

# United States Country Summary

## Table of Contents

	<b>Page(s)</b>
General Information and Statistics	2
Current Education Reform Context	3-4
• <i>Improving America’s School Act (1994)</i>	
• <i>No Child Left Behind Act (2002)</i>	
• <i>State-level Initiatives/Policies</i>	
Teacher Policy Highlights	5-7
• <i>Attracting and Supporting New Teachers</i>	
○ <i>Recruitment</i>	
▪ <i>Financial incentives</i>	
▪ <i>Alternative certification programs</i>	
▪ <i>Other initiatives</i>	
○ <i>Induction</i>	
• <i>Improving Schools as Places to Work and Learn</i>	
○ <i>Ongoing Professional Development</i>	
○ <i>Coaching/Instructional Improvement Initiatives</i>	
○ <i>Peer Assistance and Review (PAR)</i>	
• <i>Improving Pay and Career Opportunities</i>	
○ <i>Pay</i>	
▪ <i>Differentiated pay</i>	
▪ <i>Incentive pay</i>	
▪ <i>Performance-based pay</i>	
○ <i>Career Opportunities</i>	
▪ <i>Programs creating new roles</i>	
▪ <i>National Board for Professional Teaching Standards</i>	
Focus on Current Initiative	8-10
• <i>National Board for Professional Teaching Standards</i>	
References/Additional Information	11
Appendices	12
• <i>National Board List of Certification Areas</i>	

Please note: The majority of the information in this document was taken directly from the US Background Report (NCTQ & USDOE, 2004) that was written for the publication of *Teachers Matter: Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers* (OECD, 2005). Country representatives provided additional information. This country profile was created for the Aspen-OECD Bellagio Seminar, How Can Teacher Policies Improve Student Learning? October 17-20, 2006, Bellagio, Italy.

## United States

### Country Summary—General Facts and Information

**Population:** ~296,000,000

**Education expenditures:**

- As a % of GDP (includes primary, secondary and tertiary): 7.3% (5.1% public; 2.3% private)
- Per pupil expenditure in US dollars (2001) (includes primary, secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary): \$8,144 (varies widely among states and districts) (OECD, 2005b)

**Teacher demographics: (3 million teachers)**

- Gender distribution (% female):
  - Primary: 88%; Lower secondary: 65%; Upper secondary (all programs): 55%
- Percentage of unqualified teachers: >10% (OECD, 2005c)
- Salary after 15 years experience (equivalent US \$): \$44,000 (OECD, 2005a)
- Trends:
  - Major portion of teaching force retiring in this decade
  - Half of new teachers leave in the first 5 years
  - Large proportion candidates from lower end of distribution of academic ability
  - Proportion from racial/ethnic minority groups low compared to school population
  - Shortages in math, science, special education, bilingual and some geographic regions
  - Declining share of college students express interest in teaching

**Student demographics: (47 million students)**

- In public institutions: 90% (NCTQ/USDOE, 2004)
- Eligible for free school meals: 38% (NCES, 2000)
- Minority ethnic population: 39.6% (NCES, 2000)
- English as an Additional Language (EAL): 6.7% students (NCES, 2000)
- Graduation rate (Upper secondary): 74% (OECD, 2005a)
- PISA Math mean score (2003): 483 (below OECD average score)

**Structure of the education system:**

- Governance:
  - Public schools are administered at the local level under state regulation with limited federal oversight.
  - States establish standards for public education and implement policies through state departments of education.
  - Locally elected school boards manage school districts.
- Teacher employment (state laws govern certification):
  - Teachers are employed by local boards of education.
  - Most attend a 4-year university degree program, however, there are 5-year programs including a master's degree as well as alternative fast-track programs.
  - Must progress from probationary license (lasting 1-3 years) to standard license.
  - Unionization: 79% of public school teachers belong to one of two major unions.
  - Salary schedules are determined through contracts with local unions. Pay is fixed based on years experience and education level.
- Average class size (2003): Public primary: 22, Public lower secondary: 24 (OECD, 2005a)

**Curriculum and Assessment:**

- There is no national curriculum; Many states have standards that provide a guide to school districts which are given generally wide latitude in their selection of curriculum.
- Under the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, states are required to test proficiency in reading and math annually in grades 3-8 and at least once in high school.
- States must set a proficiency level that all students will reach by 2014.
- Schools not making progress towards this benchmark will be subject to sanctions.
- In addition to tracking whole-school progress, schools must show progress of all demographic subgroups or be subject to sanctions.

