

Policy Levers and Gaps in Addressing Availability, Recruitment, and Retention of Highly Qualified Teachers for Urban, At-Risk Schools

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Introduction

Since 2005, the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality has worked with regional comprehensive centers¹ and states to help them address the challenge of staffing every classroom with a highly qualified teacher. This issue is most common (and arguably most important) in at-risk and hard-to-staff areas where students need the best possible teachers to help them succeed and to help close the persistent achievement gaps in the nation. Through this work, there have been many opportunities for the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality to (1) develop an understanding of some of the nuances of the challenge of getting these teachers into the classrooms that need them the most and (2) provide technical assistance to support the development of targeted policies and programs for addressing that challenge.

A primary example of this work is the support that the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality offered to states and regional comprehensive centers in the summer and fall of 2006 when the vast majority of states needed to revise their state highly qualified teacher (HQT) plans to meet federal reporting requirements. In response to a federal mandate to have 100 percent of all teachers highly qualified and to resolve the inequitable distribution of teachers across schools and districts, states were required to submit plans that included detailed data about core academic courses *not* taught by highly qualified teachers as well as their plans for alleviating this problem. In addition, states were required to include an equity plan that specifically reported on:

“steps that the State educational agency will take to ensure that poor and minority children are not taught at higher rates than other children by inexperienced, unqualified, or out-of-field teachers, and the measures that the State educational agency will use to evaluate and publicly report the progress of the State educational agency with respect to such steps” (No Child Left Behind [NCLB] Act, 2002a, §1111(b)(8)(C)).

States found the equity plan to be the most challenging part of their overall HQT plans, and only six of the 52 states required to submit plans gained approval on this section during the initial review process. In response to this, the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality provided technical assistance to states that failed one or more sections of their original HQT plan and were required to revise and resubmit the plan. Because the teacher equitable distribution component presented such a challenge to states and because the National Comprehensive Center’s work focuses specifically on at-risk schools and students with special needs, much of the technical assistance offered to states centered on that particular component. By working closely with regional comprehensive centers and states on HQT plans, the National Comprehensive Center was able to (1) gain an understanding of some of the greatest challenges states face around teacher quality and equitable distribution of teachers across urban schools and districts and (2) determine potential solutions that reflect targeted, data-informed planning and strategic decision making when it comes to developing, implementing, or evaluating policies and programs.

¹ The U.S. Department of Education funds a network of 16 regional comprehensive assistance centers and five national content centers. The regional comprehensive centers were created to work with states and help low-performing schools and districts close achievement gaps and meet the goals of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act.

This paper begins with a short review of a well-known concept—the importance of staffing every classroom with a high-quality teacher. That review is followed by a discussion of some of the challenges that at-risk, hard-to-staff urban schools and classrooms encounter when trying to staff every classroom with a high-quality teacher. These challenges include issues around availability, recruitment, and retention of highly qualified teachers. Using National Comprehensive Center experiences working with states through the HQT plan process, the paper then provides a discussion of how states addressed these challenges in their equity plans. Last, the paper discusses areas that states should consider addressing through policy and practice in order to most effectively deal with their challenges.

Importance of Staffing Every Classroom With a Highly Qualified Teacher

Minority students are overrepresented in schools with the highest poverty rates (those with over 75 percent of the student body eligible for free and reduced-price lunch), and this representation increases for central city schools where over 60 percent of black and Hispanic students are enrolled in the highest poverty schools. The persistent achievement gaps still evident among racial and ethnic groups are evidence of the challenges these students face. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the achievement gaps between white and black students and white and Hispanic students in reading and mathematics have shown little change since the early 1990s (Snyder, Dillow, & Hoffman, 2007; Rooney et al., 2006).

These numbers are particularly unsettling considering that some of the necessary knowledge and tools to address these achievement gaps are already in place. Research consistently shows that having a high-quality teacher matters for student learning. The problem is that students in high-poverty, predominantly minority schools are far more likely to have teachers with less experience or more marginal qualifications than students attending low-poverty, predominantly nonminority schools, and this has been a persistent challenge. Furthermore, certain subject areas suffer from continuous teacher shortages and high teacher turnover. For 2006–07, the majority of states reported teacher shortage areas as follows (U.S. Department of Education, 2007):

- Instruction of exceptional student populations.
 - Forty-two states reported one or more special education course as a teacher-shortage-area subject.
- Science and mathematics (or science, technology, engineering, and mathematics [STEM]).
 - Thirty-four states reported mathematics at the middle and/or secondary level as a teacher-shortage-area subject.
 - Thirty-eight states reported science at the middle and/or secondary level as a teacher-shortage-area subject.

