



FACT SHEET – TEACHER EQUITY

Research has shown that low-income students and students of color are more likely than their higher income and white counterparts to be taught by an ineffective teacher.

- In Tennessee, 23.8 percent of teachers in high-poverty and high-minority schools are rated “least effective” while only 16 percent of staff at low-poverty and low-minority schools fall into that category.¹
- 17.6 percent of teachers at high-poverty and high-minority schools in Tennessee ranked “most effective” compared to 21.3 percent at low-poverty and low-minority schools.²
- Students in Los Angeles’ poorest schools were nearly three times as likely to have teachers from the bottom quarter of effectiveness than students in the district’s most affluent schools.³

Nationally, there is “abundant evidence that teachers with stronger credentials tend to teach in schools with more advantaged and higher performing students and, to a far lesser extent, that similar matching occurs across classrooms within schools.”⁴

- Core academic classes in high-poverty secondary schools are almost twice as likely as classes in low-poverty schools to be taught by teachers with neither a major nor certification in their assigned subject (14 percent compared to 27 percent).⁵
- High-minority secondary schools have almost double the percentage of math classes taught by teachers with neither certification nor major as do their low-minority counterparts.⁶
- Data across states show that low-income and minority students are saddled with disproportionate numbers of inexperienced teachers that have taught for three or fewer years.
- In Illinois, the highest minority schools have approximately 22 percent inexperienced teachers while 16 percent of teachers at the lowest minority schools were inexperienced. The data show similar results for the highest poverty versus lowest poverty schools.⁷

¹ Tennessee Department of Education 2007. “Tennessee’s Most Effective Teachers: Are they assigned to the schools that need them most?” available at http://tennessee.gov/education/nclb/doc/TeacherEffectiveness2007_03.pdf. For purposes of this report, high-poverty and high-minority schools were those in which at least 75 percent of students qualified for free or reduced-price lunch and at least 75 percent of the students were minorities.

² *Id.*

³ Education Equality Project, “On Improving Teacher Quality” (April 2009). The study looked at 9,400 math classrooms in grades three through five.

⁴ Clotfelter, Ladd and Vigdor, “How and Why do Teacher Credentials Matter for Student Achievement?” page 5 (2007) (Working Paper), available at http://www.caldercenter.org/pdf/1001058_Teacher_Credentials.pdf.

⁵ Analysis of 2003-2004 Schools and Staffing Survey data by Richard Ingersoll, University of Pennsylvania (2007).

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ White, Presley, and DeAngelis, “Leveling Up: Narrowing the Teacher Academic Capital Gap in Illinois” (Illinois Education Research Council 2008), available at <http://ierc.siue.edu/documents/IERC2008-1.pdf>.

- In North Carolina, 24.6 percent of teachers at high-poverty middle schools are inexperienced compared to 13.9 percent of teachers at low-poverty schools.⁸
- In 42 of Texas' 50 largest school districts, the highest poverty and highest minority schools have more than their fair share of inexperienced teachers. For example, in Fort Worth, almost one in five teachers (17 percent) in the highest-minority schools have fewer than three years of teaching experience, nearly twice the rate in the district's lowest minority schools.⁹

The disparity between the caliber of teacher found in a high-poverty or high-minority school and that of a teacher found in a low-poverty or low-minority school has a massive impact on student achievement. "If the effects were to accumulate, having a top-quartile teacher rather than a bottom-quartile teacher four years in a row would be enough to close the black-white test score gap."¹⁰ Consider two examples:

- Students in Los Angeles that were assigned a top-quartile teacher increased their math achievement scores on average 10 percentile points more than students who had a teacher in the bottom quartile. With a top-quartile teacher four years in a row, low-income students could, effectively, overcome the achievement gap.¹¹
- Students who start the third grade at about the same level of reading achievement (about the 60th percentile) finish sixth grade about 35 percentiles apart, with those assigned to three effective teachers completing sixth grade at about the 75th percentile and those assigned to three ineffective teachers finishing sixth grade at about the 40th percentile.¹²

Given the correlation between an effective teacher and student achievement, it is critical that this reauthorization of ESEA get equitable access to strong, quality teachers right if we are honestly aiming to prepare all students for college and meaningful careers. Recognizing that it is easier for teachers to be better when they have access to resources and tools that make their jobs easier, we believe it is equally important that ESEA address ways to improve teachers' access to high-quality instructional tools.

Ensuring Equitable Access to Effective Teachers and Leaders – Our Recommendations

We are closer than ever to being able to use student achievement data to identify effective teachers. But many school districts are still years away from implementing measures of teacher effectiveness that are fair and accurate. Given the complexity of these value-added calculations and the importance of getting them right, we should not attempt to rush the development of these systems. Further, for a large group of teachers—perhaps even the majority of them—we may never have meaningful effectiveness data.

Congress should establish powerful incentives and reasonable timelines for the development of systems to measure the effectiveness of teachers. It also must require that states develop and use other research-based measures of teacher quality to identify strong teachers in untested core-subject areas and grades and to use those measures for all teachers until reliable effectiveness systems are in place.

