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Myths and Facts About HQET

It is our nation's responsibility to ensure that all children receive quality, effective instruction so that they can achieve. Rather than focusing on teacher credentials, the Commission recommends a comprehensive plan that supports teacher effectiveness in the classroom. This plan would allow teachers who produce learning gains for children *and* receive a positive principal evaluation or peer review be recognized as "Highly Qualified Effective Teachers" (HQET). This plan would also ensure that professional development funds are spent effectively. The teachers who are struggling should have access to extra help through quality professional development, targeted to their needs and designed to help them reach the *effectiveness* standard. Effective teaching will lead to success for all students.

Myth: HQET judges teacher effectiveness based on one test score.

Fact: Although the Commission recommends student test scores account for no less than 50 percent of HQET determination, student progress on test scores is just one measure in determining HQET. Attaining HQET status must also include a positive principal evaluation or teacher peer reviews. In addition, teachers would have three years to demonstrate that they are producing sufficient student learning gains. Teachers who initially struggle to reach the effectiveness standard receive up to three years of targeted professional development to help them achieve HQET status. We must do a better job of focusing professional development dollars to helping teachers become more effective at improving student achievement.

Myth: States don't have the data systems to measure teacher effectiveness—it will never work.

Fact: It is true that today most states do not have the longitudinal data systems necessary to implement HQET—that is, data systems that track individual student achievement over time. However, the technologies and capabilities exist. According to the Data Quality Campaign, a national effort to promote the development of longitudinal data systems to improve student achievement, 45 states report having a unique student identifier—an integral part of a longitudinal data system. Additionally, 15 states have a teacher identifier that gives them the ability to match teachers to students (Data Quality Campaign 2006). The Commission's recommendations provide funding for states to develop and implement data systems that will provide accurate information about individual student growth from year to year—data that also shows teacher effectiveness. The Commission does not recommend that states implement the new HQET process until those data systems are in place—within four years of enactment of a new law—and are capable of providing timely, accurate information. The U.S. Department of Education would be required to sign off on a state's data system before it is implemented.

In addition, states will want to put such systems in place because of the strong support for growth models to measure student progress as a mechanism for determining schools' adequate yearly progress. We must use this data to ensure that teachers are effective in improving student achievement and that teachers who struggle to produce achievement gains get the help they need to improve.

Myth: The HQET provisions guarantee that 25 percent of teachers will fail to meet HQET each year.

Fact: Teachers who initially struggle to produce sufficient learning gains receive targeted professional development so that they can improve their performance. Once states implement data systems capable of making the HQET calculations, teachers have *seven years* to demonstrate that they are producing learning gains and receive a positive evaluation from their principal or fellow teachers before any sanctions apply. During those seven years, when teachers are not making progress, they receive additional support and targeted professional development to help them succeed. When teachers meet the HQET standard, they do not have to go through the process again.

Myth: HQET just labels teachers as failures and does nothing to support and improve teaching.

Fact: HQET, in fact, labels effective teachers as just that—effective. The aim is to ensure that effective teachers receive recognition and credit. In addition, the HQET provision targets additional support to the teachers who need it the most. Currently, many teachers who need professional development are not getting it because it is either unavailable or does not fit their needs. A stronger policy would ensure that professional development funds are more efficiently targeted to reach those teachers who are most in need of additional services to improve their instruction.

Myth: HQET is another way to put down teachers and blame them for all that ails schools.

Fact: HQET is a mechanism for recognizing and honoring the effectiveness of those teachers who are improving student achievement and for targeting focused professional development to help those who struggle to succeed.

Myth: HQET judges teachers against an arbitrary federal or state standard and doesn't allow teachers to demonstrate—in a fair process—that their students are learning.

Fact: HQET actually compares teachers against their peers. In each year of the *seven-year* HQET timeline, the learning gains of a teacher's students are compared to the learning gains of students of other teachers across the state. This is a state standard that gives teachers ample opportunities to demonstrate success.

Myth: HQET creates divisions among teachers because only teachers of the three core academic subjects would need to meet the requirement.

Fact: While HQET applies only to subjects in which NCLB requires assessments—reading or language arts, mathematics and science—a state, at its option, could expand HQET to more subjects in which the state assesses performance. States can ensure that all teachers are effective, regardless of the grade level or subject area they teach.

Myth: HQET ignores the impact that working conditions can have on teachers' ability to raise student achievement.

Fact: The Commission recommends requiring that school districts with the highest rates of teacher turnover implement teacher retention plans. These plans must include using the results of a required state audit of teachers' working conditions to improve those conditions—such as quality of school leadership, more planning time, release time for professional development—to more effectively promote a collaborative learning environment. Recognizing and improving poor working conditions is just one part of the Commission's comprehensive plan to promote effective teaching in the classroom.