These shortages, coupled with high teacher turnover, perpetuate the presence of less experienced teachers in these courses.

While the easiest solution to closing the achievement gap would appear to be staffing every classroom with a high-quality teacher, there are challenges to achieving that goal. Regardless of these challenges, however, some states are making progress by critically examining their data to identify areas of need and then targeting resources and policymaking toward those specific areas. Let us first review some of the challenges.

Challenges of Staffing Every Classroom With a High-Quality Teacher

The National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality is dedicated to the belief that in order for school to have an impact on student learning, especially for students in at-risk schools, the education system as a whole needs to do a better job recruiting people into the teaching profession, particularly for mathematics and science; tapping pools of individuals who would be willing to be teachers and then distributing them equitably; recruiting current teachers to specific schools, areas, or classrooms that are in need of their experience and skills; and using resources wisely to retain teachers. All of these efforts, however, can be quite challenging, and the nuances of the challenge depend on the particular context. The following discussion highlights some of the challenges that states and districts encounter when addressing teacher availability, recruitment, and retention.

Availability of Highly Qualified Teachers

A fundamentally important question to consider in thinking about staffing every classroom with a high-quality teacher is whether there are enough good teachers available to make *any* solution successful. Nearly 10 years ago, William Hussar (1999) predicted we would need between 1.7 and 2.7 million new teachers by 2008–09 as a result of increased enrollment, teacher retirement, and teacher turnover. This shortage is especially the case for specific subject areas. Each year, for example, more than 13 percent of special educators leave the profession or transfer to general education; every four years, half of all special education teachers have departed (McLeskey, Tyler, & Flippin, 2003). Although it would be tempting to determine availability and appropriate solutions based on some assessment of the entire pool of teachers available, the situation is much more complex.

A variety of factors contribute to the difficulty of finding and keeping good teachers for at-risk and hard-to-staff urban schools. Ultimately, however, the problem is local and must be addressed based on local realities and locally appropriate solutions supported and empowered by quality state policy. One district may have a shortage of middle school science teachers while a neighboring district may have a shortage of high school music teachers. In some districts, teacher hiring takes place at the school level. As a result, it is possible that within a given district one school may have a full complement of highly qualified mathematics teachers while other schools in the district struggle to find any.

Many different factors might account for such disparities, and thus very different courses of action to address them might be called for. A state might have difficulty producing enough teachers in specific geographic areas and also may not be successful in luring enough teachers from elsewhere to fill the need. In addition, the challenge of availability of teachers must be set in an economic or workforce context. A significant science-related industry in one part of a state, for example, may lure prospective science teachers away from teaching in the area because of the opportunity to earn much higher salaries in the private sector. Finally, there is some evidence that teachers trained in traditional, university-based programs tend to teach within the geographic area in which they were prepared (Cornett, 2003). Districts with staffing challenges often are not located near institutions with teacher preparation programs. These realities point to the following important implications:

- Whether there is a sufficient number of well-qualified teachers available to address inequities in the distribution of teachers in a particular district depends on an array of factors, some national or regional and some statewide, and many have to do with policies and conditions in individual districts and schools.
- States and districts ultimately need to consider all factors that contribute to the problem and all strategies that could facilitate a solution. They should begin, however, by addressing localized factors for which they can implement targeted solutions.

Recruitment and Retention

In addition to the complicated notion that in some instances there are not enough good teachers to address problems related to staffing every classroom with a high-quality teacher, there is also the issue of actually being able to recruit and retain available teachers into specific schools and for particular subject areas. These schools are often at risk and located in places where teachers do not necessarily want to work or live. Comparatively few new teachers choose to teach in high-poverty, urban schools (Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002; Prince, 2003). Furthermore, the subject areas are often those in which a teacher could make a higher salary in a related, nonteaching position.

