

NCLB'S "HIGHLY QUALIFIED TEACHER" REQUIREMENT by The Principals' Center's Critical Issues Committee

During the past school year, the Principals' Center's Critical Issues Committee has focused on the myriad of issues associated with the "highly qualified teacher" provision of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Our primary interest in doing this is to support teaching and learning and having an excellent teacher in every classroom in Connecticut. The Highly Qualified provision of NCLB does nothing in and of itself to improve teaching and learning. While effective teachers need a basic knowledge of content, more importantly they need a range of strategies for teaching content to a diverse group of learners. At the elementary level the emphasis is wrongly placed on content when the need is for better pedagogy to reach all children. With regard to special education teachers affected by the law, there is also a greater need for emphasis on pedagogy over content. The teachers affected by this provision have already demonstrated sufficient knowledge of content through the evaluation process. The committee is pleased with the response of the Connecticut State Department of Education to the "highly qualified" requirement of NCLB. What follows is a summary of this response:

Beginning in school year 2006-2007, all public school teachers teaching a core academic subject area must be "highly qualified." As defined in the *No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)*, core academic subjects include English; Reading/language arts; Civics and Government; History; Geography; Economics; Mathematics; Science; The Arts (music, fine arts, dance and theater); and World Languages.

To be considered "highly qualified," individuals who are *currently employed* must:

1. Hold full state certification; and
2. Hold a bachelor's degree; and
3. Demonstrate competency in the core academic subject area(s) they teach using one of the following four methods:
 - Hold a major in the core academic subject area(s) that they teach; or
 - Hold a master's degree in the core academic subject area(s) they teach; or
 - Has successfully completed the Praxis II exam in the core academic subject area(s) that they teach; or
 - Has successfully demonstrated competency in the core academic subject area(s) using the district's High Objective Uniform State Standard of Evaluation (HOUSSE).

The recently reauthorized IDEA law included special education teachers as teachers of core academic content. They, too, must demonstrate competency in the core academic subjects that they teach to one or more students. Special education teachers who teach one or more core academic subject area(s) who have not successfully passed the CONNECT or Praxis II exam in each of the content areas they teach, must demonstrate competency in the core academic subject area(s) that they teach through one of the three remaining options provided under NCLB (e.g. hold a major in the core academic subject area(s), hold a master's degree in the core academic subject area(s) or demonstrate competency through the district's HOUSSE process).

To be determined "highly qualified," a teacher must use the HOUSSE plan if he/she has not passed a state subject matter test, or holds an undergraduate or graduate major (or its equivalent), or holds advanced certification (e.g. National Board Certification) in all of the core academic content area(s) that he/she teaches. **Because each district's teacher evaluation and professional development guidelines: (1) were reviewed and critiqued using the State Department's Peer Review process; and (2) includes subject matter knowledge assessment, Connecticut's teacher evaluation plans have been approved by the U.S. Department of Education as Connecticut's official HOUSSE plan.** To ensure that this statewide plan is standardized across districts throughout the state, it is critical that individual districts evaluate a teacher's subject matter competency in the core academic content area(s), based upon the *Common Core of Teaching (CCT)*, using both the foundational skills and competencies and the discipline-based professional standards.

Teachers Hired Prior to July 1, 2006

The CSDE provides the following guidance concerning the implementation of the HOUSSE plan, otherwise known as the district's teacher evaluation plan:

- All teachers who need to use the HOUSSE plan to be considered "highly qualified" must be evaluated between January 2002 and June 30, 2006; the evaluation must involve the determination that a teacher is competent in all of the core academic content area(s) that he/she is presently teaching. Evaluators should use the national and state discipline specific curriculum standards (and accompanying support materials) and the CCT foundational skills and competencies.
The district has an obligation to evaluate all teachers to which this requirement applies between January 2002 and June 30, 2006.
- The written evaluation must specifically identify that an individual has been determined to be "highly qualified" in specified core academic content area(s) which they teach. This determination of "highly qualified" must be portable; an individual teacher's evaluation must be made available to be taken to another district as demonstration of his/her achieved "highly qualified" status. It is recommended that, as part of the evaluation, a certificate indicating the individual's "highly qualified" status be produced, signed by the evaluator, placed in the teacher's employment file, and a copy given to the individual being evaluated. It is the decision of the receiving district to accept or reject the sending district's determination of "highly qualified."
- Evaluations must be conducted by persons appropriately qualified to conduct them (holders of the #092 – Intermediate Administrators certificate). It is recommended that elementary teachers be evaluated by an elementary principal with knowledge in elementary curricula. It is recommended that middle school and high school teachers be evaluated by an administrator with subject matter knowledge in the core academic content areas they are evaluating; OR by a collaborative team made up of: (1) department chairs "highly qualified" in each of the core academic content areas the teacher is teaching; and (2) an appropriate administrator.

Teachers Hired On or After July 1, 2006

All teachers hired on or after July 1, 2006, must be "highly qualified" in the content area(s) they will teach prior to being hired. Therefore, they must: (1) hold an undergraduate or graduate major in the core academic content area(s) they are being hired to teach; OR (2) have a master's degree or an advanced certification (such as National Board Certification) in one or more of the core academic content area(s) they will teach; OR (3) have successfully passed a state standardized content knowledge test in the core academic content area(s); OR (4) have previously been determined "highly qualified" via the sending district's HOUSSE plan.

IDEA has provided some flexibility for special education teachers hired subsequent to July 1, 2006. In order to hire a special education teacher who will be a primary teacher of core academic content knowledge either in a resource room or self-contained classroom, that person must be "highly qualified" in one of following core academic content areas prior to being hired: reading/language arts/English, mathematics or science. Special education teachers then have up to two years to become "highly qualified" in the additional core academic subjects they will be teaching; districts may choose to use the district's HOUSSE process for special education teachers to become "highly qualified" in additional content areas.