

Literature Review:

Has the No Child Left Behind Law Produced More Qualified Teachers?

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## HAS NCLB PRODUCED MORE QUALIFIED TEACHERS?

### Abstract

This literature review seeks to find if the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 has produced more qualified teachers since before its enactment. The impact of the NCLB on student achievement and teacher quality needs have been examined since there have been 10 years after the law was enacted. Only 11% reported that the NCLB highly qualified teacher requirements have enhanced their strategies for teacher recruitment or teacher retention to a moderate or great extent, (Zhang, 2008). However, research shows that the majority of American school teachers have reached the highly qualified teacher status requirement mandated by NCLB, and that reading, literacy, and mathematics scores have improved since its enactment. It is important to assess the differences if any, between teachers' and students' achievement from the time before NCLB and now, after 10 years of use. The goal of NCLB was to give equal education to all students, no matter their educational category, as well as provide teachers with more education and credentials, in an effort to improve our education system. The information could be valuable to reformulate the current NCLB law so that it can be more effective for more people.

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### Introduction

This literature review seeks to find if the NCLB Act has afforded students with more qualified teachers since its enactment. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act (U.S. Department of Education 2002), signed into law on January 8, 2002, by President George W. Bush, may be one of the most significant education policies ever enacted by the federal government. This bipartisan legislation is designed to hold schools accountable for defined levels of student achievement or to provide other options for families to educate their children. NCLB requires individual states to establish student-learning standards in reading and mathematics and assess their progress toward meeting those standards on a regular basis. The act requires all students to be proficient in reading and mathematics by 2014, and that schools make adequate yearly progress (AYP) as established and assessed by state standards, (Dever, Carlston, 2009).

The four key principles of No Child Left Behind are: schools must be accountable for student performance and teacher qualifications, states and districts must set growth targets and have room to achieve them, parents must have more information about their schools educational options if the school does reach its growth target, and lastly schools must use research based instructional strategies, (Byrnes, 2009). NCLB requires states to set standards for designating all public school teachers as highly qualified and requires districts to notify parents of students in Title I programs if their child's teacher does not meet these standards. The requirements apply to all teachers of core academic subjects—English, reading or language arts, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, and geography—and to teachers who provide instruction in these subjects to students with limited English proficiency

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(LEP) and students with disabilities, (Birman et al 2009). This is the basis of the law and although a federal enactment it also leaves states to add more requirements to it per the states' needs. The purpose of the law was to ensure that teachers had the right amount of education, background and experience to teach students in order to instruct more successfully and prepare students for a bright future. With more stringent requirements for teacher's to meet in order to teach, it ensures that each teacher is the best possible candidate for the job. The country does not have common standards for defining a high-quality education workforce, and a teacher who is highly qualified to teach in one state may not meet the requirements in another state, (Brackett et al, 2008).

### What is "Highly Qualified?"

Teacher education today finds itself in the glare of the public spotlight as educators and policymakers seek to determine what characterizes a highly qualified teacher, a teacher who will benefit student learning. Traditionally, state certification of teachers has provided the entry gate through which teachers would be certified as ready to undertake the job. Advocates of professionalism argue that there is a body of research on good teaching and on good practices in teacher education, and they argue that this research can guide the professional oversight of teacher education programs and improve the process of certifying or licensing good teachers, (Marszalek et al 2010). This process however, varies by state regulations and getting certified as highly qualified is more difficult than what meets the eye. Most teachers met their states' requirements to be considered highly qualified under NCLB. According to state reports, 94 percent of teachers were highly qualified in 2006– 07, (Birman et al 2009). Teacher's education, background and experience all play a part in what type of teacher they are; some teachers are deemed highly qualified but are not considered good teachers by their students. Knowledge of

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content area does not always mean they can portray the information well enough to students.

