Telling the Whole Truth (or Not) About Highly Qualified Teachers

New State Data

Analysis by The Education Trust, December 2003

We are nearly two years into implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Already the law has revealed a lot about student achievement in public education. For the first time, federal law requires states to hold every school and district accountable to the same standards of academic performance, standards that apply to all students, including the low-income and minority students who have been traditionally underserved. Because states must report their progress to the public against those standards, we now know more about both overall achievement and gaps between different groups of students.

But of course, differences in students' achievement in reading and math do not tell the public everything it needs to know about public education. Citizens also need to know about students' opportunities to learn, in particular their access to highly qualified teachers.

In raising expectations for all students, we are also raising expectations for the dedicated individuals who have devoted their careers to the preparation of young people. But regardless of their desire to help their students meet high standards, many teachers have not been adequately prepared for this challenge. This is what makes collecting teacher quality data such a critical step toward helping students and their teachers. This data enables states and districts to target professional development and other resources so that teachers can get the support they deserve to become the teachers our students need. NCLB sets aside funds for this purpose. What states need is good data so they can channel those resources where they are most needed.

> "A few states have been forthright with their teacher quality data. But that some states have no data and most have questionable data reflects a shameful inattention to basic issues."

On September 1, 2003, every state was required to file a report with the U.S. Department of Education, providing basic information on highly qualified teachers in their state, among other important issues.[1] In many states, it was the very first time this data had ever been made public.

There were no rewards or penalties attached to this information. Rather, the information was meant to provide schools, parents, and policymakers with a state-specific baseline measure of certain critical elements of each state's K-12 education system. Having established the baseline, states can then devise strategies and policies for improvement, and then evaluate whether the strategies have succeeded. By providing honest, forthright information to the public, states are laying the foundation for moving ahead to where they need to be.

Our analysis of the September 1 filings reveals some encouraging findings and others that are highly disturbing. Some states appear to have taken the reporting provisions to heart, working hard to provide an honest accounting of where they are and where they need to improve. But others took a different track. Some states simply didn't report any data, citing an inability to gather even this most basic information. And some states seem to have used their discretion in interpreting the law to cross the line that separates fact from fiction, to paint a rosy picture that is simply at odds with reality.

In this last group of states, the numbers reported on September 1 border on farce and veer into tragedy. Farce because

these states have released data about teacher quality that obscures the truth. Tragedy because this kind of deception undermines the likelihood of improvement in the future and hurts the educational prospects of students. By pretending that everything is fine when it is not, these states weaken the effort to actually make things better.

We applaud those states that have been forthright with their data even though the truth initially may be uncomfortable to confront. By their honest attempts to show the reality of teacher quality in their states, they are announcing a public commitment to improve it. But that some states have no data and most have questionable data--on what research consistently shows is most important to student learning--reflects a shameful inattention to some basic issues.

There is no good excuse for not knowing which schools and students don't have enough qualified teachers. And there is no excuse for not sharing this information with the public.

Responsibility for this void of worthwhile information rests largely with the U.S. Department of Education. The federal government has a critical responsibility to serve as more than just a conduit for state-reported data of dubious value. It needs to provide clear guidance on what is required. It also needs to insist that the data meet basic standards of validity and reliability, and show a good-faith compliance with the letter and clear intent of the law. If states are unwilling to comply, the Department must take action. So far, the Department has simply refused to do so.

When the NCLB reporting process unfolds as it has – with some states reporting honest numbers, and the rest ducking the issue – it quickly breeds cynicism and perverse incentives for state education leaders. Those that are forthright about their education outcomes are singled out; those that are not get a free pass. We simply can't afford for this to happen. These issues are far too important.

Why is it important for teachers to be "Highly Qualified"?

Teachers are the fundamental resource of education, the essential element of any successful long-term strategy to help students learn. The latest research findings confirm that teachers have a huge influence over student learning; they can literally make or break a child's academic progress for years to come.[2] Yet despite this evidence, many young Americans — low-income and minority students disproportionately among them — continue to be taught by inexperienced, ineffective, unqualified teachers.[3] For these reasons, NCLB contains a number of provisions focused on raising the overall level of teacher quality and addressing the shortage of qualified teachers in high-poverty schools.

What does NCLB require?

NCLB has established an important new standard. By the end of the 2005-06 school year, all students are expected to be taught by a "highly qualified" teacher in the core academic subjects. This provision was accompanied with substantial new funds to help teachers meet these standards: from $2 billion to the current $3 billion each year.[4]

As a first step to meeting the 2005-2006 goal, each state was required to report its baseline data to the U.S. Department of Education on September 1, 2003. These reports were to detail the percentage of classes currently taught by highly qualified teachers, both statewide and in high-poverty schools. These results then form the starting point for state-designed plans to assure that all teachers are highly qualified by the spring of 2006.

NCLB also contains provisions requiring state and local education agencies to assure that low-income and minority students are not taught disproportionately by teachers who are inexperienced, teaching out of their field of expertise, or otherwise unqualified. In addition, parents must be notified when their children are taught for more than four consecutive weeks by a teacher who is not highly qualified.

According to NCLB, teachers are "highly qualified" when they meet three conditions.[5] These are:

1. A college degree.
2. Full certification or licensure, which specifically does not include any certification or licensure that has been "waived on an emergency, temporary, or provisional basis."
3. Demonstrated content knowledge in the subject they're teaching, or in the case of elementary teachers, in at least verbal and mathematics ability. This demonstration can come in various forms:
   - new elementary teachers must pass a state test of literacy and numeracy;
   - new secondary teachers must either pass a rigorous test in the subject area or have a college major;
   - veteran teachers may either pass the state test, have a college major, or demonstrate content knowledge through some other uniformly applied process designed by the state.

