

## Improving Teacher Quality Q & A



### **How does this law improve teacher quality?**

*No Child Left Behind* requires local school districts to ensure that all teachers hired to teach core academic subjects in Title I programs after the first day of the 2002-03 school year are highly qualified. In general a "highly qualified teacher" is one with full certification, a bachelor's degree and demonstrated competence in subject knowledge and teaching. (Core subjects include English, reading or language arts, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history and geography.) The act also calls for *all* teachers of the core academic subjects (teaching in Title I programs or elsewhere) to be highly qualified by the end of school year 2005-06.

*No Child Left Behind* (ESEA, Title II) provides federal funding to states and districts for activities that will strengthen teacher quality in all schools, especially those with a high proportion of children in poverty. The great majority of Title II funds, \$2.9 billion in 2003--an increase of 39 percent since President Bush took office--is for the Improving Teacher Quality State Grants program. Funding can be used to support a wide array of activities, including interventions for teacher professional development, so long as the activities are grounded in scientifically based research. Because communities nationwide face such a variety of needs when it comes to teacher quality, the law gives schools and districts a great deal of flexibility in how the money is spent. It also holds them accountable for the proper and effective use of the funds.

In addition to the state grants program, Title II includes funding for other teacher quality-related grant programs. For example, this year the Transition to Teaching program will allocate nearly \$42 million to states, school districts and nonprofit groups to help thousands of outstanding candidates enter teaching through alternate routes to traditional teacher preparation programs. Similarly, Troops to Teachers, which helps states and school districts streamline the entry of former military personnel into schools as teachers, will receive almost \$29 million in funding. The Teaching of Traditional American History grant program will allocate almost \$100 million this year to states, school districts and education groups to help improve, through teacher professional development, the quality and rigor of American history instruction in the nation's schools. *No Child Left Behind* also requires districts to spend Title I funds to improve teacher quality and allows them to pool Title I and professional development other federal formula funds.

### **How are states and districts held accountable for improving teacher quality?**

Each state that receives Title II funds must develop a plan to ensure that all teachers of core academic subjects are highly qualified by the end of the 2005-06 school year. The plan must establish annual, measurable objectives for each local school district and school to ensure that they meet the "highly qualified" requirement.

In schools that receive funds under Title II, principals must make a statement each year as to whether the school is in compliance with the "highly qualified" teacher requirement. This information will be maintained at the school and district offices where members of the public can

see it upon request. In addition, each school district must report to the state annually on its progress in meeting the requirement that all teachers be "highly qualified" by the end of the 2005-06 school year. This information is part of the state report cards described earlier.

### **How can parents find out about the quality of their child's teachers?**




Parents of students in Title I schools are guaranteed annual notification of their "right to know" about teacher qualifications by their school district. That means parents may request and receive from that office information regarding the professional qualifications of the student's classroom teachers, including: (a) whether the teacher is state-certified; (b) whether a teacher is teaching under emergency or other provisional status; and (c) the baccalaureate degree major of the teacher and any other graduate degree major or certification.

### **What about paraprofessionals or teachers' aides? Does *No Child Left Behind* call for increased academic requirements for them?**

While paraprofessionals or teachers' aides are valuable assets to many learning communities, they are not qualified to fill the role of teachers--a role which, unfortunately, many have been called upon to fill, especially in schools that are under-staffed. *No Child Left Behind* is clear that teachers' aides may provide instructional support services only under the direct supervision of a teacher. In addition, the law allows teachers' aides to facilitate instruction only if they have met certain academic requirements: They must have at least an associate's degree or two years of college, or they must meet a rigorous standard of quality through a formal state or local assessment. If a paraprofessional's role does not involve facilitating instruction--such as serving as a hall monitor--that person does not have to meet the same academic requirements. But, in order to provide instructional support services, an aide or paraprofessional must have the academic background required by *No Child Left Behind*.

### **Why is teacher quality such an important issue?**

A major objective of *No Child Left Behind* is to ensure high-quality teachers for all students, regardless of race, ethnicity or income, because a well-prepared teacher is vitally important to a child's education. In fact, research demonstrates the clear correlation between student academic achievement and teacher quality (Sanders and Rivers 1996). Parents should never hesitate to inquire within their school and district about the qualifications of teachers instructing their children.

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