Certainly, there is much research on what kinds of schools most good teachers gravitate toward and what it would take to get them to work in an at-risk school or subject area instead. As with teacher availability issues, recruitment and retention issues must be addressed with an understanding of the local context. For example, some districts have problems with hiring late in the academic cycle. Levin and Quinn (2003) noted that because of hiring delays (e.g., not offering positions until July or August), urban districts often lose stronger applicants who have an earlier opportunity to accept positions in non-hard-to-staff schools, commonly in suburban districts. On the other hand, some districts may have a particularly effective human resources department with stellar recruitment and hiring practices that give them an important edge over neighboring districts. Teachers may be attracted to some schools in a district and avoid others, based on the reputations of the schools' leadership or learning environments.

In Hirsch's report (2006) on recruiting and retaining teachers in Alabama, survey responses from teachers showed school leadership to be one of the most important factors in whether or not a teacher remains in a school. Some districts have attempted teacher reassignment as a means to balance inequities among schools. A collective bargaining agreement in a particular district, however, may make it very difficult for the superintendent to reassign teachers in order to balance the quality of the teaching staff among the district's schools. Such an attempted reassignment might risk a backlash from parents in the district whose children may be benefiting from having the lion's share of the best teachers under the current arrangements. Furthermore, forced reassignment within a district may result in some teachers leaving the profession or may lower the morale of teachers who stay. Efforts to remediate inequities between districts may also be hindered by the fact that teacher compensation in one district may be substantially lower than compensation in neighboring districts, making it difficult for the district with lower pay to attract and retain good teachers.

States can benefit from an awareness of the types of challenges related to teacher availability, recruitment, and retention for their urban, hard-to-staff schools. A better understanding of the

factors involved in teachers' decisions and potential policy or practice barriers that may contribute to the challenge can allow states to target their efforts on areas in which they can affect change in ways most likely to succeed. This is precisely the type of information that should have, and in some cases did, inform states' HQT teacher plans and particularly the component on equitable teacher distribution.

State Highly Qualified Teacher Plans and Equitable Teacher Distribution

As discussed, in 2006 states were obligated by the U.S. Department of Education to submit their HQT plans. In these plans, states were required to report on core academic courses by highly qualified status of the teacher and to indicate how they would rectify the situation if there were core academic courses taught by nonhighly qualified teachers. In addition, states were required specifically to report on whether poor and minority children were more likely to be taught by inexperienced or less qualified teachers and how states would rectify the situation if it exists (NCLB Act, 2002a). To address the inequitable distribution of highly qualified teachers, states were advised to focus on targeted policies that would help schools with the greatest needs.

State-Identified Challenges

States were required to report inequities in teacher distribution for students in high-poverty and high-minority schools, which, in most states, are concentrated in urban areas. Several states specifically identified their urban districts or regions as those with the greatest percentage of core academic courses being taught by nonhighly qualified teachers. Furthermore, the vast majority of states reported that they continue to struggle with challenges of having a larger number of core academic courses taught by nonhighly qualified and inexperienced teachers in their high-poverty and high-minority schools as compared with other schools in the state. This challenge is particularly acute in secondary schools and likely reflects the fact that because more specialized subject matter expertise is required in high school, secondary school teachers are certified to teach a specific subject, which limits the flexibility of schools when it comes to teacher assignment.

The depth of analysis performed by the states—and their subsequent ability to fully understand the reasons for these inequities—differed dramatically, based on the availability and accessibility of teacher certification and employment data in each state. For strategies to be effective, they must be data driven and focused on identified causes of or factors contributing to inequitable teacher distribution. Therefore, the importance of creating and maintaining a quality data system cannot be overstated. Some states did not have data systems that allowed them to ascertain the highly qualified status of their teacher corps at the course level, leaving them able to report only the number or percentage of highly qualified teachers at the school level. Without adequate data, a state is unable to target its efforts and resources to a specific challenge, having instead to implement more general responses that may result in a reduced or slower effect on the areas of greatest concern.