This last option, not involving a college major or a test, is generally referred to as the HOUSSE provision – High Objective Uniform State Standard of Evaluation. Under state HOUSSE standards, teachers can demonstrate content knowledge through some combination of experience, college coursework, professional development, or other state-determined measures.

Table 1: Initial State Reports of Percentage of Classrooms Taught by Highly Qualified Teachers

	State Aggregate	High-Poverty Schools
Alabama	35.3%	29.0%
Alaska	16%	16%
Arizona[1]	84%	Unavailable
Arkansas	97%	97%
California	48%	35%
Colorado	85.65%	84.57%
Connecticut	96.04%	94.70%
Delaware	85%	85%
D.C.	74.60%	65.36%
Florida	91.1%	92.9%
Georgia	94%	95%
Hawaii[2]	86.69%	83.98%
Idaho	98.13%	98.55%
Illinois[3]	76%	Unavailable
Indiana	96.2%	95.0%
Iowa	94.8%	94.7%
Kansas	80%	80%
Kentucky[4]	95%	97%
Louisiana[5]	Unavailable	Unavailable
Maine	Unavailable	Unavailable
Maryland	64.5%	46.6%
Massachusetts[6]	96%	93%
Michigan	95%	90%
Minnesota[7]	96.03%	94.09%
Mississippi	85%	81%
Missouri[8]	94.7%	93.6%
Montana[9]	Unavailable	Unavailable
Nebraska[10]	90%	82%
Nevada	50%	50%
New Hampshire	86%	84%
New Jersey[11]	Unavailable	Unavailable
New Mexico[12]	77%	71%
New York[13]	Unavailable	Unavailable
North Carolina[14]	83%	78%
North Dakota	91.1%	93.8%
Ohio[15]	82%	78%
Oklahoma[16]	64%	57%
Oregon	81.8%	71.5%
Pennsylvania	95%	93%
Puerto Rico	25%	25%
Rhode Island	63%	58%
South Carolina[17]	Unavailable	Unavailable
South Dakota[18]	85.7%	78.9%
Tennessee	Unavailable	Unavailable
Texas[19]	75.8%	69.3%
Utah	95.9%[20]	96.4%[21]
Vermont[22]	92%	93%
Virginia	80%	73%
Washington	83%	88%
West Virginia	94%	96%
Wisconsin	98.6%	96.9%
Wyoming	95%	99%

[1] Reflects the percentage of teachers statewide that are highly qualified, not the percentage of classes taught by highly qualified teachers.

[2] High-poverty schools data reflects the percentage of classes in all Title I schools taught by highly qualified teachers.

[3] Reflects the percentage of teachers statewide that are highly qualified, not the percentage of classes taught by highly qualified teachers.

[4] State aggregate calculation reflects the percentage of teachers who do not hold emergency, probationary or conditional certificates, not the percentage of classes taught by teachers meeting these specifications. High-poverty schools calculation reflects the percentage of teachers meeting these specifications in districts receiving Title I funds.

[5] Said data would be available by November 1, 2003. As of publication, data has not been publicly reported.

[6] Based on a sample of data from district NCLB report cards. Margin of error is +/- 1%.

[7] Reflects the percentage of teachers who are highly qualified teaching core classes, not the percentage of classes taught by highly qualified teachers.

[8] High-poverty schools data reflects the percentage of classes in all Title I schools taught by highly qualified teachers. Data based on quartile analysis will be reported in October 2003.

[9] Said data would be available by December 2003. As of publication, data has not been publicly reported.

[10] Data reflects only classes at the secondary (9-12) level.

[11] Says data will be available by May 2004.

[12] Data was not reported in the original September 1st Reports. It was provided on December 1, 2003.

[13] Will begin data collection in 2003-04.

[14] Data was not reported in the original September 1st Reports. It was provided on December 1, 2003.

[15] Does not include those with a Master's degree, a major with 30 or more hours in the content area or those who qualify through the HOUSSE rubric.

[16] Includes those who have completed "subject testing" since 1982; does not include those who qualify under the HOUSSE provision

[17] Said data would be available by October 1, 2003. As of publication, data has not been publicly reported.

[18] South Dakota reported that 16.4% of classes in high-poverty schools were taught by highly qualified teachers. In response to an inquiry from the Education Trust, the South Dakota Department of Education responded that this number was inaccurate, and that the correct number was 78.9%.

[19] Data reflects information from certification records only.

[20] Of these, 70.98% have "interim status" -- teachers not new to the profession who meet the current standards of Utah but not those of NCLB -- and 24.92% are "fully highly qualified."

[21] Of these, 85.31% have "interim status" and 11.08% are "fully highly qualified."

[22] Data based on a stratified random sample of teachers.

What did the states report and how complete is the data?

In looking at the September 1 report, we found that some states seem to have met the challenge with honest and complete data; some produced information that seems highly dubious; and others just flat out didn't produce data at all. Table 1 on page 3 provides a list of state-reported results. What should we make of these numbers?

