

AFT on Teacher Quality

No
Child
Left
Behind

THE REAUTHORIZED ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION ACT

What Some Have Proposed for NCLB Reauthorization

With Congress set to revise the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) as early as 2007, several groups are proposing changes to the law. One proposal, offered in various forms by several groups, is to change NCLB's current "highly qualified teacher" requirement and make it a requirement that all teachers be highly qualified effective teachers (HQET).

The law's current "highly qualified" requirements mandate that all teachers of core academic subjects meet qualification requirements, which include having a bachelor's degree, a state-issued teaching license, and subject-matter competency. Subject-matter competency can be demonstrated through a test, a major or, for veteran teachers, a portfolio demonstrating teaching experience in the particular subject. Once a teacher meets these requirements, the teacher is forever "highly qualified" in that subject.

Critics of the current "highly qualified" requirements argue that they are only a minimum education standard, and do not show whether a teacher is effective in the classroom. They also believe that the standards for subject-matter competency and teacher licensing are too low.

Critics of the current requirements say that federal law should judge teachers based on how much each teacher is teaching his or her students—that is, his or her "effectiveness." They are proposing that all teachers be evaluated on their students' test scores using a value-added system that ties test-score gains to individual teachers.

Test-score gains (or losses) would determine an individual teacher's effectiveness. Because these are just proposals, details, especially of the consequences for teachers not deemed to be "effective," vary greatly.

Where AFT Stands

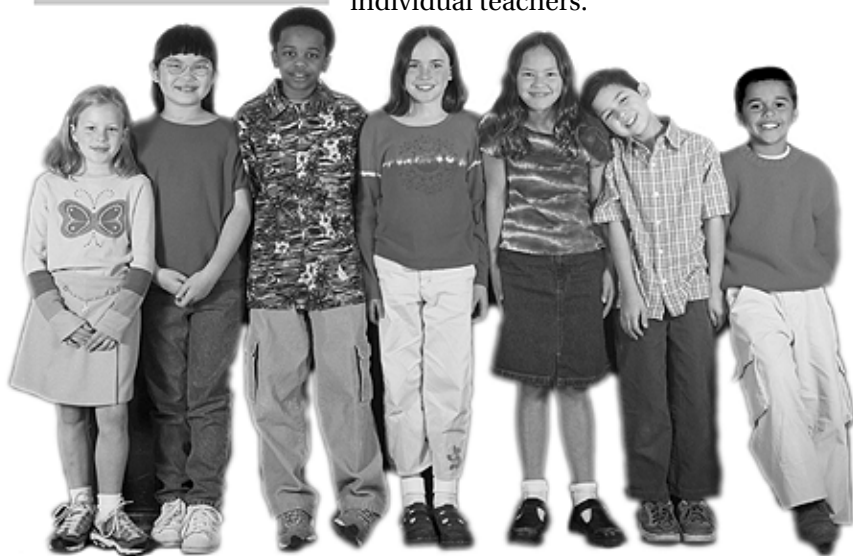
Proposals to judge teachers based solely on their students' test scores are irresponsible. NCLB established the highly qualified teacher requirements for the first time in 2002, and states are still working to meet this requirement. The reform should have time to take root before alterations are considered. The law's current highly qualified teacher requirements should not be expanded when NCLB is reauthorized.

Additionally, the leading research on value-added systems indicates that we do not yet have valid or reliable assessment or data systems to make this proposal possible. Research also shows that most state assessments are not aligned with state standards or curricula.

Finally, judging teachers based on test scores is not a feasible proposal. By AFT calculations, only 22 percent of teachers teach the academic subjects for which there are longitudinal test-score data, a prerequisite of value-added systems. It is unclear how, if at all, the other 78 percent of teachers would achieve HQET status.

Several AFT affiliates—Douglas County, Colo.; Rochester, N.Y.; and Toledo, Ohio, among others—have adopted sensible and rigorous approaches to teacher evaluation. When NCLB is revised, Congress should consider offering grants to local school districts for pilot programs modeled after these AFT programs as a better alternative for federal teacher evaluation experiments.

For more information on the No Child Left Behind Act, visit our Web site at www.aft.org/topics/nclb.



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