

# Teachers Who Do Not Meet the Definition of Highly Qualified Teacher and Related Issues

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Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Ladies and gentlemen of the committee, for the record my name is Jennifer Azordegan. I am a researcher the Teaching Quality Policy Center at the Education Commission of the States, and more importantly, I am a certified teacher. I want to thank you for the invitation to visit you today and discuss the national landscape of teacher evaluation and how states are dealing with teachers who do not meet highly qualified status. Just briefly, if you look on your agendas, my colleague, Michael Allen was also invited to join me in this presentation. But unfortunately, due to prior commitments, he was not able to come before you today. I will do my best to speak on his behalf as well.

The time is short, and this topic is enormous. It is my intention today to:

- First, give you a brief overview of teacher evaluation and the recommended strategies for its improvement,
- Second, to put teacher evaluation in the context of the “highly qualified teacher” and the HOUSSE tool; and
- Third, to give you a few examples of assistance efforts focused on teachers who do not meet the definition of a “highly qualified teacher”.

I am also happy to answer any questions you may have on this topic, and if I do not readily know the answer, I - and everyone at ECS - remain at your disposal for further research on this or any issue in state education policy.

## **I. State Context of Teacher Evaluation**

Evaluation of teachers. When we talk of this topic, in many people’s minds teacher evaluation is just a step on the way to license renewal. In the past, licensure renewal for teachers, has often been in the form of continuing education credits or performance observations, and heavily, if not solely reliant on years of experience. In the last few years, however, we have been moving into an era of a more direct evaluation that is linked much more strongly with student outcomes – and in particular student achievement gains. This form of teacher accountability is often referred to as performance-based evaluation. Its intent is to provide a more accurate, and fair, measure of a teacher’s effectiveness and teaching competence.

### **Strategies for Improving Teacher Evaluation**

The NGA Center for Best Practices recommends the following strategies to improve teacher evaluation:

#### **Define teaching quality**

States have defined academic standards for what every child needs to know, and have also clearly defined what a highly qualified teacher needs to know and should be able to do. This has to be done before they can purposefully construct a teacher evaluation policy.

EXHIBIT C Education Document consists of 4 pages.

- ☒ Entire document provided.  
☐ Due to size limitations, pages \_\_\_\_\_ provided. A copy of the complete document is available through the Research Library (775/684-6827) or e-mail [library@lcb.state.nv.us](mailto:library@lcb.state.nv.us).

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Obviously No Child Left Behind has motivated states into explicitly defining a “highly qualified teacher” in their state policies. However, few states went above and beyond the requirements mandated by the federal law. State policymakers might want to carefully review this definition to see if it encompasses all that it wants its teachers to be.

### **Focus evaluation policy on improving teaching practice**

Teacher evaluation should be viewed as an informational tool to help administrators identify teachers who need additional or specialized assistance and to help individual teachers improve their instructional practices.

I would add that not only should the evaluation be seen as an informational tool *to help administrators*, but also *to help teachers* in their own reflections of their practice.

An evaluation technique that would contribute to this goal of improving teacher practice is the teacher portfolio. Connecticut, while famous for its overall teaching policies, has had particular success with teacher portfolios – as has Vermont. Connecticut’s teacher portfolio assessments are designed to assess the foundational skills and competencies, as well as discipline-specific teaching standards. They include daily lesson logs, videotapes of lesson segments, examples of student work, and teacher commentaries on planning, instruction and assessment. Portfolios are then scored by trained educators.

### **Incorporate student learning into teacher evaluation**

In designing teacher evaluation to be more outcome-driven, states may consider measurable student achievement as a principal outcome on which teachers are evaluated. States such as Tennessee, Texas and Colorado have integrated such measures as part of their teacher evaluations, though I should stress that we are not aware of any state policy that holds individual teachers accountable for the performance of their students. Rather, the information is incorporated into a system of many elements.

### **Create professional accountability**

Career ladders can provide states an opportunity to strengthen teacher evaluation policy and align it with performance-based teaching standards. Professional classifications (such as “beginning,” “mentor,” and “master” teacher) can also provide a framework through which to implement performance-based compensation.

Performance-based, multi-tiered licensure systems serve several functions. Teachers who are not effective in the classroom are identified earlier, and teachers who demonstrate weaknesses can seek to strengthen their practice, or forfeit their position. These systems are designed to recognize the enhanced expertise of experienced teachers and their capacity for assuming more demanding responsibilities.

### **Train evaluators**

If an evaluation is to be truly effective, teacher evaluators need preservice training on skills such as analyzing effective teaching practice, determining a teacher’s impact on student learning, and providing leadership for professional development and remedial assistance. This also helps to ensure a greater level of objectivity and high standards throughout the state and district.