First, there is huge variation among the states. At the high end, Wisconsin reported that 98.6% of classes statewide (and 96.9% of classrooms in high-poverty schools) are taught by highly qualified teachers. At the low end, Alaska reported that only 16% of classes statewide (and the same in high-poverty schools) are being taught by highly qualified teachers. Twenty states reported that at least 90% of classrooms statewide are taught by highly qualified teachers. By contrast, four states – Alabama, Alaska, California, Nevada — and Puerto Rico reported that 50% or fewer classrooms statewide are taught by highly qualified teachers. It's reasonable to think that states vary in terms of teacher quality. Indeed, previous state-by-state data on teacher qualifications has always shown some variation. But not this much. Clearly, something else is going on.

Second, the number of states with very high numbers is surprising. Since the passage of NCLB, there has been much hand-wringing over the highly qualified teacher provisions, with a number of state officials asserting that the requirements are all but impossible to meet over the next three years. Yet less than two years later, we find many states claiming that virtually every teacher is already highly qualified. This is cause for skepticism.

Third, there are a surprising number of states that report either a small gap in the percentage of highly qualified teachers between high-poverty schools and other schools, or that high-poverty schools actually have an equal number or more highly qualified teachers than other schools. While most states reported that students in high-poverty schools were *somewhat* less likely to be taught by highly qualified teachers than other students in the state, a massive federal survey of teachers and administrators suggests that the maldistribution of qualified teachers to poor children is even more pervasive.[6] These results should also be viewed with extreme caution.

The U.S. Department of Education has known all along that many states were neglecting their responsibility to enact responsible definitions and collect this data, but provided states with insufficient guidance and assistance.[7] Through its inaction, the Department signaled that failure to collect or report honest teacher quality data would be overlooked.

Meanwhile, the Department has not been so complacent about other NCLB requirements. Georgia and Minnesota, for example, were told they would lose part of their state administration funds because they did not administer the tests approved in their Title I plans. The Department also advised superintendents across the country that funds would be withheld if they could not certify that school prayer was being adequately protected. These decisions sent a clear message to states about the Department's priorities. Sadly, producing good data about highly qualified teachers has not been among them. The mixed bag of state data is the predictable result.

States That Made Legitimate, Good Faith Efforts

While no state has a monopoly on best practices when it comes to evaluating teacher quality, some states appear to be taking the process seriously and are far ahead of others. These states have created definitions of "highly qualified" that appear focused on making sure that every child has access to teachers that demonstrate the depth and breadth of knowledge they need to be effective. For example, Mississippi has set a clear and unequivocal standard for the content knowledge of its teachers: to be highly qualified, teachers without a major in their field need to pass a subject matter test, get National Board Certification, or complete subject-related college coursework. Arizona and New Mexico, states that didn't even test teachers before, moved immediately to put required assessments into place.

To look at their current teachers, states like Alabama, Ohio, and Rhode Island have created thoughtful HOUSSE rules that appear to strike an appropriate balance between experience in the classroom and formal training.[8] Colorado and Tennessee – alone among the states – include actual measures of student progress in their process of evaluating whether current teachers are highly qualified.[9] Using evidence of student learning as a means of gauging teacher effectiveness is an important initiative. It should be applauded and emulated by other states.

States That Reported No Data at All

These are the easiest to identify. Seven states provided no data whatsoever.[10] Despite the fact that these requirements have been well known for going on two years, some states were either unable or unwilling to comply with the clear requirements of the law. Three of these states said the data would be available by the end of the year, one said it wouldn't be ready until next year, one said it wouldn't begin data *collection* until 2003-04, and two

provided no explanation or timetable at all. Not much more can be said about these states, other than parents, educators, and policymakers should demand that the information be released as soon as possible. The U.S. Department of Education should consider withholding an appropriate amount of state department of education administrative funds until the requirements are met.[11]

States that Reported NO DATA about Highly Qualified Teachers	
Louisiana	New York
Maine	South Carolina
Montana	Tennessee
New Jersey	

States That Didn't Apply Their Definition of "Highly Qualified"

Some states didn't complete the process of developing and applying their HOUSSE standards in time for the reporting deadline, so the value of their initial data reports is diminished as a basis for making improvement plans. These states include Alabama, Alaska, California, Delaware, Hawaii, Kentucky, Maryland, Ohio, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, and Texas. Many of these states are among those that reported the lowest percentages of highly qualified teachers. So, it appears that a significant portion of the variation among states on the low end of the distribution on Table 1 is not a result of real variation in the number or definition of highly qualified teachers, but rather a result of states not completing their definitions on time. In the future, when all states have HOUSSE processes in place, the top-to-bottom variation will likely be significantly smaller.

Other states had their definitions in place, but chose not to apply them. Just like standards for student learning, NCLB teacher quality provisions rely entirely on state definitions. The only requirements states must include are college degrees and demonstration of subject knowledge. But some states appear to be keeping two sets of books, one for public reporting purposes, and another using the state's "real" definition for qualified teachers.

Utah, for example, reported in its submission that 95.9% of teachers were highly qualified, an amount that was cited in initial media reports comparing state results. However, in a parenthetical addition to its filing, Utah indicated that only 25% of teachers were "fully" highly qualified, while 71% had "interim" highly qualified status, whatever that is. Utah further stated in its filing that it believes that "it is impractical and unreasonable to suggest that all teachers will meet the highly qualified requirements for all courses." But NCLB does not exempt states from the obligation to provide all students with qualified teachers because they believe the goal is "unreasonable," or, for that matter, any other reason.

