

Preparing Teachers for the Classroom: The Role of the Higher Education Act and NCLB
Written Congressional Testimony
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Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, I thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am Dr. Janice Wiley, Deputy Director for Instructional Support Services of the Region One Education Service Center located in Edinburg, Texas. The Region One Service Center serves a student population of over 373,000 located along the south Texas-Mexico border, of which approximately 144,000 students are limited English proficient. Ninety-seven percent of the student population is of Hispanic descent with 85% qualifying as Economically Disadvantaged. To serve these students, there are over 23,256 teachers in the Region One area, with over 18,000 teachers in the academic core subject areas. Of those, only 12.6% hold a master's degree and approximately 40% have less than 10 years experience.

Imagine a first-year teacher entering his/her first day of teaching at local high school. There are 25-30 students in each class period; the class made up of many of the demographic characteristics that I just mentioned. There are also many diverse learners including students that are Limited English Proficient, migrant students, as well as special needs students. For many of them, at least half will be the first in their family to earn a high school diploma and the first to attend college, much less have an advanced degree. Not only is the novice teacher faced with the challenge of helping all of these students meet state and federal standards, but the school is rated based on the passing rates of his/her students. Can you feel the immense pressure this teacher must be facing? What can we do to support this teacher so that after a few years he/she does not feel burned out or worse yet, feel like they are facing a losing battle all by themselves? We can continue to provide quality professional development and mentoring programs to assist the teacher so that their students are successful in not only meeting, but surpassing state and federal academic standards. The Region One Education Service Center believes vehemently that a key factor in increasing student achievement lies in improving the quality of teachers in our classrooms. Title II funds make it possible to provide these learning opportunities for our teaching force.

It is impossible for teachers to learn everything they need to know for a lifetime of teaching during their college preparation work; therefore professional development and mentor programs are crucial for beginning teachers. Research clearly shows that a well-trained teacher is the greatest factor in predicting student achievement and that, dollar for dollar, monies that are spent on professional development produce far greater gains in student learning than do investments in tests, materials, or programs.

Even our most experienced teachers have professional development needs. Many graduated from teacher preparation programs before state content standards were developed and well before technology played such an important role in our profession. Additionally, due to brain research we know more about how students learn cognitively than ever before. Experienced teachers must be knowledgeable about new scientifically researched-based strategies in order to reach all students.

Through Title II funds we have been able to fulfill many of our teachers' professional development needs. Many efforts are being coordinated locally with the service center facilitating many of the activities. We have formed a local P-16 council to align instruction from high school to our colleges and universities and to create a seamless transition for our students.

Title II funds have been used to serve identified needs and have been used by the Region One Education Service Center to form the numerous initiatives:

- Texas Regional Science and Math Collaborative – A network of statewide universities, education service centers, and school districts that provide professional development in math and science. Teacher mentors are developed and participating teachers may earn college credit and pursue graduate degrees in the math and science content fields.

- Texas Science, Math, Engineering, and Technology (TSTEM) Center – Region One ESC is one of only 5 centers in Texas created to develop professional development opportunities in the STEM content areas. Project-based learning will be emphasized in which teachers will learn how to engage students in more relevant real-world problem solving activities. This is a collaboration of local school districts, Region One ESC, universities, community colleges, and the Workforce of South Texas.
- CSCOPE Curriculum – Region One Esc has formed a collaborative to produce a curriculum based on the state content standards. Districts use Title II funds to pay for the professional development needed to implement the standards-based curriculum. Key participants in the training are campus administrators who also learn how to support the curriculum, monitor the implementation, and provide feedback to teachers through analysis of data from six weeks tests and walk-through observations.
- Teaching American History Grant - This program is designed to raise student achievement by improving teachers' knowledge and understanding of and appreciation for traditional U.S. history. This is a partnership between local school districts, Region One ESC, University of Texas Pan American, and local museums.

Title II monies have also been used in recruitment and retention in the following manner:

- Stipends to recruit highly qualified teachers in shortage areas;
- Mentor programs for beginning teachers and principals;
- Hiring of additional teachers to reduce class size, particularly in the early grades

Since the 2004 school year, Region One has shown significant gains in student achievement for all students on state assessments. Reading increased from 71% to 81% passing rate, a gain of 10%. Mathematics increased from 58% to 69%, a gain of 11%. Social Studies increased from 77% to 81%, a gain of 4%. Science has seen the largest

increase, from 43% to 61%, a gain of 18%. We firmly believe that these gains are due to the professional development that we provide to our teachers through Title II funds. We are hopeful that these funds will continue to be available to meet the needs of the children in south Texas.

Thank you for the opportunity to be here today to present this information. I will be happy to answer any questions that the committee may have.