## **Current Education Reform Context**

This section summarizes current education reform initiatives in order to provide context for the discussion of teacher policy initiatives that follows.

### Improving America's School Act (1994)

- Federal legislation codifying into law the standards and accountability movement that began in the U.S. in the late 80s.
- Specified that state assessments should measure the proficiency of students in math and reading/language arts and that students should be tested to monitor progress.

### No Child Left Behind Act (2002)

- Federal legislation that builds upon and expands the standards and accountability focus.
- Enacted in response to continuing national concern about education quality and equity and the desire to hold schools and school systems accountable for student achievement results.
- The primary aims of this Act are to:
  - improve overall academic attainment and
  - eliminate the achievement gap between rich and poor and between white and minority students.
- Requires states to adopt standards for the achievement of all children.
- Requires annual testing of students in grades 3-8 and at least once in 10-12 in reading, language arts and mathematics and science (added in 2007-08).
- Requires states to set a “proficiency level” on state tests and have all students reach that level by 2014.
- Requires each state to disaggregate achievement data by student subgroup (race, ethnicity, gender, English language proficiency, migrant status and low-income status).
- States must show that each subgroup is making progress annually.
- Emphasizes accountability by establishing sanctions for schools not making “adequate yearly progress” towards the “proficiency level” for students. Sanctions include students being allowed to transfer schools and significant restructuring (take-overs) of schools.
- Requires all teachers be “highly qualified” (defined as demonstrating competency in academic content in the areas in which they teach and holding state certification):
  - Teachers can meet this requirement in a variety of ways.
  - In many states candidates only need to have a bachelor's degree and pass a content-matter exam in the subject taught to obtain certification.
- While the NCLB law specifically defines a “highly qualified” teacher, there is great debate among U.S. policymakers about entry standards for the profession:
  - One end of the spectrum argues extensive preparation programs create unnecessary barriers for attracting talented teachers and that we need teachers with strong academic backgrounds and deep content knowledge.
  - The other end of the spectrum believes that skill in teaching and a deep understanding of children are essential qualities and that these and the necessary academic content knowledge are best acquired in a comprehensive preparation program.
  - The NCLB Act supports the former view of highly qualified teachers.

## State-level Initiatives/Policies

Given the highly decentralized nature of the U.S. system and the variety of initiatives enacted by states and districts, it is difficult to characterize the national context. The following policies/initiatives are currently utilized by many states and/or districts and are worthy of mention in the overall context.

### *Charter schools:*

- Publicly funded schools that allow teachers and administrators to operate with freedom from many of the regulations that apply to traditional public schools.
- Not bounded by state curriculum or administrative guidelines (not exempt from NCLB accountability standards).
- Provides parents the ability to choose a school with alternative curriculum and structure.
- In 2003, 40 states had charter laws and 2,695 charter schools were serving 685,000 students.

### *Reducing class size:*

- States and districts have aimed resources at reducing class sizes, particularly at the primary school level.

### *High school reform - Small schools:*

- Many districts have sought to make high schools more intimate educational institutions by dividing the large schools into smaller “schools-within-a-school.”

### *Technology:*

- States and districts have committed considerable resources to ensuring schools have internet access and computers.
- States and districts are also working to ensure all teachers have the skills to utilize technology for instruction.

### *Use of Data:*

- Given the increase in testing and accountability pressures, many states and districts have created data systems to enable them to analyze a range of student outcomes including formative assessments, standardized test scores, etc.
- Some of these data systems are also being utilized for teacher evaluation and professional development.
- Some states and districts are exploring ways to use “value-added” data as another tool for accountability and teacher evaluation. This sophisticated statistical technique estimates the aggregated yearly growth in student learning. The idea is to measure the amount of “value” that a teacher consistently adds to students and compare that to a normative sample.
  - TVASS (Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System) has been used extensively in Tennessee, and districts in other states have also recently begun using “value-added” teacher data.
  - The methodology is extremely complicated, and there is still debate about its fairness for use in evaluation and pay systems.

