

January 14, 2005

Raymond Simon
Assistant Secretary, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education
United States Department of Education
Room 3W315
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Mr. Simon:

I am writing on behalf of the more than 1.3 million members of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) to express our concern about the difficulty that some teachers will encounter in meeting the deadline requiring all teachers of core academic subjects to be highly qualified by the end of the 2005-06 school year.

The No Child Left Behind Act and its regulations clearly delineate the high, objective, uniform state standard of evaluation (HOUSSE) as an important option for teachers to demonstrate that they are highly qualified. The AFT is concerned that many states are not making this option available to teachers and are, therefore, failing to afford teachers the flexibility the law provides to them to meet the highly qualified teacher requirement. Other states have just recently begun offering their HOUSSE, giving their teachers a very small window of time to become highly qualified. As a result, many teachers may be unfairly labeled not qualified because of their state's inaction, not their own.

In light of this, the AFT requests the U.S. Department of Education:

- (1) require all states to develop the HOUSSE option for veteran teachers; and
- (2) provide veteran teachers with an extension to the law's deadline for becoming highly qualified in those states that have delayed developing the HOUSSE. The AFT recommends three years from the time the HOUSSE option is made available to teachers.

Furthermore, we are asking for a written response to the following questions:

- Which states do not currently have a fully operational HOUSSE option in place for veteran teachers?
- Between now and the end of the 2004-2005 school year, what technical assistance will the U.S. Department of Education offer states to ensure that all of their teachers are provided all available options to meet highly qualified mandates?

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- Does the U.S. Department of Education anticipate applying sanctions to states that do not have 100 percent of their teachers highly qualified by the end of the 2005-2006 school year?
- Are there plans to allow veteran teachers an extension to NCLB's 2005-2006 school year deadline to become highly qualified in states that have delayed HOUSSE implementation?

The AFT has long been committed to high standards for students and teachers. We look forward to your response and to working with the department in making solutions available as soon as possible so that all teachers have a fair opportunity to meet the requirement of NCLB.

Sincerely,

Joan Baratz Snowden
Director, Educational Issues Department

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