Teacher effectiveness may also differ, especially if it really does depend on teacher preparation, since 6.1% of middle school teachers are uncertified in contrast to 3.1% and 2.7% in elementary and high school, respectively. Possible mechanisms for the effect of teacher effectiveness were differences in teacher discipline practices and teacher self-efficacy, both of which may be affected by the quality of teacher preparation, (Marszalek et al 2010).

What distinguishes highly qualified teachers from teachers who begin teaching with preparation in their content fields but little or no teacher preparation coursework? Highly qualified teachers have essential knowledge and skills unavailable to content-only specialists. For example, educational researchers have established through decades of research the importance of student centered teaching practices, selection and adaption of curriculum to meet student needs and interests, and a focus on students' conceptual understanding and critical thinking rather than knowledge acquisition, (Marszalek et al 2010). Where a teaching minor was once a certifiable option, NCLB legislation now requires states to individualize their certification requirements with a HOUSSE (High Objective State Standard of Evaluation) plan that all but eliminates transferability across state borders, (Miller et al 2006). Attaining highly qualified status for teachers is not a simple process because federal and state regulations must be followed, and each varies by state. Another issue with getting certified as highly qualified in your subject area is the lack of tests in your subject area, such as astronomy. Teachers in the subject of astronomy are not and cannot currently get highly qualified status because there is no means to achieve this. Until a test is created or a standard regulations for these teachers, they will be considered "unqualified" no matter the amount of education they have or their teaching experience.

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Emerick, Hirsch, and Berry (2003) of the Southeast Center for Teaching Quality found that NCLB's narrow emphasis on content knowledge has led to lower standards for teachers. They concluded that content knowledge alone does not justify the designation of highly qualified teacher, but that the successful teacher demonstrates understanding of the nature of student learning, the use of multiple forms of assessment, and the ability to differentiate instruction. In short, the high quality teacher will possess appropriate content knowledge, and will also possess considerable background in communicating effectively to students. Thus educational researchers have found that teacher dispositions like collegiality, self-reflection, collaborative and interactive skills, and the ability to adjust personal and professional practice based on reflection are important characteristics of good teachers, (Miller et al 2006). Becoming highly qualified is not a clear cut process and many teachers do not know what their status is. In the table below, percentages are represented by teachers who are highly qualified under the NCLB mandate, teachers that are not highly qualified, and those teachers that do not know if they are or not.

**Table 1**

Changes in Percentage of Teachers Reporting That They Were Considered Highly Qualified or Not Highly Qualified or That They Did Not Know Their Status Under

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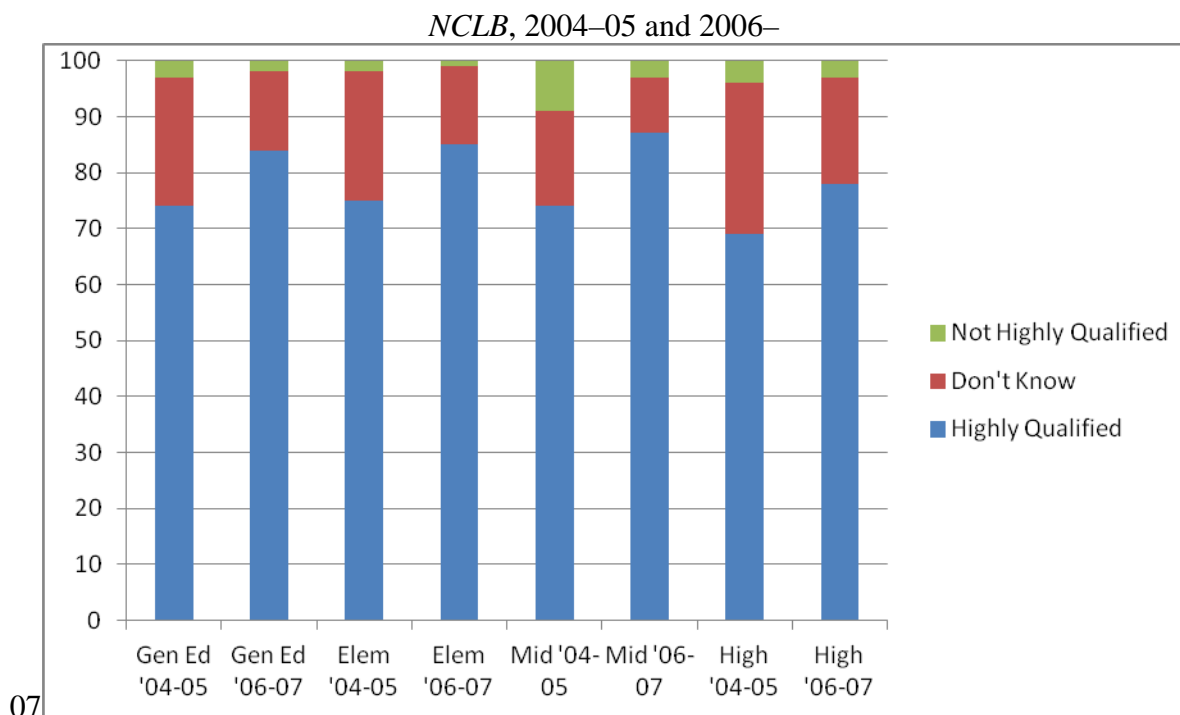