Similarly, a Wisconsin official reported that "there's a disconnect between what the feds define as highly qualified and what we define as highly qualified."[12] Under the law, there can't be a disconnect between the two. NCLB relies entirely on the state definition, and puts only minimal parameters around what the state definition must include, i.e., a college degree and a demonstration of content knowledge. If a state doesn't consider a teacher to be highly qualified, then by definition the teacher is not highly qualified for reporting purposes under NCLB.

As we will see below, several states have exploited the latitude built into the law. Combined with the U.S. Department of Education's *laissez faire* approach to enforcing even minimal teacher quality standards, some of these states define "highly qualified" in ways that are nearly meaningless.

States That Say Certification and Content Knowledge Are Essentially the Same Thing

The first two elements of the highly qualified definition – a bachelor's degree, and certification – are, or should be, relatively uncontroversial. Nearly everyone agrees teachers should have a college degree, and nearly all teachers have one already. And while there are healthy debates in many states regarding the nature of teacher certification processes, few would argue that teachers should not have to meet what the states themselves define as the appropriate minimum qualifications to be in the classroom.

The third provision, however – demonstration of content knowledge – throws a new wrinkle into the equation in some states. Research suggests that students who have teachers with strong content knowledge learn more than students who have teachers with weak content knowledge. The research is particularly compelling in subjects like mathematics.[13] In other words, teachers need to know what they're teaching.

But there is also much research suggesting that many states have not paid sufficient attention to teacher content knowledge. In these states, too many children are being taught by certified teachers who lack strong subject-matter knowledge, and these teachers are disproportionately likely to be teaching low-income and minority students.

Under NCLB, one way teachers can demonstrate knowledge is with a college major. Yet a recent analysis of the latest federal Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) commissioned by the Education Trust found that almost one out of three secondary classes in core academic subjects (32%) nationwide are led by

teachers lacking a major in the field they are teaching, with a high of 49% in Louisiana and New Mexico to a low of 9% in Minnesota.[14] Moreover, the problem is significantly worse for disadvantaged students: 41% of classes in high-poverty secondary schools nationwide are taught by a teacher without a major in the subject, compared to 25% in low-poverty schools.

Similarly, a recent report from the Council of Chief State School Officers analyzed the SASS dataset and found that, nationwide, only 63 % of math teachers in grades 7-12 have both a major in their field and full state certification, with that amount ranging from 38% to 90% among the states.[15] The numbers for science teachers are similar.

The SASS data are independently collected by the National Center for Education Statistics and based on information reported by practicing classroom teachers and administrators surveyed across the country. Readers should note that this data is not equivalent to state highly qualified data. For one thing, in collecting evidence of teachers' content knowledge, SASS focuses on middle- and high-school classrooms, whereas the states report on both elementary and secondary classrooms. Nonetheless, SASS provides a reasonable check against the state reports. Large differences between the data sets should be a flag alerting states to take a second look at their definitions and/or the accuracy and reliability of their data collection.

A comparison of the SASS numbers and September 1 numbers suggests that many certified teachers in each state must be demonstrating content knowledge with something other than a college major. For example, West Virginia reports that 94% of classes statewide are taught by highly qualified teachers, but SASS data from that state's own teachers indicates that only 65% of secondary classes are being taught by a teacher with at least a major in their field. A comparison of SASS and September 1 numbers also shows significant differences on the distribution question. Data from Florida teachers, for example, shows a gap of 16.4 percentage points between high-poverty schools and schools statewide in terms of classrooms taught by teachers with a major in the subject. But the state reported in its September 1 filing that classes in high-poverty schools have *more* highly qualified teachers than the average statewide.

Table 2:

States that Don't Test Subject Matter as Part of Certification	States that Don't Test Anything as Part of Certification
Alabama	Iowa
Alaska	South Dakota
Delaware	Utah
Idaho+	Wyoming
Kansas**,+	
Maine**	
Montana**	
Nebraska	
New Hampshire*	
New York	
North Dakota**	
Rhode Island**	
Washington	
Wisconsin	

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Title II State Reports, November 2003, www.title2.org

+Content tests required in 2003-04, but state has not yet established cut scores

*New Hampshire has a subject matter test for secondary certification but not for elementary

** Does not require a subject matter test for elementary or secondary certification, but does require a major in field for secondary certfication.

Under NCLB, teachers without a major in the subject they are teaching must use an alternate method to demonstrate subject matter knowledge, such as passing a "rigorous state academic subject test in each of the academic subjects in which the teacher teaches." In fact, many states have integrated subject-specific tests into their licensure and certification processes.[16] So for new teachers fresh out of college in these states, content knowledge won't be an issue.

However, a number of states either have no subject-specific test requirements or no test requirements at all (See chart). Some states plan to implement these requirements in the future, but haven't yet, even though states have been required to have such tests — including tests of literacy and numeracy for elementary teachers — in place for new teachers since last year as a condition of receiving federal funding. This is simply another example of states openly flouting the teacher quality provisions of NCLB with no enforcement or comment on the part of the U.S. Department of Education.

While many states have included subject matter tests as part of their licensure system for some time, some states implemented those provisions relatively recently. In these states, a significant number of experienced teachers got their licenses before the tests were required. And as the SASS data show, many of those teachers are assigned to subjects for which they have no college major. How do states assess content knowledge for these teachers?

Veteran teachers always have the option of taking the same test new teachers take to demonstrate knowledge. But states also have another option, the HOUSSE provisions described previously. In a recent report, the Education Trust warned of the potential to abuse the HOUSSE process by making these "standards" so lax as to include virtually every teacher in the state, regardless of actual demonstration of content knowledge.[17] As the following examples show, that concern now appears to have been well founded.

