

## NCLB'S "HIGHLY QUALIFIED TEACHER" REQUIREMENT

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;  | World Languages;       |
| Reading/language arts;                          | Civics and Government; |
| Science;  | History;               |
| Mathematics;                                    | Geography; and         |
| The arts (music, fine arts, dance and theater); | Economics.             |

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:
  - Holds a major in the core academic subject area(s) that they teach; or
  - Holds a master's degree in the core academic subject area(s) that 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, 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).

### **Highly Qualified Teachers – Issues at the Middle Level**

#### **The Problem:**

Anachronistic certification ranges have been an obstacle to assigning teachers at middle school level. Most teachers hold either a K-6 or 7-12 certificate, unless they are in one of the few fields that offers K-12 certification (e.g., art, music, special education, physical education). The ranges of these certificates reflect the organization of public schools in

the 1950s—K-6 elementary schools / 7-8 or 7-9 junior high schools / 9-12 or 10-12 high schools. These certificates worked in an era when there was a widely observed transition following Grade 6.

Most districts now have middle schools that include Grades 6, 7 and 8. Many include Grade 5. Given the certification “divide,” staffing a middle school is a challenge. In a school that comprises Grades five through eight, the academic staff is likely to be split into two groups by their certification areas. Grade 5 and 6 teachers hold elementary (K-6) certificates, while Grade 7 and 8 teachers of academic subjects must hold a certificate appropriate for the subject(s) they teach. While Grade 5 and 6 teachers may teach any academic subject with their generalist certificate, in Grades 7 and 8, a teacher usually must have a different certificate for each subject taught (math, English, science, social studies). Certification has not mirrored the development and staffing of middle schools.

This division of staff members at Grades 6-7 overrides a principal’s judgment and can result in staffing assignments that are made to suit the constraints of the law instead of the needs of children. In the worst case, it could cost an experienced teacher a job for which an inexperienced teacher has the correct certificate for that year’s opening. On a middle school staff, there might be only one or two teachers holding a 7-12 certificate for social studies or science or math. If one of those teachers needs a leave of absence of over 40 days, a narrowly certified teacher must be found to fill the position. The chances of finding such a narrowly certified teacher who is also qualified for middle school is unlikely.

The distinction between the two levels of certificates is most apparent when a middle school position is posted. If the position is for a position in Grades 5 or 6, there will usually be dozens of applicants. The position is available to the whole range of teachers who hold a K-6 certificate. A hiring committee can be selective with such a pool. On the other hand, when a Grade 7 or 8 position is posted, there is usually only a handful of applicants. Most teachers who hold a 7-12 certificate are truly interested in teaching high school. A hiring committee must often settle for one of the handful of applicants or re-post the position in the hopes of garnering a few more applications.

Now the designation of “highly qualified teacher” imposes an additional set of constraints on the assignment of staff members. The law’s intent is laudable; who would argue for less qualified teachers. In practice however, it further constrains a principal from exercising professional judgment when assigning teachers.

While the law intends to ensure for every classroom a teacher who is well-trained in a course’s content, it can have these unintended consequences:

- Dissuading secondary subject matter specialists from applying for a middle school position (because the same certificate qualifies the teacher for a greater number of positions, should enrollments decline)
- Forcing a principal’s hand in assigning staff based solely on narrow certificate areas. (Sometimes a principal would judge an experienced 7<sup>th</sup> grade teacher as a better match for a group of students, considering teaching qualities not

accounted for in a subject area certificate. In staffing a sixth grade position, a principal could make such a judgment; in Grade 7 all of the other elements of good teaching—establishing rapport, understanding individuals' needs, etc.—drop out of consideration. A principal might have to hire an inexperienced—but certificated teacher—rather than assigning the best qualified teacher to a class of students.

To summarize . . . .

- There is a growing shortage of certified and qualified middle level teachers. According to *“Statistics on Teacher Preparation in Connecticut, 2001-2002”* published by the Connecticut Department of Higher Education, only 3%, 89 of the 3,330 newly trained teachers in Connecticut were certified for middle grades. In a comparable period, 213 teachers entered the profession through the alternative route.
- Teaching teams, an underpinning of middle level education, are endangered as the number of teachers with multiple endorsements declines.
- Principals are having an increasingly difficult time staffing middle schools with teachers with knowledge of young adolescent attributes and needs.
- It is often more difficult for a certified middle level educator to obtain an additional endorsement than for a non-certified individual to gain certification through the ARC Program.
- “Although the number of educators receiving new certificates is larger than the number of teachers retiring, the teachers are not often certified in the subject areas of need. Of newly certified educators, in 2001-2001, approximately 34% were in elementary education, which is currently not a shortage area.”
- No Child Left Behind Legislation makes it imperative that certified and qualified teachers are available in every classroom

### **Solutions:**

1. *Amend certification Regulation 10-145d-428 (Cross Endorsements) to allow certified teachers or those holding a certificate of eligibility for a middle level subject to obtain an additional endorsement for a middle level subject upon successful completion of the appropriate Praxis II Exam.*

Rationale: At the heart of middle level best practices are “small communities of learners.” The literature indicates that this practice promotes

- School safety
- Positive relationships with knowledgeable, caring adults for each middle school child
- Whole child experiences
- Interdisciplinary and integrative curricula opportunities
- Teachers who are expert in teaching emerging adolescents.

Small communities of teachers and learners depend on a preponderance of multi-certified middle school teachers.