An example of the importance of a robust data system can be seen in the analyses completed by Delaware. Overall, Delaware found discrepancies in the percentage of classes taught by highly qualified teachers, based on poverty and minority status in both elementary and secondary schools. In addition to noting general discrepancies *between* schools based on these characteristics, however, the Delaware data systems allow for analysis of data *within* a school to determine the likelihood of traditionally underserved student populations being assigned to classes with nonhighly qualified teachers. In other words, Delaware is able to determine if some classes have large concentrations of students from identified subgroups and if these classes are more likely to have nonhighly qualified or less experienced teachers (defined as having less than

four years teaching experience). The state found specific inequities based on this level of analysis, which enabled it to appropriately target its responses.

In general, inequities in teacher distribution result from the following challenges: teacher supply and availability, recruiting highly qualified teachers to at-risk schools and subject areas, retaining highly qualified teachers in at-risk schools, and a large percentage of potentially certified teachers teaching out-of-field or out of the subject in which they are highly qualified. Where states choose to focus their resources initially, however, should be informed by the specific challenges they have identified related to the equitable distribution of highly qualified teachers. Their efforts should be focused and resources should be dedicated in a manner whereby they are most likely to effect the greatest change.

State Responses to Equity Challenges

As mentioned, the vast majority of state plans identified areas of inequitable distribution of highly qualified teachers—a larger percentage of core academic courses being taught by nonhighly qualified teachers in schools designated as high poverty and/or high minority. Furthermore, the largest needs relative to subject area as reported by the states are in mathematics, science, foreign languages, and special education. The challenges of equity across schools generally revolve around supply, recruitment and assignment, and retention; therefore, most state plans include responses to those issue areas.

Supply

The most frequently cited efforts to increase supply were various forms of alternative certification programs. Several states also indicated policies—either already in effect or approved and being implemented—that allow retired teachers to return to the classroom to increase the availability of already experienced, highly qualified teachers for schools. Many states have focused efforts on increasing the supply of teachers in specific subject areas, most frequently mathematics and science, through targeted initiatives intended to entice college students with interests or majors in those fields into teacher preparation programs.

Recruitment and Assignment

State efforts around teacher recruitment and assignment generally addressed two separate challenges. First were efforts to get out-of-field teachers highly qualified in the content areas they are teaching. This usually involved targeted professional development designed so the teacher could pass the subject-area exam required by the state. The second challenge was recruiting already highly qualified teachers into at-risk schools. Efforts to address this challenge usually took the form of signing bonuses or other financial incentives such as housing allowances.

Retention

Retention of teachers in at-risk schools has received more attention in the research than other areas of challenge, and states have used this information in creating responses. Efforts aimed at retaining teachers in at-risk schools generally took the form of improving working conditions at

the school and implementing mentoring programs. Some states, South Carolina for example, overtly recognized the importance of leadership in at-risk schools by targeting efforts at improving leadership capacity at these schools.

Struggles in Responding to Equity Challenges

Notwithstanding the efforts noted, in analyzing state equity plans, it was clear that while many states have policies or programs intended to address issues of teacher availability, hiring, retention, and assignment, many of these efforts were discussed at the state level rather than being targeted toward the schools with the highest need and other locally specific conditions. Although there are concerns over parity for schools, states with authentic challenges in specific schools or types of schools should dedicate their efforts and resources toward these high-needs areas rather than potentially diffusing the effects of these efforts by spreading their resources too thin. In effect, the level of specificity of efforts to ameliorate the challenge of equitable teacher distribution emerged as a struggle during the analysis of states' HQT plans and how they address equity challenges. Another struggle that emerged was the balance between local control and state-level responsibility. These two struggles are discussed in more detail in the following paragraphs.

The Use of Targeted Efforts

Many states' plans included listings of teacher availability and supply, hiring and assignment, and recruitment and retention efforts already in place. Several of these efforts were undertaken at a statewide level rather than prioritizing the districts or schools with the greatest challenges. Two examples of states whose plans included interventions and efforts specifically targeted for urban, high-risk schools and districts are Connecticut and Missouri.