⁸ Charles T. Clotfelter, Helen F. Ladd, Jacob L. Vigdor and Justin Wheeler. "High poverty schools and the distribution of teachers and principals," Working paper 1. (Washington, D.C.:

The Urban Institute, 2007), available at http://www.caldercenter.org/PDF/1001057_High_Poverty.pdf.

⁹ The Education Trust, "Their Fair Share: How Texas-Sized Gaps in Teacher Quality Shortchange Low-Income and Minority Students" (Washington, D.C., 2008), available at <http://www.edtrust.org/sites/edtrust.org/files/publications/files/TXTheirFairShare.pdf>.

¹⁰ Gordon, Kane and Staiger, "Identifying Effective Teachers Using Performance on the Job" (The Brookings Institute 2006).

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² Jordan, Mendro and Weerasinghe, "The Effects of Teachers on Longitudinal Student Achievement" (2007). Sanders and Rivers also found that students in two different districts in Tennessee taught by effective teachers for three years finished at the 96th and 83rd percentiles on average in fifth-grade math while their peers, taught by three ineffective teachers, finished only at the 44th and 29th percentiles, respectively. Sanders and Rivers, "Cumulative and Residual Effects of Teachers on Students Academic Achievement" (University of Tennessee Value-Added Research and Assessment Center 1996).

The administration has proposed that the new law should retain the current provisions regarding Highly Qualified Teachers (HQT) during this transition. This is reasonable, provided the current provisions are modified to remove the HOUSSE (High, Objective, Uniform State Standards of Evaluation) allowance.

But neither effectiveness nor HQT can be used now to determine equity in access to strong teachers. If low-income students and students of color, who are far more likely than other students to be taught by our least able teachers, are to have a fair shot at college and career readiness, they cannot wait for value-added teacher evaluation to be developed. Congress, in this reauthorization must ensure that districts and states use and act on the best information available to them *now* to ensure an equitable distribution of teacher talent.

Specifically, we recommend as a condition of Title II funding that states:

- Include, in state applications for Title II funding, annual goals for equitable teacher assignments so that low-income students and students of color get a fair share of the strongest teachers—and are not saddled with a disproportionate share of the weakest. In addition, states should assign specific progress goals to each school district.
- Develop statewide teacher-quality indexes that include only those indicators that research has shown to affect student achievement. Such indicators might include whether a teacher is a novice (in her first year) or a veteran, whether a teacher has ever failed a licensure exam, and for secondary school teachers, whether they have a major or minor in subjects they teach. States should be required to collect index data for each teacher and report that index data by school and district annually.
- Use school-level teacher-quality index data to make within-district and between-district teacher-equity determinations.

Districts that do not demonstrate progress on equitable access to quality teachers in their high-poverty and high-minority schools should be required to spend their Title II money solely on fixing the inequities in their districts. Such districts also should be required to give priority in hiring to schools with low teacher-index scores and to protect them from both voluntary and involuntary teacher transfers that are not approved in writing by the school's principal.

States that are not making progress in eliminating teacher inequities among districts should be ineligible for all competitive grant funds under the control of the U.S. Department of Education. States making significant progress in this regard should receive preference in their applications for competitive grant programs.

Further, the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights should be required to investigate teacher-assignment practices in states and districts with significant school-to-school and district-to-district variation in their teacher-quality index scores, should such differences overlap with differences in patterns of school and district enrollment based on race or ethnicity.

The new law also should include requirements to incorporate teacher-effectiveness information into teacher evaluations, once states and districts have systems to determine teacher effectiveness in a consistent manner across districts.

Equitable access to strong teachers is critical to closing achievement gaps, but the supply of such teachers is inadequate to the task of preparing all of our students for college and career. Therefore, we strongly suggest that Congress attend to issues of teacher preparation. Superficially, this reauthorization should provide states with incentives to eliminate nonsensical barriers to teaching for individuals with records of outstanding professional and academic accomplishment who successfully complete high-quality alternative certification programs. As it reauthorizes ESEA, Congress should also simultaneously open for reconsideration Title II of the Higher Education Act, which has failed to meet the goals for which it was established.

Improving Instructional Tools

Even the strongest teachers need high-quality instructional tools to do their best. And we have failed to provide our teachers with such tools. Currently, individual districts, schools, and most importantly, teachers are left to develop instructional materials and support systems on their own. This arrangement has left too many teachers overwhelmed and frustrated, while too many students—especially low-income students and students of color—are languishing in schools without the instruction and support they need to achieve college and career readiness.

The federal government should provide resources for states and consortia of states to develop their own high-quality instructional tools that align with college and career-ready standards. These tools should include curricular materials that reflect expectations for instruction, benchmark assessments, and a system of early-warning indicators to identify students likely to fall off-track to graduation. Such tools can provide educators with models of the kinds of instruction and student work that are “good enough” and real-time information that alerts them of the need to adjust their instruction and identify struggling students who need more individual attention.