## U.S. Teacher Policy Highlights

### Attracting and Supporting New Teachers

#### *Recruitment:*

- Financial incentives:
  - Federal government offers loan forgiveness for some teachers in high-need areas.
  - Many states and districts attract candidates (particularly for subject-area shortages and high-need schools) with financial incentives including student loan forgiveness, scholarships, waiving licensing fees, housing assistance and signing bonuses.
- Alternative certification programs:
  - Many states, districts, and private organizations have developed “alternative certification programs” allowing candidates to bypass some state requirements and begin teaching more quickly (while taking weekend or evening courses).
  - In 2003, 46 states have some type of alternative route to certification.
  - The goal is to improve the attractiveness of the career, but opponents worry these teachers will not be well prepared. (This is an ongoing debate among policymakers.)
  - Many programs have attracted a higher percentage of minorities to the profession.
  - Two prominent alternative certification programs run by private nonprofit organizations (Teach for American and The New Teacher Project) have had a major impact by bringing many new people into the profession. (Notably, many of these new teachers are not planning to stay in the profession for a long time.)
- Other initiatives:
  - Large urban districts are working to streamline hiring processes.
  - Districts recruit candidates at colleges, nearby community colleges and high schools.

#### *Induction:*

- Twenty-three states require new teachers to participate in a mentoring or induction program.
- Fifty-six percent of new teachers report involvement in a formal support program.
- Programs are typically designed and implemented by local school districts and schools.
- There is substantial variation in the length and quality of these programs (Ranging from a few days’ orientation to a sustained, year-long program of mentorship.)
- Only 5 states require schools to provide mentors with reduced teaching loads.
- Research suggests effective programs include training and compensation for mentors, time for structured interaction, and orientation and training programs for the new teachers.

### Improving Schools as Places to Work and Learn

#### *Ongoing Professional Development:*

- States require specific number of hours of professional development to renew licenses:
  - Most require 6 hours (a semester hour means an hour a week for an academic semester, or 10-14 weeks) every 3-7 years.
  - Some states specify additional coursework, while others leave districts and teachers to determine how to meet requirements.

- School districts frequently offer and require professional development under the terms of contracts with teachers unions. The structure of these offerings varies widely.
- Historically, most professional development has been one-shot workshop and conferences that are not connected to teachers' daily work in an ongoing way. There is now a widespread attempt to move towards ongoing experiences more closely related to teachers' practice.

#### *Instructional Improvement Initiatives/Coaching:*

- Some large urban districts have "coaching" programs to enhance/improve teacher's skills.
  - A "coach" or "consultant" (specialist in either mathematics or literacy) meets with a small group of teachers on a regular basis to discuss practice and pedagogy.
  - Meetings include the coach or one of the teachers providing a sample lesson with time for debriefing the strengths/weaknesses of the lesson.
  - The coach also meets with teachers to provide individualized support.
  - Generally the coach does not evaluate the teacher.
- Several large urban districts have restructured their systems to ensure the focus of all staff is supporting continuous instructional improvement. These districts:
  - Ensure principals and administrators are capable instructional leaders spending time visiting teachers and providing feedback on instruction.
  - Use the above coaching/consulting model to provide sustained support with a particular type of instruction/curriculum.

#### *Peer Assistance and Review (PAR):*

- Several districts have PAR programs in which teachers evaluate and support other teachers.
- Programs are developed in partnership with unions and run by teacher/administrator boards.
  - New teachers assigned a "consulting" teacher who evaluates and mentors.
  - Consulting teacher and new teacher develop a plan for growth for the year.
  - Consulting teacher provides model lessons, observes the new teacher, offers feedback, and provides other forms of support.
  - Consulting teacher evaluates achievement of goals and ultimately recommends whether the teacher be re-hired. The joint board makes this final decision.
  - In some districts, experienced teachers in need of improvement may be asked to enter this program. Dismissal may be recommended if improvement is not shown.

#### Improving Pay and Career Opportunities

##### *Pay:*

- Three types of pay initiatives are under way in some districts:
  - Differentiated pay for differentiated work:
    - Mentor teachers, curriculum specialists, coaches, etc. often receive additional/different pay.
  - Incentive pay for hard-to-staff subjects or hard-to-staff schools:
    - Some states and districts offer bonuses for those teaching subjects prone to shortages (special education, math and science).

- Some states and districts offer bonuses (stipends or housing subsidies) to teach in high-poverty and low-achieving schools.
  - Pay-for-performance:
    - Some pay systems reward teachers (or groups of teachers) for a variety of measures of “performance” including meeting specific goals, attaining specific skills or expertise, or improvements in student achievement scores.
    - Few systems have yet to incorporate standardized student test scores into their pay structure, although there is interest in doing so.
    - There is interest in adapting “value-added” assessment (see p. 4) to pay-for-performance systems, although there is still debate about the use of this methodology in pay and evaluation systems.