Table reads: In 2004–05, 74 percent of general education teachers reported that they were considered highly qualified under *NCLB*, 4 percent reported that they were not highly qualified, and 23 percent reported that they did not know their status. Note: For 2004–05, n = 7,340 (all general education teachers), 4,087 (elementary teachers), 1,887 (middle school teachers), and 1,386 (high school teachers). For 2006–07, n = 7,482 (all general education teachers), 4,121 (elementary teachers), 1,916 (middle school teachers), and 1,445 (high school teachers). Column totals may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding, (Birman et al 2009).

### Hiring and Retaining Highly Qualified Teachers

To help improve the qualifications of teachers, *NCLB* provides funds that states can use for a wide variety of efforts, from improving certification systems to supporting strategies to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers. The law also supports ongoing professional development for all teachers regardless of their highly qualified status, (Birman et al 2009).

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NCLB has funding for teacher enrichment programs, however this funding is not enough for every school across the country and it may be bankrupt by now- leaving no more money for anyone. NCLB was a great idea to get the American education system back on track and focus on what's important, but it was not well enough funded to make the impact it should have. Our results suggest that a number of policy initiatives, including NCLB's highly qualified teacher provisions, the introduction of alternative route programs in Illinois, and Chicago's comprehensive efforts to recruit talented new teachers, together had a positive impact on the level and distribution of teacher qualifications, (DeAngelis et al 2011). The NCLB program is working, especially in areas of the country where good teachers could not be retained, like Chicago city schools. Now these schools are thriving and have absolutely impacted teachers and students.

Teachers make a difference in student academic growth. Students from low-income, minority communities attend schools with less resources and less qualified teachers than students in wealthier communities, (Mangiante et al 2011). School communities with more money can afford to pay their teachers more and keep the great teachers, leaving the few teachers in low-income neighborhoods underpaid, overworked, and underappreciated. However NCLB is supposed to help out communities like these by its mandate to have more qualified teachers in those areas, thereby creating a better educational environment. In 2006–07, schools identified for improvement, high-poverty schools, and high-minority schools were more likely to report needing technical assistance to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers than were other schools, (Birman et al 2006).