Anticipated Outcomes: Allowing certified middle school teachers to obtain an additional endorsement by passing the Praxis II will

- Maintain high standards of scholarship for entry into the profession as well as for cross endorsements
- Relieve the growing shortage of qualified teachers at the middle level
- Promote dual certification among those who have already been trained in middle school methods and pedagogy
- Provide principals the flexibility to assign teachers to grade levels and teams based on their overall strengths as well as their subject area specialty
- Target teachers who are already proficient in teaching and learning

*2. Amend Sec. 10-145d-428 (3) to allow certified teachers to obtain the training specific to middle level education methods and instruction through continuing education units as well as course work. These teachers will also need to demonstrate proficiency in content areas through course work or Praxis II.*

Rationale: The teacher shortage is not universal. There is currently a surplus of otherwise competent and qualified teachers who do not have credentials to teach in areas of shortage. Providing these teachers with an opportunity to retrain can relieve current and future teacher shortages.

Anticipated Outcomes: Allowing certified teachers to obtain middle school training through continuing education units will

- Maintain the high standards for subject specific certification while promoting cross endorsements for otherwise qualified teachers
- Provide flexibility for superintendents to effectively staff and manage school enrollment “bubbles” as they move through the grade levels
- Allow certified teachers to continue to work as they pursue additional endorsements (the Bureau of Certification could establish a minimum number of CEUs for a provisional endorsement with appropriate timelines for completion of all training)
- Promote teaching in areas of shortage among those in surplus areas who might otherwise leave the profession
- Create a pool of qualified, recognized middle level practitioners who can provide meaningful, practical, researched based training to candidates for middle level endorsement
- Provide easier access to the middle level endorsement to teachers who did student teaching at other levels

Through implementation of the aforementioned amendments to certification regulations, shortages in critical areas of middle level education can be significantly reduced, small communities of learners in middle schools can be maintained and principals and

superintendents can better utilize staff, all without compromising Connecticut's high standards for entry into the profession.

## **Highly Qualified Teacher – Issues with Veteran Teachers**

### **The Problem:**

The state of Connecticut has many certified elementary educators who began teaching prior to the inception of the Praxis Tests. At the middle and high school levels there are special education teachers who received certification prior to the inception of the current NCLB requirement for content knowledge in specific content areas. All of these teachers are mid-career or late career educators. The sudden introduction of a testing program or a requirement that the group return to school for coursework would likely, at best, be viewed as an unnecessary and burdensome requirement and, at worst, result in the premature departure of teachers.

These teachers are fully certified and have met recertification requirements including the accrual of CEUs. They have also met district requirements for continuing as a teacher under local (and state approved) evaluation programs. According to the Connecticut Competency Instrument, which has been a component of the state evaluation program planning framework, successful teachers have had to demonstrate content knowledge and accuracy in their teaching.

### **Solution:**

*Allow certified teachers in this situation who meet local criteria for possessing content knowledge in their area and who receive satisfactory evaluations from administrators with content expertise to qualify under the HOUSSE system.* Such teachers should not be burdened with additional testing or coursework in order to meet the highly qualified requirement of NCLB. If, on the other hand, a teacher does not demonstrate this knowledge as based on the evaluation of her/his supervisor, then that teacher would need to meet the current requirement in order to be deemed highly qualified.

Rationale: Our primary interest is to support teaching and learning and to have 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. Effective elementary teachers need a basic knowledge of content, but 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 if we are 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.

## **HQT - High Objective Uniform State Standard of Evaluation (HOUSSE) Plans**

Beginning in school year 2006-2007, all teachers teaching in public schools at the elementary, middle and high school levels (including special education teachers) must be determined to be “highly qualified.” To be determined to be “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. The recently reauthorized Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) includes special education teachers as teachers who must demonstrate competency, i.e. be highly qualified, in the core academic subjects that they teach.

**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:

- A. Foundational skills and competencies; and
- B. 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 (A & B at bottom of page 1).
  - 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.

### **Highly Qualified Teacher - Distance Learning**

#### **The Problem:**

Distance learning, defined as an arrangement in which the enrolled student and the teacher are in different locations, presents a unique set of problems in trying to insure that

every student is taught by a highly qualified teacher. In 2003, better than one third of the school districts in the country (5,500 out of 15,000+) reported students enrolled in distance courses, with about ten percent of the public schools involved. While most enrolled students are in high school, approximately one quarter are in ungraded, middle, and even elementary schools. State and national education officials predict these numbers will grow exponentially citing the availability of distance learning options facilitated by the internet, the increased popularity of college level AP courses (and the lack of resources of some schools and districts to provide them), increased numbers of students being home schooled, and an overall interest in expanding the menu of choices beyond local course catalogues.

The quality of distance learning options seems as varied as the quantity of choices, ranging from the Branson (CO) School On-Line to Michigan's Virtual High School. The former is a school district in a tiny town of about seventy residents located on the old Santa Fe Trail fifty miles from a store and gas station. Yet Branson enrolls thousands of Colorado's students and generates millions in revenue annually - and anyone in town who wants to teach a course on line is given the opportunity. The latter requires Michigan's school districts to contract for "seats" and provide in-house mentors and only employs state certified teachers. Branson is presently under investigation by the Colorado Department of Education while Virtual High School, Michigan has had state oversight from its inception.

### **Solutions:**

1. *Limit attendance to programs organized by institutions that are certified by regional accrediting associations.*

Rationale: Students, parents, community members, the school board, and colleges can depend with a degree of surety that the organizing institution has been reviewed and that it meets reasonable standards for an educational institution.

2. *Develop local review standards that must be applied to programs before credit is authorized and require highly qualified teachers as in-house mentors. Utilize local assessments (i.e. course final examinations) when distance courses are redundant of local offerings.*

Rationale: This process insures that the level of challenge, the expectations for students, and the degree to which they are fulfilled are consistent with local standards. It is analogous with the way most districts now organize independent study programs.