Connecticut. Through its data analysis, Connecticut identified inequitable distribution of experienced and qualified teachers between its high- and low-poverty and high- and low-minority schools. Over 80 percent of these schools are in the four largest urban districts in the state. These identified schools are to receive top priority for efforts aimed at increasing their numbers of experienced and qualified teachers. Connecticut will implement, or has implemented, various strategies. Examples are as follows:

- The state education agency (SEA) will work with schools to determine if any institutional practices or procedures exist at the local education agency (LEA) or SEA level that correlate with less experienced teachers being assigned to high-minority schools.
- The SEA approved the Yale Urban Teaching Initiative, a one-year advanced graduate program designed to improve the knowledge and skills of teachers in high-poverty, low-performing schools. Graduates of the program receive a master's degree in urban education studies and an initial educator license permitting them to teach Grades 7–12. They commit to teaching in a high-needs school district for three years. Success of the program, which began in 2006–07, will be measured through the retention and success of the graduates in urban settings.
- Overtly acknowledging the importance of leadership in schools, the Connecticut Accountability for Learning Initiative provides executive coaching to principals in the state's neediest schools. The program is designed to identify and implement leadership

practices proven to promote student success and create a school culture that attracts and retains effective teachers.

- Southern Connecticut State University received a grant from the SEA to work with paraprofessionals in the four largest urban centers. Through this program, paraprofessionals will earn their bachelor's degrees and become certified in special education. The funding supports travel for a university professor to go to the urban district where the paraprofessionals are working, child care for paraprofessionals' children, and the ability to offer the courses tuition free. The number of paraprofessionals completing their degrees in special education will determine program success.
- Retired teachers are allowed to teach in shortage areas for one school year without being subjected to the earning limit.
- The Teachers Mortgage Assistance Program is offered to certified teachers who are employed by and purchase their primary residence in a priority urban district. Success for this program is measured through teacher participation in it. Since its inception, the number of teachers using the program has grown from six in 2000 to 114 in 2005.
- The SEA provides targeted technical assistance to beginning teachers in the four largest urban districts to improve their instructional effectiveness in language arts and mathematics. As a result, larger numbers of teachers passed their induction portfolios, and larger numbers scored at the excellent level.

Missouri. Missouri identified the two urban districts of Kansas City and St. Louis as its primary focus for its equity plan because of the high percentage of poverty and minority enrollment these districts represent. Further, the state's analysis revealed that the highest number and percentage of nonhighly qualified teachers were in language arts, mathematics, and science. Examples of strategies outlined in the equity plan to address the challenges of the identified urban districts are as follows:

- Priority will be given to these two districts for Math and Science Partnership grants through which nonhighly qualified teachers will take courses at their local universities to enable them to obtain proper certification in mathematics and science.
- Online courses will be offered through public television stations in these two districts. The courses will be in language arts and mathematics. Credit for the courses will be available through local universities.
- Title II-A funds will be used to support individuals with teaching certificates to become fully certified in core content areas and individuals with substitute certificates to complete full certification.
- A mentoring program will be established in these two districts to mentor teachers with five years or less experience.

Local Control and State Responsibility

Several states overtly mentioned that the LEA has authority over teacher-employment-related policy and practice. The state, however, is held accountable for working with LEAs to successfully carry out the plan to meet the goal of having 100 percent of teachers highly qualified. Furthermore, states were asked to indicate specific steps they would take in monitoring

progress, providing technical assistance, and providing programs and services, as well as any corrective action that would be taken by the SEA if the LEAs were unsuccessful in meeting their HQT goals. Regardless of these requirements, some states did not clearly delineate their programs and processes around working with the LEAs, other than stating the SEA would “encourage” and “support” LEA efforts.

Part of the challenge in this area may lie in confusion around the purpose and function of quality state policy. Quality state policy should not be overly prescriptive as that may hinder rather than empower the systems it is designed to govern. It should set priorities for effort and resource allocation and establish parameters of authority and activity, clearly outlining stakeholder responsibilities. This sorting out of responsibility is of particular importance as state-level policies must be targeted at and implemented by LEAs. A state-level policy that is overly prescriptive may inadvertently hinder the ability of other involved agencies and organizations to reach their goals or serve their populations. By providing too little direction, however, a policy may not give a clear indication of priorities. In addition, state policy needs to be dynamic to reflect advances in knowledge and changes in context and culture.