Another effect seen by surveyed teachers, and the only effect directly caused by NCLB, is change in, or elimination of, teaching assignments, particularly because of the 'highly



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qualified' specification. Some teachers wrote that they have had to make choices in what they can, or will, teach. Sometimes the change has been forced upon teachers, (Krumenaker, 2009). Teachers are not happy when they are told what to teach, how to teach it and when to teach it; therefore it impacts the happiness of teachers and creates a high attrition rate. The "highly qualified teacher" requirement of No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (2002) has put significant pressure on school districts to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers; however, some districts are more hard pressed than others to meet this requirement due to geographic, demographic, and field specialization factors,(Mollenkopf, 2009). For example, in some areas it may be harder to find highly qualified special needs teachers and there may be a surplus of highly qualified general education teachers. The percentage of teachers who were not highly qualified under NCLB was higher for special education teachers and middle school teachers, as well as for teachers in high-poverty and high-minority schools. Moreover, even among teachers who were considered highly qualified, teachers in high-poverty schools had less experience and were less likely to have a degree in the subject they taught than teachers in more affluent schools, (Birman et al 2006).

### Teacher Evaluations and Yearly Progress

As a result of No Child Left Behind's demand for highly qualified teachers in every classroom, teacher evaluation became a policy target in the states. The National Governors Association targeted evaluation as a tool for instructional improvement, (Hazi et al 2009). Many teachers do not agree with the yearly testing standards in place to decide what the students learned and how well they learned it. It unfairly categorizes teachers as not doing a good job when the realities may be that some children in the class have learning disabilities or do not speak English as their first language. As educational leaders continue to struggle with the

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"Highly Qualified Teacher" mandate of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation, many are turning to co-teaching models that are designed to incorporate regular education and special education teachers into the same classroom to deliver instruction, (Nichols et al, 2010). Teacher evaluations are being used unfairly, as Hazi et al 2009 research shows that once teachers are tenured they are evaluated less frequently than once per year. Tenure should have no bearing on the frequency of evaluations; all teachers should be tested equally.

The Act's key tenets promised improved student learning and professional development for teachers, but changes in national priorities have prevented congress from meeting state requests for assistance. Schools are struggling with federal mandates for Adequate Yearly Progress. School districts are trying to comply with the Act's tenets, but inadequate funding for programs and heavy emphases on high-stakes testing are causing financial difficulties and resistance to full implementation, (Gray, 2006). Previous to NCLB students with disabilities were not held accountable and were not expected to be tested by state programs. However the NCLB holds every student accountable and IDEA's 1977 preamble states that research has shown that education of students with disabilities can be made more effective by having high expectations of those students. Although the claim that teacher expectancies can raise student intelligence had been effectively rebuked, most critics have expressed the belief, supported by research, that expectancy effects do influence teacher-to-student performance and behavior, (Byrnes, 2009). Students should absolutely demonstrate their knowledge no matter the cognitive disability; research has shown that testing a student helps them retain information. Although some students may not have the abilities that other students do, not holding them accountable is not the answer. Not only do low expectations have a negative effect on these students, but so do the lack of responsibility.

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Based on their nation-wide survey of teachers, Abrams et al. (2003) found that high stakes, state-mandated testing may lead to instructional practice that is not aligned with teachers' beliefs about best practices. Teachers also reported that in this era of high-stakes testing, they often teach to the test and feel compelled to spend valuable instructional time preparing students for testing, (Dever, Carlston, 2009). The NCLB Act holds schools accountable for teaching and learning through extensive testing and calls for annual reading and mathematics examinations for all students by 2005-2006 in grades 3-8 and at least once in grades 10-12. Results must prove that students are making AYP, which means mastering material and improving their scores each year. After a base line for test results is established, schools are expected to comply with NCLB's annual assessments beginning in 2005-2006. Data will be disaggregated by poverty level, race, gender, ethnicity, migrant status, disability, limited English proficiency, and reported for each school and sub-group, (Gray, 2006).