A HOUSSE of Cards

From our analysis of the September 1 filings and subsequent follow-up with state departments of education, it is clear that some states have abused the flexibility they have to decide how to address the content-knowledge requirements for veteran teachers by claiming simply that all certified teachers have met them. An example is Wisconsin, which reported the highest percentage of highly qualified teachers in the nation: the state reported that 98.6% of its classes statewide and 96.9% of classes in high-poverty schools are allegedly taught by highly qualified teachers.

The Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel published a front-page headline proclaiming the state "best in nation."[18] The state superintendent issued a press release proclaiming, "Wisconsin has set the standard in terms of teacher quality for all other states to follow."[19]

If these numbers were complete, we would encourage school leaders to rush to Wisconsin to learn from and emulate their exciting teacher production and retention strategies. Unfortunately, they're not. In fact, Wisconsin is currently one of a minority of states that have no subject matter testing requirements for new teachers at all. The state passed a law in 1999 requiring new teachers to demonstrate content knowledge, but the provisions don't go into effect until August 2004.

Instead of crafting a reasonable definition for highly qualified teachers, Wisconsin simply said the following in their September 1 filing:

> "Wisconsin standards that meet the HOUSE (sic) criteria are the program approval requirements. All teachers licensed in Wisconsin must have completed an approved program at a college or university, either in this state or in another state. All current middle and high school teachers who teach core academic subjects are in the HOUSE."

In other words, Wisconsin has made the conceptual leap of equating the question of whether teachers have sufficient subject matter knowledge in the specific subject that they are actually teaching with the question of whether or not they have completed an accredited teacher education program in any subject area at any college or university in the United States of America. Needless to say, this simply defies common sense, especially when the SASS data indicates that 20% of secondary teachers in core subjects in Wisconsin didn't major in the subject they're teaching.

A number of other states have also submitted definitions of "highly qualified" that on some level conflate the content knowledge requirement with their existing certification processes. Not surprisingly, many of these states, like Wisconsin, reported a very high percentage of teachers as highly qualified, in the range of 95% or above. These numbers should raise serious questions as to whether all currently certified teachers truly have the full extent of subject matter knowledge they need to effectively help their students learn.

States That Say Local Performance Evaluations and Content Knowledge Are Essentially the Same Thing

The words that make up the acronym HOUSSE aren't particularly difficult to understand. Most people know what "High," "Objective," "Uniform," and "State" mean. Yet some states have chosen to ignore some or even all four of these requirements, by abdicating their responsibility for determining content knowledge to local schools and the state's pre-existing evaluation process.

Florida, New Hampshire, and Washington are examples of states that have used, in various ways, pre-existing local teacher evaluations requirements as *de facto* HOUSSE processes despite the fact that such evaluations don't typically include an objective assessment of subject matter knowledge. In Florida, veteran teachers can meet content requirements by receiving a satisfactory score on their annual performance evaluation.[20] Such examinations are cursory in many schools, based on brief observations conducted once or twice a year, resulting in the vast majority of teachers being rated "satisfactory." New Hampshire allows for a "self-evaluation" process to substitute for the required "objective" assessment of subject knowledge.[21]

States That Emphasize Teacher Experience at the Expense of Content Knowledge

A number of states have developed a standard, objective, uniform HOUSSE process. Most of these states are using a "points" system to do so: teachers accumulate points based on various factors, such as college coursework, professional development, and experience teaching in the field. This makes good sense. But the devil is in the details. Teachers without a college major in Alabama, for example, need to obtain 100 points out of a possible 150 to demonstrate content knowledge. Of that 150, only 30 points can come from actual teaching experience in the content area, earned at 2 points a year for the most recent 10 years, and 1 point a year for years after 10. The majority of the points must be earned through college coursework and/or professional development. This approach recognizes experience, but insists on clear evidence that the teacher has also partici-

pated in training that will deepen his or her grasp of the content.

By contrast, California's proposed HOUSSE rubric – also based on a 100 point standard – gives teachers 10 points a year for years of experience, up to a maximum of 50 points. A teacher with 5 years of experience in California gets 50 points out of the 100 needed; the same teacher in Alabama would get only 10. These differences in rubric scoring protocols may seem arcane, but for millions of students they could mean the difference between being taught by a teacher with demonstrable subject matter knowledge, or not.

Georgia, Kansas, New York, and Vermont likewise appear to place significant emphasis on teacher experience in their attempt to comply with the HOUSSE provisions. These states are meeting the letter of the law. But they could have adopted HOUSSE rubrics more focused on actual *demonstrations* of content knowledge, rather than the *belief* that knowledge expands and deepens with experience. Absent any college coursework, professional development, or external validation, there's no evidence that teachers in their fifth year teaching have substantially more content knowledge than in their first.

States That Reported Data That Appears Wrong

Finally, some of the numbers just don't withstand a glancing review. For example, South Dakota reported that only 16.4% of classes in high-poverty schools were taught by highly qualified teachers. In response to an inquiry from the Education Trust, the South Dakota Department of Education responded that this number was inaccurate, and that the correct amount was 78.9%.[22]

As we see again on Table 1 (page 3), five states – Alaska, Arkansas, Delaware, Kansas, and Nevada — reported that high-poverty schools have *exactly the same* percentage of classes taught by highly qualified teachers as in schools statewide. It's possible that this is true. The federal SASS data suggests that teacher distribution might not be a problem in a few states. But in most states the percentage of highly qualified teachers differs between high- and low-poverty districts. The fact that these states report *no* difference should raise questions about those states' data collection.