### **Broaden participation in evaluation design**

Policymakers must reach out to all education stakeholders, including teachers and administrators, to design a teacher evaluation system. Educators and school officials must have confidence in and an understanding of evaluation— prior to and during implementation—to ensure its long-term sustainability.

## **II. Teacher Evaluation in the Context of NCLB’s “Highly Qualified Teacher”**

While we have been speaking of teacher evaluation in terms of improving teacher practice and most likely in the context of annual evaluations, NCLB has brought a very distinct, one-time evaluation into the mix, the sole purpose of which is to measure content knowledge of teachers already in the classroom – in each subject they teach. Before we jump in the realm of HOUSSE, however, I’ll just quickly review the basis of NCLB’s highly qualified teacher provisions.

As you all know too well, the federal law’s “highly qualified teacher” requirements have three main components:

- Full state certification
- A minimum of a bachelor’s degree, and
- Demonstrated subject matter competency in each of the academic subjects in which the teacher teaches (core academic subjects only).

If an existing teacher does not meet the content knowledge standards of the highly qualified definition – for elementary teachers, through a test, and for middle and secondary teachers, through a major, coursework equivalent to a major, advanced certification, or a test – then they can have the option of using the High Objective Uniform State Standard of Evaluation or HOUSSE. I won’t elaborate on this too much, because I know that Superintendent will also be addressing the HOUSSE, but I would like to give you a picture of what we’ve seen nationally on this topic.

ECS has been collecting the HOUSSEs for several months and now has an almost complete interactive on-line database. From our analysis of these evaluations, we have seen that they tend to fall into the following categories:

**Point System:** An existing teacher accumulates points for various professional activities, usually relating to the subject taught. Frequently used categories include coursework, professional development, services to the profession, student achievement data, and awards, recognition or publications.

**Professional Development:** A teacher can meet competency by participating in a certain amount of professional development. Often teachers will determine what is needed to meet competency and submit those requirements in a plan to be completed by the end of the 2006 school year.

**Performance Evaluation:** In most cases, an already existing performance evaluation system is used. It may include observation and review by peers, a panel or a supervisor, or by the teacher herself. Content knowledge is usually one criterion among others such as classroom management and instructional skills.

**Portfolio:** A collection of evidence from the teacher's practice and primarily from the classroom that demonstrates his or her competency in the subject taught. As defined throughout the HOUSSE systems, a portfolio is more likely than a point system to contain observation/evaluation notes, student work and classroom artifacts.

**Student Achievement Data:** This category is a means of measuring the teacher's effect on student achievement or learning through scores on particular assessments.

You'll see that some of the strategies we mentioned earlier pop up in the HOUSSEs, such as student achievement data and portfolios. However, I'll remind you that these are solely evaluations of subject matter competency – not overall teacher effectiveness.

### **Efforts Around The Country To Help Teachers Become Highly Qualified**

Finally, I'd like to discuss efforts around the country to help teachers become highly qualified. The first and most important thing to remember is that now is a time for assistance not removal. No states are being encouraged to remove teachers who are not highly qualified. From this week, we have two years and three months until teachers have to be highly qualified. There is still time to help existing teachers reach the highly qualified requirements.

We have not seen too many efforts at the state level. When speaking with state departments of education, I have often found the same response: we're leaving that to the districts. This approach is with good reason. Assistance from Title II-A program heavily favors local education agencies. They are entitled to 95% percent of the funds to help their teachers become highly qualified and increase the development and delivery of high-quality professional development. However, we have found some state level approaches to assist teachers to become highly qualified. For instance, some states, like Michigan, are increasing the subsidies given to teachers to become highly qualified, since that is a component to their highly qualified teacher definition. Another creative assistance program is Mississippi's Middle School Professional Development Institute, which is lovingly referred to as a sort of boot camp for teachers to become highly qualified. At these summer institutes, middle school teachers can acquire credits needed to raise their status to highly qualified.

At the district level, we are seeing many more efforts to assist teacher who are not yet highly qualified. These are generally in the form of scholarships. In the Kansas City Kansas public schools, we have seen a particularly creative approach: for each \$1,000 they provide to teachers to become highly qualified, that teacher has to agree to stay in the district for one year. Essentially, this is a retention technique: \$1,000 = 1 year of stability.

Finally, there are outside assistance efforts for teachers – primarily in the form of distance learning. Western Governors University is one such effort that offers coursework to teachers. Another exciting endeavor is the Electronic Campus run by the Southern Education Regional Board. They have a program that is geared entirely at helping teachers gain access to courses that will help them become highly qualified, or assist them in licensure renewal.