### Achievements from NCLB

Consistent with the findings of the study done by the International Reading Association (2005), teachers in this study agreed with the basic premise of NCLB. They noted that increased attention to reading and additional resources (e.g., professional develop opportunities, reading coaches) for reading instruction were positive outcomes of the legislation, (Dever, Carlston, 2009). Teachers are seeing benefits from the NCLB and not always immediately (like 1st or 2nd grade), but certainly in the grades where reading comprehension is essential (such as 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>). NCLB has made leaps and bounds in terms of creating more attention towards reading and literacy in schools, and this is the basis for learning all other subjects and should be at the forefront of educational priorities. It can be assumed as unarguable that highly qualified teachers are superior to those who are less well qualified, (Miller et al 2006).

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A Comprehensive School Reform model helped schools prepare for NCLB implementation through its comprehensive approach to staff development and parental involvement, and thus the experience with comprehensive school reform provided a firm foundation for NCLB, (Evans et al 2005). By creating a new program to prepare for all of the NCLB's mandates, many schools have found better ways to model their schools and create better student achievement. So although, NCLB may not directly have made the school better, preparing for it and realizing the basic important components have helped guide schools to excellence. One example given is that of Astronomy, it's a science class heavily based on math and reading; however there is no exam to deem a teacher highly certified in the subject of Astronomy. These teachers are stuck, and until NCLB makes more definitive regulations, these teachers will continue to teach the subject without being highly qualified, although many teachers have a Master's in the subject area. The only major direct effect appears to be that of meeting the 'highly qualified' status, which is difficult to achieve because no state offers teaching certification in astronomy. A few other teachers have allowed NCLB to positively, directly affect their classes by incorporating more math and literacy exercises than before, (Krumenaker, 2009). Although, not able to be reach the highly qualified status because of technicalities, some of the Astronomy teachers have been able to use NCLB affectively to incorporate more math and literacy activities within the subject of Astronomy.

### Difficulties with NCLB

Teachers felt they lacked autonomy as decision makers in their classrooms. One issue for teachers was the fact that districts were mandating particular instructional programs and in some

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cases, mandating the amount of time spent on those programs, (Dever, Carlston, 2009). Teaching a classroom full of diverse students is a task in itself, however when mandates occur and deem the teacher's time and authority are void, children receive a lesser education. A teacher knows best for his or her students and where each student needs help, however following a mandate helps only the record books, not students. Teachers should be able to decide how much time is spent on a certain subject and if a student needs extra time or help, a teacher should be able to give it to the student. Several teachers commented about the challenges of helping English Language Learners achieve grade level reading skills. They realized that while it would be laudable to accomplish that, it was not realistic. One teacher commented: I think it is frustrating taking the ESL endorsement and the whole time you are just taught so much about those children and how there's a five to seven year period of time before you can expect them to assimilate into the culture and adopt the academic language. . . They're telling us about the seven years and yet something like this comes out and we're supposed to pull miracles, (Dever, Carlston, 2009).

Teachers also had concerns related to meeting the needs of children. They noted the fact that children come to school with differences that impact their learning. In the words of one teacher, "What the federal government doesn't take into account is that all children learn differently and at different rates." She suggested that the impact of NCLB is becoming a "civil rights issue. We're leaving children behind who are ethnic minorities because the federal government is not recognizing differences and is using tests that do not recognize differences," (Dever, Carlston, 2009). Teachers felt that achieving grade level expectations for other children with special needs was unrealistic too, but they felt tremendous pressure to achieve that goal. One commented, "Responsibility is put totally on us as teachers, where maybe there is some other learning disability or something like that, that is keeping children from succeeding,"

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(Dever, Carlston, 2009). Special educators teach high risk children and, ironically, have become a high risk group themselves. They are prone to low job satisfaction, low self-efficacy, as well as increased stress and burnout. The attrition rate of special educators is particularly high, contributing to an overall shortage of qualified teachers throughout the United States, (Emery, 2010). Another downfall of the NCLB program is that it fails its special education teachers, which in turn fails its special needs students by requiring highly qualified status of what may be great special needs teachers. The additional legal requirements for highly qualified teacher status, particularly in relation to subject area competency, may exacerbate an already acknowledged teacher shortage, (Quigney, 2010). Teacher shortages seem to be a regional issues and contrary to the former statement: The percentage of special education teachers who reported they were highly qualified increased from 52 percent in 2004–05 to 72 percent in 2006–07, (Birman et al 2006).

