

**National Board for Professional Teaching Standards
Initial Thoughts on the Reauthorization of the
No Child Left Behind Act¹**

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and subsequent legislative directives offer a narrow view of *highly qualified teacher* that tend to diminish many of the factors that research and practice indicate are critical to effective instruction and learning. We contend that the mandate falls short in providing quality teaching to students most in need, and that greater attention to a more comprehensive view of quality teaching is in order. In our view, the blueprint for this directive is, for the most part, already established in the work of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS). This landmark effort has shown that it is possible for teaching professionals along with research experts and policymakers to come to consensus on a set of national teaching standards that are effective in advancing student achievement.

The teacher quality provisions under NCLB require educators in core academic areas to be licensed by the state, hold a bachelor's degree, and demonstrate competence in their subject teaching area. The details regarding these provisions are given to states to spell out through High Objective Uniform State Standards of Evaluation (HOUSSE) regulations. The sanctions imposed on states and districts for failing to meet Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) for students and student subgroups are arguably stronger than those imposed on those states and districts that have not met highly qualified teacher provisions in the specified time. Therefore, it is not surprising that there appears to be less attention generally to how the highly qualified teacher provisions are being accommodated than there is to the academic achievement of students as measured by test scores. There is wide variation among states on what constitutes “a highly qualified teacher” with no states presenting requirements that can be perceived as anything greater than qualified at the basic level. The legislative intent to raise the standard of teaching for all teachers, but particularly teachers of students in underperforming schools, has made modest progress. No state indicates that it has no highly qualified teachers.

¹ M.E. Dilworth, J.A. Aguerrebere and C. Keller-Allen (2006) excerpts from unpublished manuscript, May 2006; subject to change.

Generally speaking, most all involved in the deliberations on defining highly qualified teacher appeared to agree on the centrality of teachers and the assertion that content knowledge and academic excellence are critical to the definition. The absence of discussion about the complex interaction of content knowledge, pedagogy, and dispositions indicates that policymakers were very focused on the more tangible elements – namely subject matter competence. At the same time, by requiring that states submit student achievement data by targeted sub-group, race/ethnicity, income, disability status, and language background, it is evident that Congress intended to hold states, schools and/or teachers accountable for the achievement gap.

Defining quality teaching is an important issue for both the policy and the educational communities. The policy community recognizes in NCLB and elsewhere teacher attributes that positively relate to student achievement: verbal ability, subject matter knowledge, years of experience, and certification. They contend there is no consensus on what makes a teacher effective. Seemingly, there is a lack of agreement even within the educational research community (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005). Legislation is focused on subject matter knowledge and certification (Stedman, 2004). Consequently, policymakers legislate and therefore influence what will be measured.

In the case of NCLB, schools are to make AYP, as determined by standardized tests in specific subject areas, including mathematics, reading/language arts, and science. Teachers are said to be qualified if they have studied the subjects they teach and are licensed by the state to teach those subjects. What differentiates the requirements of a highly qualified teacher as defined in NCLB with definitions of an accomplished teacher as identified by NBPTS is the ability and requirement to evidence this type of work in a classroom with children.

Certainly, teachers should know the subjects they teach and know them well. As important, however, teachers should know the students they teach and know them well. The NCLB language is silent on this subject. It is as if all students were the same, that they entered school with similar starting points and backgrounds, they progressed at predictable and similar rates, and all a teacher needed was the ability to deliver knowledge to a waiting audience. The importance of teacher knowledge of the student and having a sense of a student's community cannot be underestimated.

A key task of a highly qualified teacher is to use this knowledge of the student to develop strategies that utilize the child's background as a starting point, and a possible strength upon which to build toward success. A highly qualified teacher understands, for example, what types of errors a student who is learning English is likely to make based on patterns that exist in their native language (Brisk, 1998; Mercado 2001). This information can be used to craft differentiated instructional techniques that meet the needs of each student. Culturally responsive pedagogy calls upon teachers to understand the background of students in order to develop teaching practices that meet the needs of all students (Gay, 2000; Irvine, 1992). The bottom line is that an effective teacher in this context should expect all of their students to reach high learning goals, and should be armed with various strategies for helping students to achieve realizing that every student starts at a different place and may require a different path to accomplish the same goals.