What are the implications of reporting incomplete data?

The widespread obfuscation about teacher quality threatens our efforts to improve student achievement in two profound ways. First, it obscures the pervasive opportunity gaps that hold back low-income and minority students from achieving their potential. While some states have a relatively equitable distribution of teachers, the SASS data show that most states have significant disparities for low-income and minority students. The fact that numerous states showed negligible gaps and 17 states reported that high-poverty schools have an equal or *greater* percentage of classes taught by highly qualified teachers flies in the face of numerous well-researched studies of teacher distribution. These results amount to a whitewash of a pervasive problem that is undermining the education of millions of disadvantaged students. In the process, it feeds the myth that low achievement is the fault of the kids instead of what it really is — the system's inability or unwillingness to provide them with qualified teachers.

Second, the states that misrepresent teacher data are squandering the opportunity to use honest information as a launching point for improvement initiatives. For example, in touting her state's supposedly nation-leading teacher results, the Wisconsin state superintendent said, "With 98.6 % of our students having their core subjects taught by highly qualified teachers, it stands to reason that academic achievement in Wisconsin is among the best in the nation."[23]

The problem with this statement is that it's wrong on both counts. Wisconsin's high teacher numbers are the result of definitional slight-of-hand. And Wisconsin is *not* among the best in the nation on many important measures of academic achievement. For example, Wisconsin is one of only five states that saw a decline in 8th grade math scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress for low-income income students from 1996 to 2003, even as the average score for low-income students nationwide was rising. In 1990, African American students in Wisconsin were at the national average among African American 8th graders in mathematics; by 2003 they had fallen far behind, recording the smallest increase of any state in the country, and in overall score ranking ahead of only Arkansas, Alabama, and the District of Columbia. While the nation overall reduced the ranks of 4th grade students who were not even reading at the "basic" level from 1992 to 2003, they worsened in Wisconsin. Minority graduation rates in Milwaukee are among the worst in the country.

Fixing these achievement gaps is going to require a serious commitment to improving the quality of teaching in Wisconsin classrooms, a task that is seriously undermined at the outset when the state suggests that everything is fine when it comes to teachers. We have already heard from stakeholders in the state that such sugarcoating has made it much more dif-

ficult for them to energize their efforts to deal with a real shortage of qualified teachers.

Third, states that don't have reliable teacher quality data won't know where they need to channel resources to help teachers become highly qualified. These dollars are significant — $3 billion for 2003 alone. Not only will this harm teachers and students, it adds to the misperception, especially among teachers, that NCLB is all stick and no carrot.

The U.S. Department of Education must shoulder a lot of the blame. Its response to states' flaccid compliance with NCLB's teacher quality discussions hasn't helped. Indeed, the Department's inaction is likely making things worse. In addition to allowing states to report misleading data about teachers, the Department seems to be implying that this is not a problem that needs to be solved immediately. In a follow-up article to its original coverage of the results, published nearly two months after the September 1 filing deadline, the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel reported:

> Officials with the U.S. Department of Education said they are still reviewing the states' plans regarding highly qualified teachers and are scheduling meetings in each state to iron out the wrinkles by 2005-06. They could not say at this point whether Wisconsin's definition matches the law. 'We're not saying we're taking a lax look at this. We're just saying '05-'06 is a few years away,' an Education Department spokesman said.[24]

Signaling that states have until 2005-2006 to get their *data* and their *definitions* correct, as opposed to actually having all teachers highly qualified by that deadline, is counter-productive and counter to the law. There's no way that states will be able to take steps to ensure that every teacher is highly qualified in two years if they haven't even determined what highly qualified *means* until then. And poor and minority students will disproportionately bear the burden for this lax oversight.

The bottom line is this: there are a significant number of practicing teachers out there who need help in strengthening their subject matter knowledge and teaching skills in order to help *all* their students to meet state standards. In some communities and in some subjects, there is a very real shortage of qualified teachers. The teachers in these communities are dedicated professionals who need help and support in gaining the full range of knowledge and skills necessary to serve the children to whom they've devoted their careers. If states are unwilling to acknowledge these challenges, and if the U.S. Department of Education won't use its authority under federal law to make states acknowledge these issues, the teachers that need and deserve help won't get it and the students that need help will suffer. There is funding in NCLB to focus on helping teachers meet the highly qualified standards. But states can't appropriately target these resources if their data doesn't reveal the areas where the resources are most needed.

There are no financial penalties or sanctions in NCLB if states fail to meet the goal of having all teachers highly qualified by 2005-2006. States will not be punished for being forthright about the qualifications of their teachers. Indeed, they have *many* good reasons to be honest and forthcoming, as several states have shown. But denial and obfuscation by others help no one in the end. If these states don't make immediate efforts to correct teacher opportunity gaps for disadvantaged students and ensure that all children are taught by teachers who are *actually* highly qualified, the long-term educational progress of the state will suffer.

The Pressing Need For More, Better Public Information

Beyond the fundamental issue of honesty, it's important to work harder to make the data public. The reporting process wasn't exactly designed to maximize access to the information. Only a handful of states made the common-sense decision to make their September 1 filings publicly available on their Department of Education web sites. The Department released the reports to the Education Trust and several media outlets six weeks after the states submitted them, but only after receiving Freedom of Information Act petitions. As of the date of publication for this paper, the filings were not posted on the Department's web site, meaning that the only people who have full access to vital information about their state's public schools are a handful of journalists and those with full-time employment at certain nonprofit education advocacy organizations, or within certain divisions of state and federal Departments of Education.