Several states provided detailed descriptions of planned support from and interaction between the SEA and LEAs. One example of the dual roles of holding accountable and providing support with focused resources from the state to the LEA can be found in Louisiana’s state plan. The Louisiana Department of Education requires additional specificity from LEAs in how they will handle challenges related to equitable teacher distribution and provides funding for these efforts through the Local Teacher Quality Block Grant program. The primary funding priorities for this program are to increase the number of teachers with standard state certification and the number who meet HQT requirements. Only after the LEA provides evidence that these primary funding priorities have been addressed can it use this funding for other purposes. On-site visits are conducted to ensure the LEA is acting in accordance with the approved plan. In addition, the Louisiana SEA created regional certification counselors to provide more direct technical assistance to LEAs. These counselors are located in the Regional Education Service Centers in each geographical region of the state. The overarching purpose of the counselors is to provide assistance to districts and to individual teachers to earn standard state certification and highly qualified status. The counselors also provide assistance to LEAs in their efforts around equitable teacher distribution. The Louisiana Department of Education also convenes regional and district outreach meetings to inform LEAs of state programs, resources, and requirements and provides additional technical assistance.

Another example can be found in Tennessee. The Tennessee SEA has already engaged in positive technical assistance for challenged LEAs. In its state equity plan, Tennessee identified six districts as having significant gaps in equitable teacher distribution between high- and low-poverty schools. The state outlined two primary strategies for assisting these LEAs. The first was continuous analysis and dissemination of informative data through the state’s website, webinars, and reports to the SEA. The second strategy was the provision of direct technical assistance on how best to address these inequities. In October 2007, the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality participated in a meeting of these six districts, SEA and other state personnel, and the Appalachian Regional Comprehensive Center to provide these LEAs with information on national strategies, up-to-date information on state initiatives and legislation that could be used to address their challenges, and opportunity to work together to create action plans and obtain direct and immediate feedback from state personnel on these plans.

The NCLB Act codifies the importance of finding a collaborative manner in which to address HQT goals. Section 2141 of the NCLB Act specifies consequences and required corrective action. If the SEA determines that an LEA has failed to make progress toward meeting its annual measurable objectives (AMOs), the LEA is required to develop an improvement plan that will enable the LEA to meet its AMOs and will address specifically the issues that prevented it from meeting those objectives. During the development of the improvement plan and throughout its implementation, the SEA is required to provide technical assistance to the LEA and the schools within it, as necessary. If an LEA fails to meet its targets for HQT staffing *and* adequate yearly progress (AYP) for three consecutive years, it must enter into an agreement with the SEA. The law mandates that Title I, Part A funds must be used to develop professional development strategies and activities to be used by LEAs. Further, upon reaching this point, these funds may no longer be used to hire or support paraprofessionals except under specific circumstances (NCLB Act, 2002b).

Consistency of State Efforts With Research of Effective Practices

Determining which efforts are likely to be most effective is hindered by the fact that outcomes data are frequently neither specified nor gathered upon implementation of a new policy or practice. For example, many states are implementing policies and opportunities to increase the number of students going into high-needs teacher subject areas and to train teachers for specific contexts (e.g., urban). As these programs progress and these teachers enter the workforce, quality data must be gathered to determine if the teachers remain in the field or settings for which they were prepared.

General research information on why teachers leave the profession can be used to suggest some courses of action. For example, research on teacher attrition indicates the clear importance of working conditions, as indicated by the following findings:

- Thirty-two percent of teachers in public schools moved to a new school because of dissatisfaction with workplace conditions, and the percentage increased based on experience, from 29 percent for teachers with one to three years of experience to 37 percent for teachers with at least 20 years of experience (Luekens, Lyter, & Fox, 2004)
- Thirty-eight percent of public school teachers moved to a new school because of dissatisfaction with support from administrators. This percentage also increased based on years of experience, from 33 percent for teachers with one to three years of experience to a stunning 54 percent for teachers with 20 or more years of experience (Luekens, Lyter, & Fox, 2004).
- When compared with educators reporting no desire to leave their schools, educators who indicate a desire to leave their schools in North Carolina, Arizona, and Kansas are three times less likely to report an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect and strong supportive leadership in their schools (Hirsch & Emerick, 2006; Hirsch & Emerick, 2007a; Hirsch & Emerick, 2007b).
- Results from surveys and focus groups of small groups of students in teacher preparation programs suggest that providing favorable working conditions, particularly principal support, may be more cost effective than offering higher beginning pay to bring new teachers into urban settings (Milanowski, Longwell-Grice, Saffold, Jones, Odden, & Schomisch, 2007).