*Career Opportunities:*

- *Differentiated roles for teachers in state or district-level programs:* There are limited career opportunities for teachers who do not want to become school administrators. In some select states and districts, many of the programs described above create new roles for teachers:
  - Induction programs create the role of “mentor,” however, in many cases the mentor teachers do not receive any release time for this role.
  - Coaching/instructional improvement programs create the role of “coach,” which usually is a non-classroom position.
  - Peer Assistance and Review programs provide a role for “consulting teachers” who mentor, support and evaluate other teachers.
  - The Milken Family Foundations’ Teacher Advancement Program (TAP) supports districts in creating opportunities for promotion and career advancement:
    - Schools have 3 levels of teacher positions with separate pay structures.
    - Principals have flexibility to compensate teachers differently based on performance or to attract teachers in hard-to-staff subjects and schools.
    - Teachers are evaluated by observations and “value-added” methods.
- *National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS):*
  - Created in 1987, this nongovernmental board grants “advanced certification” to teachers nationwide based on intensive evaluation of knowledge and skills.
  - This is a national initiative and participation is voluntary.
  - One goal is to reward excellent teachers hoping this will contribute to retention.
  - Approximately 50,000 teachers have been certified.
  - Application requires submission of portfolios (lesson plans, student work samples, videos of teaching) and written exercises to show content and pedagogical knowledge. (Does not include student assessment data in selection.)
  - Must have 3 years experience to apply.
  - Some states (34) and districts provide financial support for applicants and additional pay for certified teachers (stipends, salary increases, etc.)

## **Focus on Current Teacher Policy Initiative: National Board for Professional Teaching Standards**

Note: The majority of the information for this summary comes from the National Board's website ([www.nbpts.org](http://www.nbpts.org)). Citations indicate where other sources were consulted.

### Overview

Created in 1987, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) began with the goal of raising the standard for quality teaching in the United States. The National Board is a privately run organization (although largely government-funded) that has developed teaching standards for highly accomplished teachers and implemented a certification system to recognize those who meet them. Today, the NBPTS provides a voluntary opportunity for excellent teachers to apply for National Board Certification recognizing their skills and accomplishments. Currently, there are 50,000 National Board Certified teachers in the U.S. education system.

### History/Context

During the 1980s, several major reports focused the attention of the nation on the need for reforms in the education system. Two of these documents, *A Nation at Risk* (1983), and *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (1986), urged that action be taken to strengthen the teaching profession. Recommendations included raising the standards for teachers, creating career opportunities for experienced teachers, and improving pay. One specific directive was the creation of a national board to establish standards for accomplished teaching. In 1985, Albert Shanker, then-president of the American Federation of Teachers, suggested how such an organization might work:

It would be a group that would spend a period of time studying exactly what a teacher should know before becoming certified and the best way to measure that knowledge. . . Over a period of time, I would hope the board would eventually be controlled by the profession itself, even if it didn't start completely that way.

In 1987, with a \$1 million grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards was created to fill this role.

The stated goal of the National Board was to create high standards for accomplished teachers, develop a national, voluntary certification system for teachers, and advance related

reforms. From the beginning, the majority of Board members were (and continue to be) active teachers, and the Board has had the support and involvement of the nation's teachers unions. The Board raised funding from private foundations and ultimately also received federal funding to support the development of standards and certificates. The Board now offers certificates in more than 25 areas of instruction (see Appendix A).

### Key Elements

#### *Standards Development: The Five Core Propositions*

The standards for each certification area are developed by a committee of experts and finalized through a lengthy, comprehensive review process. Five core propositions are used as the basis for the standards:

1. Teachers are committed to students and their learning.
2. Teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students.
3. Teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning.
4. Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience.
5. Teachers are members of learning communities.

#### *The Application Process*

- Candidates must have three years of teaching experience and pay a \$2,500 application fee. (The federal government, states and districts offer some financial support to teachers applying for certification.)
- The application process takes a full year.
- Each applicant must complete performance-based assessment portfolios and assessment center exercises.
- Portfolios include submitting examples of student work, commentaries on student progress, videos of classes, documentation of involvement in the profession and description of involvement with families.
- Assessment center submissions require candidates to take tests of pedagogical content knowledge and their ability to make judgments about a student's performance.