With all of that in mind, the NBPTS utilized a thorough, comprehensive, and inclusive process that tapped the wisdom of practitioners, researchers, and other stakeholders to develop a set of standards and eventually assessments to measure teachers against these standards. The Board developed a linked set of professional standards that provide systematic evidence of practice assembled in a highly structured portfolio that can be assessed by standardized evaluation methods based on the standards (Darling-Hammond, Berry, Haselkorn, & Fideler, 1999). The initial effort, however, began with a set of policy statements that formed a framework from which all of the standards flow. This initial product resolved to answer the question of what accomplished teachers should know and be able to do. This work, referred to as the Core Propositions, represents core value statements that are applicable for all teachers regardless of teaching level and field. They draw in appropriate portions from the knowledge, skills, and dispositions knowledge base that we know are critical to the makeup of an effective teacher. The following offers NBPTS' core propositions (NBPTS, 1991) and the extent to which NCLB and the current definition of highly qualified teacher implicitly or explicitly attends to them.

Teachers are Committed to Students and Their Learning. For NBPTS, this proposition draws on what we know about knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Effective teachers act on the belief that all students can learn at acceptable levels and make sure

that knowledge is accessible to all students. It means that a teacher treats students equitably and adjusts instruction accordingly using good professional judgment to make sure all students are engaged and learning to acceptable levels. It means that the teacher understands how students learn and develop in a given context and can utilize best practice to help all students meet stated goals. NCLB, by calling for equitable standards and measurable goals for all students, presumes that highly qualified teachers *believe* that all students can achieve high standards and can reach their highest academic potential. Teacher beliefs and sense of efficacy are known to advance student learning. Teachers' knowledge of a student's human development, their ability to incorporate this into their instruction and have a variety of approaches to this instruction are critical to learning. As the education community seeks to find ways to develop and recognize these characteristics, the policymaking community should encourage this as a factor in teacher qualifications.

Teachers Know the Subjects They Teach and How to Teach Those Subjects to Students. Effective teachers have a deep understanding of their subject and understand how their discipline is organized, created, and linked to other disciplines. They possess special knowledge and skill regarding how to share and engage this knowledge with students. They are aware of preconceptions and background knowledge that students typically bring to each subject. Their instructional skills allow them to create multiple paths to the subjects they teach. NCLB is emphatic on teacher knowledge of subject matter. The extent to which teachers can deliver this knowledge for true and deeper understanding is not addressed. The depth of subject matter knowledge expected of teachers who teach the same subject but at different age levels also needs clarification.

Teachers are Responsible for Managing Student Learning. Effective teachers command a range of instructional techniques, know when each is important, and can implement them as needed. They know how to organize instruction to meet school goals. They understand how to motivate students and how to maintain their interest. They can assess the progress of individual students as well as the class as a whole. They employ multiple methods for measuring student growth and can explain student performance to parents. NCLB's requirement that students' academic performance is measured by tests

implies a responsibility that teachers have to understand and communicate this information. Beyond that, NCLB does not speak to this proposition.

Teachers Think Systematically About Their Practice and Learn from Experience. Effective teachers can adopt an experimental and problem-solving orientation to their teaching. They can analyze their instruction drawing on current knowledge of human development, subject matter, and their understanding of their students to make principled judgments about sound practice. Their decisions are grounded not only on the latest research, but their experience. As life-long learners, they critically examine their practice, always expanding their skills, and sharpening their judgment to adapt their teaching to new research, ideas, and theories. NCLB does not address this proposition except indirectly through its professional development provisions.

Teachers are Members of Learning Communities. Effective teachers do not work alone. They realize their effectiveness is tied to the effectiveness of the school in working collaboratively with other professionals on instructional policy, curriculum development, and teacher development. They can evaluate school progress and the allocation of school resources in relation to local, state, and national educational standards. They are knowledgeable and can deploy school and community resources to benefit their students. Effective teachers understand the value of working collaboratively with parents, and engage productively with them for the benefit of students. NCLB includes a section regarding the role of professional development for teachers but does not frame the issue in terms of promoting a larger community of learners to achieve collective goals.

In sum, the core propositions paint images of highly qualified teachers that are multifaceted and complex. They describe a teacher's skills that go beyond credentials and subject matter knowledge. Current notions of quality teaching as stated in NCLB underestimate its complexities and overlook its non-routine nature and the importance of independent professional judgment. A more complete description of quality teaching describes the inner workings of teaching that require a well-trained professional who can bring to bear professional judgments that are appropriate for each student.

As Congress explores reauthorization a more complete definition of a highly qualified teacher must be drafted. Discretionary grants to state education agencies,

encouraging the advanced certification of teachers and the connection between teacher standards and student achievement, should also be maintained and expanded.

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