Another facet of the highly qualified mandate of NCLB requires that counselors meet these standards also. Counselors have a tremendous responsibility to their students and staff members in addition to countless hours of paperwork to document students' needs. To meet NCLB requirements, some school counselors now perform additional roles: they must account for student success rates, attendance rates, and increase their testing duties and academic focus, while at the same time they are not seen as integral parts of the educational system, (Sabens et al 2009). This is a major defeat for NCLB because one of their most dependable resources for supporting teacher's duties and students' academic success is not even seen as a fundamental part of the school system.

Some opponents of the NCLB feel that is a measure to improve education levels in low-income areas. In the past, low income communities did not have great teachers in their schools

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and therefore the education quality they received was mediocre at best. NCLB acts as an anti-poverty program because it is based on an implicit assumption that increased educational achievement is the route out of poverty for low income families and individuals, (Anyon et al 2007). This is seen as a downfall of the program through the eyes of some in low-income neighborhoods; although NCLB has been found in many cases to improve education status of these students.

NCLB was designed to move public education in a different direction, but President Bush's budget proposals since 2002 reflect competition among national priorities. Funds that might have bolstered NCLB have been diverted to military programs, tax cuts, and other initiatives. Education Week reported in January, 2004, that state and local governments, struggling with increases in inflation and student enrollments, have not received financial assistance the Act should have provided, (Gray, 2006). With more fiscal and financial problems than ever before our country cannot afford all the programs and promises afforded to each program, such as NCLB. However no mandates or regulations have been altered in light of the funding deficit, how can the federal and state government have expectations of teachers and school systems without a means to afford it?

### Conclusion

The goal of NCLB was to give equal education to all students, no matter their educational category, as well as provide teachers with more education and credentials, in an effort to improve our education system. In addition to mandating a basic level of qualifications for teachers of core academic subjects in all schools, NCLB has required states to develop and implement equity plans to eliminate differences in the distribution of non-highly qualified, inexperienced, and out-

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of-field teachers across districts and schools, (DeAngelis et al 2011). When core teaching assignments are broken down by location in the state of New York, 97.1 percent of rural assignments are filled by highly qualified teachers, (Brackett et al, 2008). Likewise, the majority of the United States' teachers are considered highly qualified; this status has helped our educational system and its students to reach higher standards set by federal and state regulations. It is the position of this literature research to determine that since the enactment of the NCLB law that teachers are more qualified due to the regulations and standards set forth to accomplish this very goal.

Although there are many complaints, downfalls, and funding issues with the NCLB law, it has improved math and reading scores on a nationwide average. No system or program is faultless while attempting to be used efficiently for all schools, teachers, and students. This research has proven that while NCLB is not perfect, it does help raise literacy rates which are the basis for all other education subjects. Other than major funding issues for the teacher enrichment programs laid out by the NCLB law, more qualified teachers are being hired and retained in a school system. The testing methods used to determine the yearly progress of students is not enjoyed by students or teachers but is necessary to deem whether any progress has been made from year to year. Many teachers oppose the tests and do not find them helpful for instructors or student's academic success. This research has found that the NCLB law has helped teachers receive more education in their subject area that their content area exams rendered better scores after the law's enactment, and that teachers with more education can teach students with a solid background in the subject. The rise of highly qualified status teachers across the country had helped in the areas of reading, math, English as a Second Language, and special needs classrooms. Without NCLB our teachers would have less education and perhaps less regulation



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in America's education system; with many opponents of federal rules in local education, this is one that all can agree is better for each and every one of our children.

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