To date, the Department has provided no analysis or context for this information, despite the fact that even a rudimentary analysis would have revealed serious deficiencies in the data. If the U.S. Department of Education is not going to analyze the information, nor take any action to ensure that the information is honest or accurate, than what does it suppose is the point of collecting the information in the first place?

Adding an insult to injury, in October, the Department took credit for exposing the "dirty little secrets" of teacher quality.[25] Since the data remains unavailable via publication or web release to the gen-

eral public, the Department itself hasn't "exposed" anything. And even if it did, so much of the data misleads and obfuscates, one wonders exactly what dirty little secrets the Department thinks are revealed.

Toward Better Data

The foundation of any successful long-term school improvement strategy is good information. To reach our goals of helping all students to proficiency and graduation, we first have to know where we stand. To build public support for the hard choices and new initiatives that real improvement will entail, we first need to provide parents, educators, and policymakers with honest information about our public schools.

The fact that so many states were either unable or unwilling to provide timely, complete information to the public about these issues shows that the new NCLB reporting requirements didn't come a moment too soon.

Communities that are struggling to raise student achievement are crying out for honest information, meaningful assistance, and comprehensive strategies for improvement. Obfuscation, denial, and dishonesty does them not a shred of good. They know the truth about teacher quality reveals real challenges, and they know that real change needs to start now. The sooner the states and the U.S. Department of Education move to provide honest information, the sooner they can get started. Honestly, it's not too much to ask.

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About The Education Trust

The Education Trust, Inc. was created to promote high academic achievement for all students, at all levels—kindergarten through college. While we know that all schools and colleges could better serve their students, our work focuses on the schools and colleges most often left behind in plans to improve education: those serving African American, Latino, Native American and low-income students.

The Education Trust works side-by-side with policy makers, parents, education professionals, community and business leaders—in cities and towns across the country—who are trying to transform their schools and colleges into institutions that genuinely serve all students. We also bring lessons learned in local communities back to Washington to help inform national policy debates.

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Appendix: Highly Qualified Teachers

	Percent of Classes Taught by Highly Qualified Teachers Statewide (as Reported in Sept. 2003 Applications)	Percent of Classes Taught by Highly Qualified Teachers High Poverty Schools (as Reported in Sept. 2003 Applications)	Gap-- Statewide Versus High Poverty Schools	Percent of Secondary Classes in Core Academic Subjects Taught By Teachers With a Major in Field Statewide (SASS, 1999-2000)	Percent of Secondary Classes in Core Academic Subjects Taught By Teachers With a Major in Field in High Poverty Schools (SASS, 1999-2000)	Gap-- Statewide Versus High Poverty Schools
Alabama	35.3%	29.0%	6%	68.3%	67.5%	0.8%
Alaska	16%	16%	0%	65.0%	45.9%	19.1%
Arizona	84%	Unavailable	n/a	57.0%	47.4%	9.6%
Arkansas	97%	97%	0%	67.7%	56.9%	10.8%
California	48%	35%	13%	66.4%	65.6%	0.8%
Colorado	85.65%	84.57%	1%	72.1%	52.4%	19.7%
Connecticut	96.04%	94.70%	1%	69.4%	57.0%	12.4%
Delaware	85%	85%	0%	55.0%	n/a	n/a
D.C.	74.60%	65.36%	9%	81.6%	n/a	n/a
Florida	91.1%	92.9%	-2%	69.5%	53.1%	16.4%
Georgia	94%	95%	-1%	67.9%	57.0%	10.9%
Hawaii	86.69%	83.98%	3%	64.9%	57.0%	7.9%
Idaho	98.13%	98.55%	-0%	62.5%	38.3%	24.2%
Illinois	76%	Unavailable	n/a	69.9%	48.1%	21.8%
Indiana	96.2%	95.0%	1%	77.9%	n/a	n/a
Iowa	94.8%	94.7%	0%	76.9%	n/a	n/a
Kansas	80%	80%	0%	67.9%	75.2%	-7.3%
Kentucky	95%	97%	-2%	60.4%	47.0%	13.4%
Louisiana	Unavailable	Unavailable	n/a	51.0%	44.0%	7.0%
Maine	Unavailable	Unavailable	n/a	60.7%	n/a	n/a
Maryland	64.5%	46.6%	18%	73.8%	n/a	n/a
Massachusetts	96%	93%	3%	76.8%	n/a	n/a
Michigan	95%	90%	5%	62.9%	51.1%	11.8%
Minnesota	96.03%	94.09%	2%	90.7%	89.6%	1.1%
Mississippi	85%	81%	4%	62.9%	59.8%	3.1%
Missouri	94.7%	93.6%	1%	65.4%	49.3%	16.1%
Montana	Unavailable	Unavailable	n/a	69.0%	60.4%	8.6%
Nebraska	90%	82%	8%	78.5%	73.0%	5.5%
Nevada	50%	50%	0%	60.4%	n/a	n/a
New Hampshire	86%	84%	2%	75.6%	n/a	n/a
New Jersey	Unavailable	Unavailable	n/a	78.2%	n/a	n/a
New Mexico	77%	71%	6%	51.0%	52.7%	-1.7%
New York	Unavailable	Unavailable	n/a	78.3%	83.9%	-5.6%
North Carolina	83%	78%	5%	79.2%	66.2%	13.0%
North Dakota	91.1%	93.8%	-3%	72.1%	58.6%	13.5%
Ohio	82%	78%	4%	63.5%	55.9%	7.6%
Oklahoma	64%	57%	7%	59.3%	53.4%	5.9%
Oregon	81.8%	71.5%	10%	65.4%	50.2%	15.2%
Pennsylvania	95%	93%	2%	74.2%	64.1%	10.1%
Puerto Rico	25%	25%	0%	n/a	n/a	n/a
Rhode Island	63%	58%	5%	79.8%	n/a	n/a
South Carolina	Unavailable	Unavailable	n/a	74.2%	83.2%	-9.0%
South Dakota	85.7%	78.9%	7%	66.4%	57.1%	9.3%
Tennessee	Unavailable	Unavailable	n/a	58.6%	57.6%	1.0%
Texas	75.8%	69.3%	7%	55.8%	51.8%	4.0%
Utah	95.9%	96.4%	-1%	66.4%	42.2%	24.2%
Vermont	92%	93%	-1%	68.7%	n/a	n/a
Virginia	80%	73%	7%	67.3%	58.2%	9.1%
Washington	83%	88%	-5%	62.7%	52.4%	10.3%
West Virginia	94%	96%	-2%	64.8%	67.1%	-2.3%
Wisconsin	98.6%	96.9%	2%	80.2%	n/a	n/a
Wyoming	95%	99%	-4%	70.3%	n/a	n/a

