



COMMISSION ON
NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

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**Teacher and Principal Recommendations:
Effective Teachers for All Students, Effective Principals for All Communities**

Effective teachers make a difference in the classroom. One of the foundational principles of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is that teacher quality is the single most important school factor in student success. Studies have shown that good teachers can improve student achievement by as much as a grade level more than less effective teachers over the course of a year. For low-performing students, the differences are more dramatic. In Tennessee, for example, studies have found that low-achieving students gain an average of 14 percentile points with the least effective teachers. By contrast, the most effective teachers produce average gains of 53 percentile points with low-achieving students (Sanders and Rivers 1996).

Effective principals also play a vital role in raising student achievement. Research increasingly shows that the quality of school leadership is crucial to student and school performance. One study found that leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors contributing to what students learn at school (Leithwood et al. 2004). A comprehensive review of research on school leadership further found that an increase in principal leadership ability was associated with higher student achievement (Waters, Marzano and McNulty 2003).

But students who need it most are often taught by less experienced, less qualified teachers. Teacher quality is inequitably distributed in schools, and the students with the greatest needs tend to have access to the least qualified and least effective teachers. A study examining the distribution of teachers in three states found that children in high-poverty schools are much more likely than their more advantaged peers to be assigned to novice teachers, teachers who lack subject matter knowledge and teachers with lower academic skills (Peske and Haycock 2006).

Student performance data can be used to ensure all students are taught by effective teachers. There is growing support for the use of “growth models” to improve the way we measure whether schools are making adequate yearly progress (AYP) toward the goal of proficiency for all students under NCLB. The use of growth models has gained wide appeal because it is a more precise and fair way of determining school progress and they are more useful in informing instructional decisions and priorities. The method has been used in some 300 districts in 21 states (Hershberg 2005). And, the implementation of the data systems that are necessary to measure individual student growth from year-to-year also yield data on teacher effectiveness in the classroom. It is now possible to use more sophisticated data systems to focus on teacher effectiveness in improving student achievement rather than qualifications for entering the profession.

Professional development can be better targeted to ensure teachers get the support they need to be effective. Currently, professional development is not efficiently targeted and is spread too thinly to produce results. Under Title II of NCLB, the U.S. DOE provides \$2.9 billion annually in grants to states and districts to improve teacher quality. However, in a study of how eleven districts used their Title II funds, the Government Accountability Office (GAO 2005) found that many districts did not target their resources on any group of teachers, such as those who were not highly qualified.

We need to ensure that ALL students are taught by highly qualified, effective teachers. It is time to recognize teachers who are *effective* at ensuring children are achieving in the classroom, rather than simply those who possess *qualifications* for entering it. Therefore, we recommend requiring all teachers to be Highly Qualified *Effective* Teachers (HQET)—teachers who demonstrate effectiveness in the classroom.

- Teachers would need to produce learning gains as measured by growth models and receive positive principal or teacher peer review evaluations.
- Teachers who need it most would also, for the first time, be guaranteed high-quality professional development.
- And to further ensure quality for all, we must ensure school districts treat all schools and their children in ensuring we have effective teachers in all classrooms and must require districts with high turnover rates to develop recruitment and retention plans.

And we must ensure that all schools are led by effective principals. Focusing on principal quality is an important first step in defining and promoting effective school leadership. Therefore, we recommend enhancing school leadership by establishing a definition of a Highly Effective Principal (HEP).

- This HEP definition would require principals to obtain certification or licensure as required in their state, demonstrate the necessary skills for effectively leading a school and, most importantly, produce improvements in student achievement.
- All principals should meet this new definition, but we recommend requiring it as a condition of working at a Title I school.