These findings strongly indicate that investments in improving working conditions would be a valuable and effective strategy for both recruitment and retention. Many states include a stated intention to dedicate resources to improving working conditions. Several states, including Connecticut as outlined above, include an overt acknowledgement of the importance of school leadership in these efforts through dedication of resources to this end.

Many states include plans for targeted preparation programs either in specific subject areas or for the urban context. Because these are largely new efforts, it is not possible to draw conclusions as to the effectiveness of these efforts in the retention of teachers. While many alternative certification programs assert that they bring teachers into at-risk schools because it is a requirement of the program, it is less clear whether those teachers remain in the schools beyond their time of required service.

Offering financial incentives to attract teachers to urban and at-risk schools is another strategy used by many states, and there is some evidence this can be successful. In North Carolina, for example, certified mathematics, science, and special education teachers working in high-poverty or academically failing public secondary schools were awarded an annual bonus of \$1,800. Results of analyses completed on longitudinal data sets suggest this bonus payment was sufficient to reduce turnover rates of the targeted teachers by 12 percent (Clotfelter, Glennie, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2006).

Finally, mentoring as a strategy to support and thereby retain teachers in urban and at-risk schools was a planned intervention by many states. There is some evidence that a well-designed mentoring program can lower the attrition rates of new teachers (National Association of State Boards of Education, 1998). A study of new teachers in New Jersey reported that the first-year attrition rate of teachers involved in a mentoring program was 5 percent compared to 18 percent for teachers without mentoring (Gold, 1999).

Identifying Gaps in Policy and Practice

The analysis of state HQT and equity plans indicates the vital importance states are placing on alleviating the lack of highly qualified teachers in some of their schools. However, there are some areas that must be attended to in order to bolster the likelihood of success. First and foremost, states need to have a data system that allows them to clearly identify the challenge area. As was evident in Tennessee and Delaware, analysis of HQT status by district often is not adequately illustrative of the challenge. To truly determine whether and what inequities exist, data must be analyzed at the intradistrict level, and sometimes between classes in the same school. Further, a quality data system should allow a state to determine if the issue is difficulty in teacher supply, teacher retention in the profession, or teacher retention in specific schools. Once this is determined, efforts and resources can be targeted in a manner that will most directly affect these specific challenges. This may mean that statewide efforts are reconfigured and redistributed, possibly scaling back efforts in districts or schools without equity or AYP problems and focusing more intensively on schools with these challenges. This type of analysis and focused effort was not readily apparent in many of the state equity plans.

An additional area on which states should focus is in obtaining appropriate outcomes data to monitor the progress of their efforts. So far, there has been a lack of data collected on many state-level programs addressing teacher quality, so a full understanding of what has worked and what has not worked is not available in most states. A system should be established whereby these data are analyzed and policies and practice are changed as necessary if the current iteration is ineffective in addressing the identified challenge area. This requires a great deal of preplanning by the state to ensure the data most appropriate for assessing change are available and gathered consistently and reliably. Proxy variables that are too far removed from the actual data of interest will be of little if any use for this process.

Conclusion

In the development of policies to address the inequitable distribution of highly qualified teachers, states were advised to focus on targeted policies that would help schools with the greatest needs. In analyzing state plans written to address inequitable distribution, it was clear that states had policies and/or programs to recruit teachers, but these were not always accompanied by policies, programs, and incentives to steer teachers toward at-risk schools and give them the support to succeed in these placements. Moreover, most states had no mechanism for evaluating the success of the policies, programs, and incentives designed to address inequitable teacher distribution. In order to most effectively ameliorate the challenge of having nonhighly qualified teachers teaching core academic courses, states should target their efforts and resources on areas most challenged. Further, those efforts should be informed by quality research, as available.

SEAs can perform a vitally important function in establishing a quality collaborative relationship with their LEAs. By working to support the efforts of LEAs without providing overly prescriptive policy that may inadvertently hinder them—as well as holding the LEAs appropriately accountable for outcomes and efforts and providing support as needed—SEAs can help all students have schools in which teachers are prepared for and committed to the school and student success. The National Comprehensive for Teacher Quality will continue to provide information and resources on national efforts and requirements, as well as information about promising strategies and practices to assist states and regional comprehensive centers as we collectively work toward these goals.

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