

Evaluating Teacher Quality Under No Child Left Behind

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The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), the most recent reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, was passed by the U.S. Congress in 2001 and designed to improve the academic achievement of all students in U.S. public schools. One of the central goals of NCLB is to ensure that every child is taught by a highly qualified teacher. NCLB requires states to set standards that teachers must meet to be considered highly qualified, and it requires districts to notify parents if their child’s teacher does not meet these standards. The requirements apply to all teachers of core academic subjects, including teachers who provide instruction to students with limited English proficiency (LEP) and students with disabilities.

To help improve the qualifications of teachers, NCLB provides funds that states can use for a wide variety of efforts, from improving certification systems to supporting strategies to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers. The law also supports ongoing professional development for all teachers, regardless of their “highly qualified” status. Taken together, the requirements of NCLB represent a federal commitment to providing the nation’s children—in all states, districts, and schools—with teachers who will help them achieve at high levels of proficiency.

As part of a federally funded study of NCLB, RAND Corporation researchers, in collaboration with researchers from the American Institutes for Research, analyzed the progress that states, districts, and schools have made in implementing the teacher qualification provisions of NCLB through the 2004–2005 school year. They found that most teachers are highly qualified under the requirements of NCLB, but that the proportion who are not highly qualified is greater for teachers of special education students, low-income students, and minority students. They also found that nearly all teachers were aware of the teacher qualification requirements, but that a signifi-

Abstract

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) requires states to set standards that teachers must meet to be considered highly qualified. This study analyzed the progress that states, districts, and schools have made implementing the teacher qualification provisions of NCLB through the 2004–2005 school year. Researchers found that most teachers are highly qualified under the requirements of NCLB, but that teachers who are less qualified are more prevalent in traditionally disadvantaged schools. They also found that a large percentage of teachers were not notified of their NCLB qualification status. The study identifies issues that should be addressed to make NCLB’s teacher qualification provisions more effective.

cant percentage of teachers were not notified of whether they were considered highly qualified under NCLB and remained uncertain of their status. Based on these findings, the researchers identify important issues that, if addressed, could make the teacher qualification provisions of NCLB more effective.

States’ Requirements for the Designation of “Highly Qualified” Vary

NCLB requires that teachers have a bachelor’s degree and full certification to be considered highly qualified, but states determine the specifics of how teachers may demonstrate content knowledge in each core subject they teach. All states now have criteria to determine whether teachers are highly qualified under NCLB; however, they differ in how they determine the adequacy of teachers’ knowledge. For example, states may use different tests to assess teachers’ knowledge, and even those that use the same test may set different passing scores.

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Most Teachers Are Highly Qualified Under NCLB

Overall, as of 2004–2005, most U.S. public school teachers were designated as highly qualified, but the figure shows how teachers self-reported their qualification status. About three-quarters of teachers across all states reported themselves to be highly qualified. Approximately a quarter of all teachers did not know whether they were highly qualified. However, the researchers found that 92 percent of these teachers were similar in educational and professional qualifications to teachers who reported that they were highly qualified.

However, Inequities Exist

Although most teachers are highly qualified under NCLB, there were some important differences in how they are distributed across geographic areas, classroom types, and schools. For example, five states and the District of Columbia reported that 75 percent or less of classes were taught by highly qualified teachers in 2004–2005.

A higher percentage of teachers who were not highly qualified under NCLB teach special education and LEP classes. Among special education teachers, only 39 percent of those who teach in elementary schools, 61 percent of those who teach in middle schools, and 53 percent of those who teach in high school reported themselves as being highly qualified.

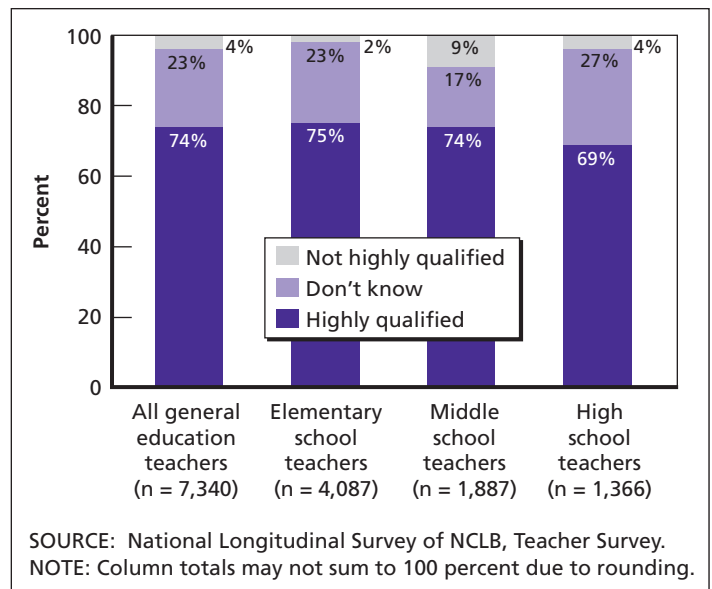
The researchers found that high-poverty and high-minority schools had higher percentages of teachers who were not highly qualified under NCLB than low-poverty and low-minority schools. For example, teachers who were not highly qualified were three times more likely to be teaching in high-minority schools than in low-minority schools.

In addition, teachers in high-poverty and high-minority schools who were considered highly qualified tended to have less teaching experience than those in low-poverty and low-minority schools (highly qualified teachers in the disadvantaged schools were more likely to have three or fewer years of experience than were their counterparts). Furthermore, highly qualified teachers in high-poverty and rural schools were less likely to have a degree in their field compared to teachers in low-poverty and suburban schools.

Communication of Status to Teachers Varied

A majority of teachers (83 percent) reported that they were aware of the requirements for highly qualified teachers in their state. However, although states, districts, and schools

Teachers' Knowledge of Their Qualification Status Under NCLB, 2004–2005



adopted various strategies for communicating with teachers about state requirements and informing teachers about their status, nearly half of all general education teachers and more than half of all special education teachers reported that they were not notified of their qualification status for 2004–2005. These findings are important because teachers who were not highly qualified might have taken steps—such as participating in additional professional development—to become highly qualified, had they been notified of their status.

Looking Ahead

The findings of this study indicate that states are working to comply with the NCLB requirements for teacher qualifications, but several issues warrant attention. First, the variation across states in their policies concerning highly qualified teachers raises questions about whether all states have set sufficient standards to ensure that teachers have solid expertise in the subjects they teach. Second, variation in teachers' qualification status across types of teachers and schools highlights ongoing inequities in students' access to highly qualified teachers. Finally, because many teachers were not notified of their NCLB status, they may not have taken necessary steps to become highly qualified. The potential for the NCLB provisions to effect positive change in the nation's teaching workforce depends, in part, on addressing these important issues. ■

This research brief describes work done for the U.S. Department of Education and documented in *State and Local Implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act: Volume II—Teacher Quality Under NCLB: Interim Report*, by Beatrice F. Birman, Kerstin Carlson Le Floch, Amy Klekotka, Meredith Ludwig, James Taylor, Kirk Walters, Andrew Wayne, Kwang-Suk Yoon, Georges Vernez, Michael S. Garet, and Jennifer O'Day (<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/opepd/ppss/reports.html#tq>), 2007, 212 pp., also available as RP-1283 (<http://www.rand.org/pubs/reprints/RP1283>). The work was performed in RAND Education, a unit of the RAND Corporation. The RAND Corporation is a nonprofit research organization providing objective analysis and effective solutions that address the challenges facing the public and private sectors around the world. RAND's publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions of its research clients and sponsors. RAND® is a registered trademark.

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