

Teacher Quality

What does NCLB say?

NCLB is the first federal education law to demand that states define what it takes to be a qualified teacher and take steps to address the unfair assignment of the least qualified teachers to the schools educating the most disadvantaged students.

Although states define a “highly qualified teacher,” NCLB sets a minimum standard:

- All teachers must meet state certification requirements and have a license;
- All teachers must have at least a college degree;
- All teachers must demonstrate that they are knowledgeable in each subject they are assigned to teach:
 - **New elementary teachers must pass a test of subject knowledge and teaching skills.**
 - **New middle school and high school teachers must demonstrate knowledge in every subject they teach, either by earning a college major in the subject or by passing a rigorous academic subject test.**
 - **Veteran teachers also need to demonstrate subject matter knowledge (if they have not already). Veteran teachers can take the state tests, or the state can develop alternate measures of subject knowledge for veteran teachers.**

States have promised that all new teachers hired in Title I schools will meet the state’s

definition of “highly qualified.” By 2005-06 ALL school teachers are expected to meet them, including veteran teachers.

Under NCLB, states and school districts must publicly report on the distribution of highly qualified and experienced teachers. This should help ensure that schools serving poor and minority students get their fair share of these teachers.

Why is this important?

Teacher quality is the most important factor affecting student achievement. **Parents know this, which is why they fight to have their children taught by the best teachers.**

The last decade of research leaves little doubt: Students who have several strong teachers in a row will soar no matter what neighborhood they come from. On the other hand, the results are devastating for students who are taught by three ineffective teachers in row. Yet students of color and low-income students continue to be short-changed when it comes to qualified and experienced teachers.

If we took the simple step of making sure that all poor and minority students had teachers of the same quality as other children, about half the achievement gap would disappear.¹ If we went further by putting our most expert teachers with the children who need them most, we could close the gap entirely.

What can I do?

Look at the school and district report cards to see the qualifications of your school’s teachers. You are entitled to information about the qualifications of the teachers in your school, and specific information about your child’s teachers.

Check with the school to see what your child’s teachers studied in college and what subjects they’re licensed to teach. Are they teaching the subjects they studied? If not, what qualifications do they have? Have they taken exams to show that they are qualified to teach this class? Schools are required to have teacher quality information on site.

Look more widely to see how teachers are distributed, both within schools and within districts. Remember, students who are behind need to catch up and the best way to do that is for them to have excellent teachers.

Make sure your school district is helping to get the best teachers for your schools. What support do teachers get? What kinds of ongoing training and professional development are provided by the school district?

Ask your school district and state for their plans for raising teacher quality. NCLB requires states and school districts to publicly report progress toward ensuring low-income and minority students get their fair share of qualified and experienced teachers. Request copies of these reports.

¹For more information about the importance of teacher quality, read “Good Teaching Matters,” available at www.edtrust.org.