Endnotes

[1] In addition to the information discussed in this report, the September 1 filings also reported information on persistently dangerous schools, high quality professional development, school drop-out rates, qualified paraprofessionals, and students with limited English proficiency.

[2] *Good Teaching Matters*, The Education Trust, 1998.

[3] *Honor in the Boxcar*, The Education Trust, 2000.

[4] The total appropriation for the ESEA Title II Teacher Quality grants to states increased from $2.11 billion in FY 2001 to $2.94 billion in FY 2003.

[5] ESEA Section 9101(23).

[6] Although NCLB clearly calls for a comparison between high-poverty and low-poverty schools, the U.S. Department of Education chose – for reasons that are unclear – to require the states to calculate the difference between high-poverty and the statewide average. Because wealthy, low-poverty schools tend to attract the best teachers, these calculations likely understate the extent of the maldistribution.

[7] U.S. General Accounting Office, "No Child Left Behind Act: More Information Would Help States Determine Which Teachers Are Highly Qualified," (GAO-03-631) July 2003.

[8] Ohio's rubric can be found at: http://www.ode.state.oh.us/teaching-profession/pdf/HQTRubric.pdf
Alabama's rubric can be found at: http://www.alsde.edu/general/AlabamaHOUSSEApplication120303.doc

[9] Colorado's HOUSSE rubric can be found at: http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdeunified/download/tiia_HQ0903.pdf
Tennessee's HOUSSE rubric can be found at: http://www.state.tn.us/education/fpnclbtchqltyimplplan.pdf

[10] North Carolina and New Mexico released their data late, in December 2003. That data is included in this report.

[11] Title I provides funds to state departments of education for administrative costs, including the cost of collecting data. These funds are separate from the Title I funding provided to schools.

[12] Hetzer, Amy, "Teacher Grades Mislead, Officials Say." Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel, October 31, 2003.

[13] D.D. Goldhaber and D.J. Brewer, "Evaluating the Effect of Teacher Degree Level on Educational Performance," *Developments in School Finance 1996*, NCES, 1997.

[14] *All Talk, No Action*, The Education Trust, August 2000.

[15] Rolf K. Blank, *Meeting NCLB Goals for Highly Qualified Teachers: Estimates by State from Survey Data*, Council of Chief State School Officers, October 2003.

[16] "Rigorous" may be an overly optimistic judgment, however. See, for example, *Not Good Enough*, The Education Trust, Spring 1999. See also, "Do the Math: Easy Test for Teachers will Hurt Students," Washington Post, December 4, 2003.

[17] *In Need of Improvement: Ten Ways the U.S. Department of Education Has Failed to Live Up to Its Teacher Quality Commitments*, The Education Trust, 2003.

[18] Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel, October 20, 2003. On October 31, 2003, the Journal Sentinel published a more skeptical follow-up article, titled "Teacher Grades Misled, Officials Say," in which it questioned the accuracy of Wisconsin's alleged best-in-nation status.

[19] Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, news release, October 22, 2003.

[20] For more information about Florida's HOUSSE definition, see "NCLB—Highly Qualified Teacher Requirements" memo, October 4, 2002 at "http://info.fldoe.org/dscgi/ds.py/Get/File-573/NCLB-HighQualMemo.pdf, and "NCLB Highly Qualified Teacher Requirements Teachers" at http://info.fldoe.org/dscgi/ds.py/Get/File-718/NCLB-HQ_Option_Chart-Rev2.pdf.

[21] For more information about New Hampshire's HOUSSE definition, see "Highly Qualified Teacher Descriptors and HOUSSE Process" at http://www.ed.state.nh.us/ProfessionalDevelopment/HQT/HOUSSEdescript.htm.

[22] Despite representations that it was "reviewing" the data for six weeks before publicly releasing it, no one from the U.S. Department contacted South Dakota officials to check the accuracy of this data.

[23] Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, news release, October 22, 2003.

[24] Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, October 31, 2003.

[25] Associate Press, "States Report Wide Range of Teacher Quality," October 1, 2003.