

Revising State Highly Qualified Teacher Plans— Answers to Commonly Asked Questions

Prepared by the U.S. Department of Education and the
National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality

The following questions were generated before and during the *Innovative Ideas and Practical Suggestions for Improving the State Highly Qualified Teacher Plans* webcast held September 7, 2006, sponsored by the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality (NCCTQ) and the U.S. Department of Education. Staff at the U.S. Department of Education provided answers to these commonly asked questions.

Equitable Distribution

What elements must be addressed in a comprehensive plan for the equitable distribution of teachers?

- *An analysis of the state's current situation in regard to teacher distribution.* The analysis must address both teachers' experience and highly qualified status. If data is not currently available, there should be a plan for collecting it.
- *Strategies for addressing the inequities revealed by the data.* These strategies must be aligned with the data.
- *Some evidence that the proposed strategies have a reasonable expectation for success.* This would include tracking of the data to see whether or not the strategies are successful.
- *Evidence that the state will include the equitable distribution of teachers in its monitoring of local education agencies (LEAs).*

What if states have limited or no data on teacher experience?

If data is not currently available, there should be a plan for collecting it. Simply ignoring the issue will not help.

What is the research base on teacher experience and student achievement outcomes?

The National Science Foundation's study *Science and Engineering Indicators* includes references to several studies on this issue. Visit the [Teacher Experience section](#) of Chapter 1.

How can SEAs be expected to ensure equitable distribution when LEAs have hiring authority?

While LEAs have hiring and assignment authority, state education agencies (SEAs) can enact statewide policies and strategies (e.g., incentives, loan forgiveness, mentoring programs, efforts to improve working conditions in unattractive schools and districts, etc.) to encourage teachers to go to hard-to-staff schools. SEAs can also help the situation by collecting, tracking, and publicizing data on this issue, thus drawing public attention to the issue.

NCCTQ is a collaborative effort of Education Commission of the States, ETS, Learning Point Associates, and Vanderbilt University.

With regard to the provision of “ensuring that minority children have the same access to highly qualified teachers as all other children,” what does *minority* mean? That is, do we need to show that each racial/ethnic subgroup has equal access to highly qualified teachers (if so, the data requirements would be formidable), or just those schools with high-minority populations (if so, what percent of nonwhite students constitutes high minority)?

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act does not include a definition of *minority* or of a *high-minority* school or district. This may be because what some states might consider a high-minority district could look like a low-minority district in other more racially diverse states. Select a definition of high minority that makes sense for your state. Ranking schools in top and bottom quartiles for minority enrollment may be a reasonable way to approach this issue.

Beyond financial incentives, what are some innovative (and acceptable) strategies to attract teachers to high-poverty, low-performing schools?

Some states target loan forgiveness or incentive pay to teachers willing to teach in rural or urban schools. Other states offer special preparation programs so that teachers can learn the skills required to teach in high-need schools or in difficult urban environments. Other activities focus on the environment of difficult-to-staff schools, which often have serious issues with safety and a deteriorated physical plant. Addressing these problems can help, as can programs that provide intensive induction and mentoring for new teachers in difficult environments.

For the equitable distribution portion, can developing a plan to make a plan (convening the appropriate stakeholders, gathering the necessary data, etc.) satisfy the requirement?

States should already have data to address some parts of the equitable distribution plan (highly qualified teacher [HQT] percentages, for instance), but they may need additional time in other areas. In such cases, having a plan that is in an early phase is appropriate, but keep in mind that progress is expected in this area. Be sure that you include timelines indicating that the state is working aggressively on this issue and that progress will be tracked.

Data Collection and Analysis

When analyzing adequate yearly progress (AYP) and HQT data, what years are we expected to use? For the July 7 submission, we used 2004–05 data, but now we have some initial 2005–06 data. Must we update?

The Education Department (ED) knows that states collect data at different times. We expect states to use the most current data they have available. If you now have more recent data that would change your proposed strategies, you should use it to the extent possible. There is little point in sticking with a plan that doesn’t reflect or align well with the data you now have.

What are ED’s expectations for the state monitoring its plan’s implementation, including data updates? Which states have effective monitoring tools and processes to ensure that LEAs are making progress toward their HQT goals?

The department always expects that states will monitor LEA program activities and progress—such grantee monitoring is required by Education Department General Administrative Regulations. SEAs have responsibility to collect and track HQT progress in districts, and §2141 of the law delineates the SEA’s accountability requirements related to the failure to make the

combination of HQT and AYP. As of now, all districts must have 100 percent of their classes taught by highly qualified teachers as their goal, and the state is obliged to track when this does not occur. Among the states that appear to have effective monitoring tools, you may be interested in reviewing the strategies used in Alabama, West Virginia, and Ohio.

How are states collecting, analyzing, and reporting special education teacher data? What are the testing options for special education teachers?

From an HQT perspective, NCLB requirements are focused on collecting data on the qualifications of the teachers of core academic subject classes. If core academic subjects are taught in special education classes, they must be included in the overall class counts on the Consolidated State Program Report (CSPR). If these classes are strictly special education and not core academic subjects, they should not be included in the CSPR data. However, some states do collect this data to check on HQT status, as required by the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), for special education teachers who do not teach core subjects.

