

A Quality Teacher in Every Classroom

*Improving Teacher Quality and
Enhancing the Profession*

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The Need to Improve Teacher Quality and Enhance the Teaching Profession

Recent studies offer compelling evidence that confirms what parents have always known – the quality of a teacher is one of the most critical components of how well students achieve. Studies in both Tennessee and Texas found that students who had effective teachers greatly outperformed those who had ineffective teachers. For example, in the Tennessee study, students with highly effective teachers for three years in a row scored 50 percentage points higher on a test of math skills than those whose teachers were ineffective.

The Challenge of Improving Teacher Quality

Teacher Preparation: Many new teachers do not feel ready for the challenges of today’s classrooms. Fewer than 36 percent feel “very well prepared” to implement curriculum and performance standards, and less than 20 percent feel prepared to meet the needs of diverse students or those with limited English proficiency.

Teacher Retention: New teachers are often left to “sink or swim,” not receiving the nurturing and support they need. Not surprisingly, about 22 percent of new public school teachers leave the profession in their first three years.

Mastery of Content: Teachers in 35 States are required to pass a test of subject area knowledge. Often the passing scores are set so low that a candidate can pass the test by getting fewer than half of the test items correct. Low expectations such as these do not address the realities of higher academic standards. Research has demonstrated a clear connection between a teacher’s subject matter preparation and student academic achievement. Teachers with strong preparation in the subject matter they teach have the knowledge and ability to help their students meet the challenges of new and more rigorous standards.

Teacher Recruitment: Over the next decade, school districts will need to hire 2.2 million additional teachers. But States and school districts face the challenge of attracting a greater *quantity* of people to the teaching profession while also increasing teacher *quality*. While States and educational organizations have begun to pursue different ways to recruit high quality individuals into the field of teaching, more help is needed.

Starting Early. Research has shown the importance of children acquiring pre-reading and numeracy skills early on in life. The more prepared children are when they enter school, the more likely they will be able to read and perform on grade level by the end of the third grade. Teachers need specific training to enable them to successfully teach young learners.

The Need to Enhance the Teaching Profession

As we expect more and more of teachers, we have an obligation to ensure that they are treated like the dedicated professionals they are. Unfortunately, fewer than 20 percent of public school teachers report that they are “very satisfied” with the level of esteem society accords them. Teachers also report that they have problems maintaining order in the classroom and face the threat of being sued when they enforce reasonable standards of discipline. Additionally, low pay and the burden of

student loans and other expenses related to teaching can contribute to teachers feeling dissatisfied with their work environment.

The No Child Left Behind Act and Teachers

Every child deserves highly qualified teachers. The *No Child Left Behind Act* requires States to have a highly qualified teacher in every public school classroom by the end of the 2005-2006 school year. For example, all new teachers will have to be licensed or certified by the State, hold at least a bachelor's degree, and pass a rigorous State test on subject knowledge and teaching skills. Existing teachers will also have to meet similar criteria.

Reaching this goal will require reform of traditional teacher training, which is usually conducted in colleges of education, as well as through the innovative expansion of alternative routes to teacher licensure. It will also require more effective in-service training and professional development for teachers currently in the classroom.

The historic *No Child Left Behind Act*, signed into law by President Bush in January 2002, provides a variety of new tools to enable the Federal Government, States, and local districts to improve teacher quality and elevate the teaching profession. These needed reforms are backed up with historic levels of funding for teacher quality initiatives in President Bush's FY-03 budget. These reforms are the foundation of the Bush Administration's agenda to improve teacher quality and enhance the teaching profession.