



Every Student Succeeds Act

Proposed Alternative to Highly Qualified Teachers (HQT)

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) eliminates the Highly Qualified Teacher (HQT) provision from the previous NCLB law for teachers. Therefore, federal law reverts to whatever standard states have for state certification of teachers. We recommend that states advocate for “full state certification” as a minimum requirement for entry into the classroom to ensure that all teachers are “profession-ready.”

PROFESSION-READY TEACHERS

The NEA believes that teachers should be “profession-ready” from their first day of being responsible for student learning. Profession-ready means that before becoming the teacher-of-record, teachers must demonstrate the skills and knowledge needed for effective classroom practice. <http://www.nea.org/home/profession-ready-teachers.html>

(A) A profession-ready teacher is one who –

- (i) has completed a teacher preparation program and is certified and licensed to teach by the State in which the teacher teaches;
- (ii) has demonstrated content knowledge in the subject or subjects the teacher teaches; and
- (iii) has demonstrated teaching skills, such as through a teacher performance assessment, or another measure determined by the State.

KEY PROVISIONS OF HQT IN THE NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND (NCLB) ACT

- ▶ To be deemed highly qualified under NCLB, teachers had to:
 - Have a bachelor’s degree,
 - Earn full state certification or licensure, and
 - Prove that they knew each subject they teach.
- ▶ Districts had to prove that they had high levels of HQT in order to be eligible to receive Title I funds. Therefore, districts and states had a perverse incentive to find a work around.
- ▶ Under federal regulations, teachers who were enrolled in programs providing an alternative route to certification or licensure met the certification requirements to be considered a highly qualified teacher for up to three years while they completed full state certification or licensure requirements—creating the “alternative preparation loophole.” (For more information, see page 4 of the following report: <https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/teaching/hqt-teacher-certification/report.pdf>.)
- ▶ Therefore, teachers enrolled in an approved state alternative preparation program that met federal guidelines (e.g. professional development, training, mentoring), were considered “highly qualified.”

KEY PROVISIONS IN THE EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT

- ▶ Under ESSA, the HQT provision has been eliminated for teachers. However, the requirement that paraeducators be highly qualified remains in federal law as NEA requested.
- ▶ Districts no longer have to prove that teachers are HQT in order to receive Title I funds.
- ▶ Instead, Title I states that “all teachers and paraprofessionals working in a program supported with funds under this part [Title I] meet applicable State certification and licensure requirements, including any requirements for certification obtained through alternative routes to certification.”
- ▶ This allows states to not only support and promote alternative preparation programs that do not adequately provide the necessary preparation for pre-service teachers, but also opens up other possibilities. For example, prior to NCLB many districts and states relied on “provisionally licensed” teachers. Typically, this allowed districts to hire someone to teach immediately, but gave them a certain amount of time, usually two years, to become certified. In some cases, this allowed the profession to become a stepping stone for individuals interested in including teaching on their resume before pursuing other long-term career goals.

RECOMMENDATIONS

HQT created an entry bar into teaching for many states in which no bar or a low bar had been set. We encourage states to use the elimination of HQT as an opportunity to strengthen this entry bar in ways that support teaching and learning.

- ▶ **Affiliates should advocate for individuals seeking a license to meet “full state certification.”** We define this to mean:
 - “A teacher has **completed** all teacher preparation requirements; that the teacher is not authorized to teach on an emergency, temporary, provisional or waiver basis; and all teachers are profession-ready prior to their appointment as the teacher-of-record.”
 - ◆ This definition eliminates the use of classrooms as training grounds for under- or unprepared teachers.
- ▶ If a given state decides to keep the alternative preparation loophole and is not willing to compromise on this point due to teacher shortages or other reasons, then a slight alteration for “full state certification” could be:
 - “A teacher has **met** all teacher preparation requirements; that the teacher is not authorized to teach on an emergency, temporary, provisional or waiver basis, and all teachers are profession-ready.”
 - ◆ This allows some space for alternative preparation programs.