#### *Funding*

- It has been estimated that NBPTS has received a total of \$410.1 million in funding from federal (\$149.1 million) and private (\$261 million) sources (through 2005) (Goldhaber, 2005).
- In addition, NBPTS receives a fee (\$2500 in 2006) for every application.

#### *Federal, State and Local Policies*

- A variety of federal, state and local initiatives support the work of NBPTS and provide opportunities for National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs).

- More than 30 states and over 500 local districts offer some combination of these opportunities for National Board Certified Teachers:
  - Subsidies/scholarships for the application fee;
  - Salary increases for teachers achieving certification;
    - For example, the state of Maine provides an annual \$3,000 stipend and the state of Florida provides a 10% salary increase for the life of the certificate.
  - Additional salary increases for NBCTs agreeing to mentor other teachers; and
  - Opportunities to serve on committees or other special positions (Berg, 2006).

### Implications/Outcomes

Critics contend that the Board has not proven that certified teachers contribute more to student learning than other teachers. Studies of student achievement data comparing certified and non-certified teachers have shown mixed results, and recent studies have further fueled this debate. In addition, there is concern that National Board Certified Teachers are not adequately utilized as agents of reform beyond their classrooms, leaving some to question whether the financial costs of the program outweigh the benefits.

The National Board was designed, in part, to provide classroom teachers opportunities for advancement and recognition during their careers. Furthermore, the National Board sought to define the knowledge and skills required of our best teachers. To some extent, both of these goals have been accomplished. As indicated above, many states and districts offer financial bonuses for teachers earning certification. In addition, some districts utilize certified teachers in leadership roles. Furthermore, some states and districts model their own teacher standards after those set by the National Board. Finally, many National Board Certified Teachers describe the application process as an extremely useful professional development opportunity. While the opportunities available to NBCTs vary greatly across states and districts, many policymakers feel the National Board has made solid progress in strengthening the teaching profession.

Note: The National Board website ([www.nbpts.org](http://www.nbpts.org)) offers a summary of the research that continues to inform these issues and the work of the National Board.

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## Additional Information

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|---|---|
| United States Department of Education webpage:              | <a href="http://www.ed.gov/">http://www.ed.gov/</a>     |
| National Center for Education Statistics webpage:           | <a href="http://nces.ed.gov/">http://nces.ed.gov/</a>   |
| National Board for Professional Teaching Standards webpage: | <a href="http://www.nbpts.org">http://www.nbpts.org</a> |

## Appendix A Certificates available under National Board Certification

### Art

- Early and Middle Childhood
- Early Adolescence through Young Adulthood

### Career and Technical Education

- Early Adolescence through Young Adulthood

### English as a New Language

- Early and Middle Childhood
- Early Adolescence through Young Adulthood

### English Language Arts

- Early Adolescence
- Adolescence and Young Adulthood

### Exceptional Needs Specialist

- Early Childhood through Young Adulthood

### Generalist

- Early Childhood
- Middle Childhood

### Library Media

- Early Childhood through Young Adulthood

### Literacy: Reading – Language Arts

- Early and Middle Childhood

### Mathematics

- Early Adolescence
- Adolescence and Young Adulthood

### Music

- Early and Middle Childhood
- Early Adolescence through Young Adulthood

### School Counseling

- Early Childhood through Young Adulthood

### Science

- Early Adolescence
- Adolescence and Young Adulthood

### Social Studies – History

- Early Adolescence
- Adolescence and Young Adulthood

### Physical Education

- Early and Middle Childhood
- Early Adolescence through Young Adulthood

### World Languages Other than English

- Early Adolescence through Young Adulthood

### Age Categories

- Early Childhood (Ages 3-8)
- Middle Childhood (Ages 7-12)
- Early & Middle Childhood (Ages 3-12)
- Early Childhood through Young Adulthood (Ages 3-18+)
- Early Adolescence (Ages 11-15)
- Adolescence and Young Adulthood (Ages 14-18+)
- Early Adolescence through Young Adulthood (Ages 11-18+)

Source: [http://www.nbpts.org/become\\_a\\_candidate/available\\_certificates1/fields\\_of\\_certification](http://www.nbpts.org/become_a_candidate/available_certificates1/fields_of_certification)