as low performing, signaling a consistent resistance on the part of higher education institutions to be evaluated and held accountable for the teachers they produce and states to take this accountability seriously. Forty states have not identified a single low-performing teacher preparation program over the last five years, and a scant few programs have ever been shut down. Only 15 states require their schools of education to administer a basic skills test (essentially a test of middle-school level skills), with most states delaying even that testing requirement until the teacher candidate is ready to graduate.

### **Removing the Roadblocks:**

► **Reporting meaningful pass rates on licensure tests. Congress should require states to report more meaningful pass rate data for teacher candidates taking licensing tests:**

1. The number of candidates scheduled to complete teacher preparation in each calendar year
2. The number of candidates passing each licensing test on the first attempt;
3. The number of candidates passing each licensing test on the second attempt;
4. The number of candidates passing in third and subsequent attempts; and,
5. An explanation of any discrepancy between the total number of candidates passing tests (2–4) and the number successfully completing a program (1).
6. Candidates' average raw score, in addition to pass rate data.

These data 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.

## VI. Tie funding opportunities to the adoption of state and district policies that can help identify, recruit and retain effective teachers

*Congress should tie all Title I and Title II discretionary funding opportunities to the adoption of policies that help ensure more effective teachers.*

Because teachers are truly at the center of all school reform efforts, Congress should require that all discretionary Title I and Title II funding opportunities include a commitment to increasing the pool and retaining highly effective teachers. Without increasing student access to highly effective teachers, the implementation of Common Core State Standards can't succeed; the lowest-achieving schools won't be turned around; and the issue of equitable distribution of teachers doesn't have a chance of being addressed. Priorities Congress should consider include:

- ▶ Incentivizing states and/or districts to **ban seniority-based layoffs**;
- ▶ Leveling the playing field for higher needs districts and schools to attract and retain effective teachers through **genuine alternate route programs**;
- ▶ Developing **state or district-level teacher corps** to place the state's most effective teachers in high needs classes as an intra-district loan or as state employees.

## Cautions against legislating policies that may not help at all

*Congress might do more harm than good by trying to level the playing field with Title I comparability.*

NCTQ is one of the few education reform organizations to express doubt about changes regarding Title I comparability. Comparability requires districts to evenly distribute their state and local funds across schools before allocating Title I funds. The major issue is that districts can exempt salary differentials when determining how to distribute their state and local funds. When average salaries are used, high needs schools, which often employ more junior-level, lower-paid teachers, can be shortchanged. As a result, there are some strong feelings that Congress and the U.S. Department of Education must do more to make districts level the playing field in salary disparities that exist between their poor and less poor schools.

We still worry about this strategy. We think that efforts to equalize teacher salaries across schools will result in all sorts of district tomfoolery, leading districts to make decisions about school staffing that have less to do with what's good for a school and more to do with meeting some federal requirements.

While there are other options to shuffling around staff to more evenly distribute funds across schools—from providing bonuses to teachers in needy schools to concentrating support staff in needy schools, or by adjusting per-pupil allocations to remedy the gaps—most require that districts come up with additional resources. We still worry that cash-strapped districts will opt for the free solution: reassigning teachers.

The principle that must be preserved above all else, including in efforts to equalize funding, is each principal's ability to select staff at the building level.

With a reauthorized ESEA committed to building systems for evaluating and making key employment decisions based on effectiveness of teachers, there are better ways to address access issues. A recent economic analysis by Eric Hanushek is telling on this point. Replacing even the lowest performing 8 percent of teachers with an average teacher (not even a highly effective teacher) could put the U.S. on par with top performers on international tests of math and science. That kind of transformation of student learning based on increasing access to effective teachers can't be accomplished by playing shell games with the profession as it is. It can be accomplished if we focus energy and resources into policies that promote and compensate effective teachers and remove the ineffective teachers.

### *It is not yet time for Congress to require states to adopt teacher performance assessments.*

If there were only a crystal ball that could predict if a new recruit was going to become an effective teacher, so many seemingly intractable problems would be solved. But until that crystal ball is invented, states and districts continue to look for ways to make better predictions. The latest strategy is performance-based assessments, licensure tests that aim to measure what new teachers are actually able to do. Nineteen states, as part of the Teacher Performance Assessment (TPA) Consortium, are ready to jump on the bandwagon, but does the TPA really separate wheat from chaff among prospective teachers?

That rather central question remains unanswered. There are plans by researchers to examine data from California's recently completed pilot to determine if the TPA is comparable to other teacher tests, as well as plans to explore if TPA scores are predictive of student achievement. In the meantime, a handful of states have even committed themselves to the TPA through legislation, and several others have pledged to come on board if the pilot proves the assessment to be valid. But there appears to be little evidence (available publicly, at least) that the TPA is a useful screen. The two states that currently require the Praxis III performance-based assessment report pass rates of about 99 percent. Given that it takes significant resources to administer a performance-based assessment, a test that nearly every teacher passes is of questionable value. At this stage, NCTQ wouldn't suggest that Congress go down this path.

## A Final Note on ESEA Funds to Improve Teacher Effectiveness

In this paper, NCTQ means not to overstate the federal role in teacher policy reform, nor to argue for a larger federal role. We think there are ways that the ESEA does significantly shape teacher policy and we've noted where the current law could be improved and existing resources could be redirected to move states in the right direction. But we firmly believe that states are where the real action is on teacher policy reform, and as our annual *State Teacher Policy Yearbook* shows, while some states have begun to make significant progress, most have a long way to go to improve the policies discussed above.

While we argue in this paper that Title II funds should be converted to a competitive program aimed at teacher policy innovators, NCTQ also doesn't take a particular stand about whether formula or competitive federal funds for education are more likely to lead to the results we'd like to see in teacher quality. Our recommendations on funding are based on whether we think states, as a whole, are where they need to be to implement policies well. On some issues, we've argued that federal formula funds should be conditional on state implementation of teacher effectiveness policies—these are issues where we believe that states are capable, but perhaps not always willing, to take steps to address teacher policy. In other cases, we come out on the side of supporting the innovators and would-be innovators with competitive funds until we have a better foundation for considering mandating policies across every state. NCTQ thinks, for example, that much of the current work on performance-based teacher evaluation, exciting as it is, isn't at a stage of development that suggests requiring it of low-capacity and/or unwilling and unmotivated states. This won't further, and could actually damage, the teacher effectiveness agenda. But we also don't think the unwilling and unmotivated should have access to funds for improving teacher quality—namely, Title II funds.

So we come out on the side of attaching conditions to ESEA funds on some issues, and making funding competitive in other cases. Regardless, as we've shown here, we strongly believe that there are sound principles for how federal education dollars ought to be spent, that those principles should be laid out clearly in a reauthorized ESEA, and that spending federal education funds aimed at teacher quality should be conditional on a sincere commitment to implementing teacher effectiveness policies. If we ever did, we certainly no longer have the luxury of spending taxpayer funds on education policy while keeping our fingers crossed that money will be spent in ways that will make a difference to teaching and learning for our nation's students.





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