States test special education teachers in a variety of ways. In many cases, special education certification requires candidates to pass a special-education-related test, but these tests do not cover core academic subject content. As a consequence, special education teachers who are responsible for teaching core content must also take core content tests or demonstrate subject-matter competency in one of the other ways allowable under NCLB guidelines.

What is an acceptable approach for collecting and reporting data on last-minute hires, for example, for teachers who may have taken a break from teaching over the last few years, for private school teachers, or for teachers moving from other states?

Most states report data based on a snapshot, taken on a given date, of all core academic subject classes. Last-minute hires are likely to be included in this snapshot (often taken in October), but midyear hires may not be included. Nevertheless, any teachers who are not highly qualified must receive support to become HQT as soon as possible so that the next data collection will not show their classes as being taught by non-HQ teachers. These teachers—who may need to complete the high objective uniform state standard of evaluation (HOUSSE), if appropriate, or pass a test in order to be highly qualified—cannot be counted as HQ until those actions are completed in a way that satisfies state procedures and NCLB requirements.

How much detail should be provided regarding data collection and analysis procedures? How much data must be presented to effectively support the proposed strategies in the plan?

Simply stating a conclusion is not enough. You must include enough information so that the reviewers can see that the conclusions reached by the analysis are accurate. Most states that did well on data analysis included charts, either in the text of the plan or in appendixes, with full data or at least summary data. Some discussion of the process by which the analysis was done is also helpful. Basically, you need to show enough of your work so that the reader can see that the arrived-at conclusion is a legitimate one.

High Objective Uniform State Standard of Evaluation

What are acceptable conditions for continuing to use HOUSSE after this year? Will we be receiving revised guidance?

The secretary's letter of September 5 should be construed as the current guidance on HOUSSE. We strongly encourage states to phase out the use of HOUSSE except for those situations described in the letter. In their plans, states should honestly address when and for which situations they will no longer need HOUSSE, and how often and with which groups of teachers they anticipate continuing to use HOUSSE. The department is working on a revision of the HQT guidance, both to express current policy in regard to HOUSSE and to address the fact that the NCLB HQT deadline has now passed.

If HOUSSE is codified in the NCLB law, how can ED phase it out?

The secretary's letter encourages states to phase out HOUSSE because it is not a strong measure of teacher content knowledge and, as such, is unlikely to help states get to the larger goal of having all students achieving at grade level by 2014. ED will work with Congress to address our concerns with HOUSSE through the reauthorization process.

Our LEAs don't report their HOUSSE data until this fall. Do we base our report on the HQT data we have, or do we wait to revise when we have it?

Use the data you have, but it would be useful if you described what you intend to do with the updated data when you receive it. Timelines for data reception and for completion of data analysis are useful.

General

Are the outlying territories required to submit a revised state plan? Do they have the same requirements as the states?

Any territory that accepts Title I and II funds is required to meet the HQT requirements and to submit a plan. Although the territories that consolidate all funds under Title V are encouraged to meet HQT goals, they are not required to do so, nor have they been asked to submit plans.

However, any entity that uses Title V funds for class-size reduction must still ensure that only highly qualified teachers are hired for that purpose.

Concerning the format of plans, is it acceptable if we simply list the requirements, responding to them one by one (while incorporating the reviewer comments), in a question-and-answer format?

Yes, but this is not required.

How, specifically, are we to use the examples of the accepted plans to revise our own?

ED offers these examples as models of plans that peer reviewers have responded to positively. While we certainly don't anticipate strategies that seem appropriate for a state whose plan was accepted to be also appropriate for everyone else, these accepted plans do contain examples of effective strategies that may be of interest to other states. These plans are also, in general,

examples of effective formatting and writing strategies that are clear and transparent to outside observers.

How can we effectively manage the natural fluctuation in teacher supply and demand, and still maintain the 100 percent target, especially in subjects that continue to be critical shortage areas? What are some specific strategies we can employ?

Fluctuations always occur, making 100 percent HQT difficult both to achieve and to maintain. However, if states analyze their data carefully, they may be able to detect patterns or trends that will affect HQT in the future. For example, what is the age of the teaching population? Are large numbers of teachers expected to retire in the near future? If so, what strategies can the state adopt now to anticipate future shortages? Does the state have chronic shortages of special education teachers? If so, what can the state do to attract more teachers to this field? Is the demographic of students in the state changing (a steady increase in English language learners, for example)? What strategies can the state adopt now to address these future needs? One effective strategy that states can employ is to use strategic planning procedures that continually look at both short- and long-term needs in order to address them before they reach crisis level.

What are the sanctions if we do not reach the 100 percent mark, even if we are making a good-faith effort?

ED reserves the right to apply the usual range of sanctions (grant conditions, high-risk status, compliance agreements, withholding of funds), as appropriate, if states are not in compliance.

Is there a possibility for an extension on the September 29 deadline?

No. This plan is supposed to cover the current school year. Extending the deadline will not allow the state to carry out the plan in a timely manner.