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# AMERICA'S OPPORTUNITY: TEACHER EFFECTIVENESS AND EQUITY IN K-12 CLASSROOMS

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Building Capacity to Increase  
Teacher Effectiveness and Equity

INTRODUCTION



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## SYSTEM OF SUPPORT

For decades, policymakers, parents, education leaders, and concerned citizens have lamented the fact that the quality of teachers in American schools varies dramatically, with schools in high-poverty areas significantly less likely to employ qualified, experienced, and effective teaching staff. Despite years of attention to this topic and the public discussions and resulting panoply of policy responses, states are still struggling to ensure that every teacher is fully qualified and that every school has its fair share of the best teachers.

The National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality (TQ Center) was created nearly five years ago with the goal of building state capacity to address those issues. In close collaboration with the regional comprehensive centers (RCCs) funded through the U.S. Department of Education, the TQ Center has worked to focus state and national efforts on research-based strategies and practices that promote effective teaching and leadership in our nation's schools—specifically in schools, and on behalf of students, with the most significant disadvantages.

In its 2005 redesign of the earlier Comprehensive Regional Assistance Centers Program, the U.S. Department of Education established five national content centers to serve as the development and dissemination arm for the 16 RCCs focused on building capacity in the state education agencies (SEAs) to carry out the key priorities of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as reauthorized by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. Ensuring that all students—regardless of their address, race, native language, or ability—have access to the best teachers is a key tenet of the current provisions of ESEA. Nevertheless, states typically have not taken on shared leadership

for what traditionally has been viewed as a local district responsibility: the recruitment and retention of teaching talent.

In an effort to address these issues, the TQ Center, in collaboration with the RCCs, embarked on a five-year scope of work to facilitate a comprehensive review of existing state policy, initiatives, and data on the quality and distribution of teachers. Similarly, the TQ Center's responsibility for meeting the last of its four goals—to galvanize public and policymaker attention and support for meeting the demand for a high-quality teaching force—continues to grow in importance, as national and state reform priorities remain focused on this goal year after year.

## THE EVOLUTION OF FEDERAL AND STATE TEACHER POLICY

As the research community continued to find more reliable and statistically significant connections between student achievement and the quality of the classroom teacher (Goe, 2007; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005; Rockoff, 2004), the federal government took unprecedented steps through the current provisions of ESEA to monitor state and local efforts to address the quality and distribution of teacher talent. For the first time, the law's highly qualified teacher (HQT) provisions required states to report annually on the number of actively employed teachers holding at least a bachelor's degree, full state certification, and demonstration of content-area mastery for the core academic subjects taught. In addition, the U.S. Department of Education established rules requiring that all states meet this requirement no later than the end of the 2005–06 school year. The focus on teacher quality was further reinforced through the 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which

## THE TQ CENTER'S ROLE WITHIN THE COMPREHENSIVE CENTERS PROGRAM

### System of Support

The TQ Center is part of a technical assistance and dissemination network system of support that is funded by the U.S. Department of Education.

### National Content Centers

The TQ Center is one of five national content centers that provide technical assistance to RCCs in conjunction with their work with state departments of education and related agencies.

### Regional Comprehensive Centers

The TQ Center provides technical assistance for 16 RCCs.



Alaska Comprehensive Center  
<http://www.alaskacc.org/>



Appalachia Regional Comprehensive Center  
<http://www.arcc.edvantia.org/>



California Comprehensive Center  
<http://www.cacompcenter.org/>



Florida and the Islands Regional Comprehensive Center  
<http://www.ets.org/flicc/>



Great Lakes East Comprehensive Center  
<http://www.learningpt.org/greatlakeseast/>



Great Lakes West Comprehensive Center  
<http://www.learningpt.org/greatlakeswest/>



Mid-Atlantic Comprehensive Center  
<http://macc.ceee.gwu.edu/>



Mid-Continent Comprehensive Center  
<http://www.mc3edsupport.org/>



New England Comprehensive Center  
<http://www.necomprehensivecenter.org/>



New York Comprehensive Center  
<http://www.nycomprehensivecenter.org/>



North Central Comprehensive Center  
<http://www.mcrcel.org/nccc/>



Northwest Regional Comprehensive Center  
<http://www.nwrel.org/nwrcc/>



Pacific Comprehensive Center  
<http://www.pacificcompcenter.org/>



Southeast Comprehensive Center  
<http://secc.sedl.org/>



Southwest Comprehensive Center  
[http://www.swcompcenter.org](http://www.swcompcenter.org/)



Texas Comprehensive Center  
<http://txcc.sedl.org/>

solidified the requirement that all special education teachers responsible for delivering instruction in any core content area must meet HQT provisions, as defined in ESEA, and mandated that they be fully certified to teach special education.

As states and local districts began to show some progress in accessing information about teacher credentials and building data systems to support these new reporting requirements, the U.S. Department of Education started to place additional emphasis on another component of the law, which requires states to develop “equitable distribution plans” as part of their state HQT plans. The equitable distribution component of the HQT plan was intended to require state policymakers to take steps to ensure that students from low-income families and minority students are not taught by inexperienced, unqualified, or out-of-field teachers at higher rates than other students. States took various approaches to meet these requirements—from sustained efforts to improve the collection and direct application of new data on teachers for influencing state-level policy investments to isolated and incremental initiatives designed to do no more than meet the letter of the law.

The increased federal and state role in the improvement of teacher quality has led to multiple efforts to enhance the quality of the teaching force at the local level. Although the accuracy of the data being reported to the U.S. Department of Education by the states is typically the main area of focus during monitoring visits, the TQ Center tracks the individual monitoring reports issued by the U.S. Department of Education on the progress that states are making toward the implementation of their HQT state plans and highlights a range of lessons learned (National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality, 2009). Through the current ESEA Title II, Part A reporting requirements, the U.S. Department of Education also collects and reports on state progress in meeting

the 100 percent HQT goal. When the data were first collected in 2003–04, 87 percent of classes were reported by the states to be taught by HQTs; by 2007–08, that number had increased to 95 percent (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Although still shy of the 100 percent target, the federal data collection efforts have contributed to substantial progress. Most notably, the number of teachers on waivers and renewable emergency certification has declined significantly; when emergency certified teachers do appear on the rolls, they now tend to be aligned with ESEA-approved alternative route provisions.

Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, Rockoff, and Wyckoff (2008) documented the impact of an increase in the quality of teacher credentials at the local level in New York City and found that the gap between the qualifications of teachers in high-poverty and low-poverty schools has narrowed substantially since 2000. The authors posit that this progress was a result of changes in the characteristics of newly hired teachers and the virtual elimination of newly hired uncertified teachers. The improvement in teacher qualifications, especially in the highest poverty schools, coincides with an increase in student achievement during that same period (Boyd et al., 2008).

Regardless of how the impact data are collected and reported, the HQT requirements specified in the current provisions of ESEA forced all states to implement systems to collect and report teacher data. According to the 2008 *Quality Counts* report on the teaching profession, 46 states now assign unique identification numbers to all teachers (Editorial Projects in Education, 2008). Although many states still have significant challenges to overcome in modifying data systems to reliably connect students and teachers for the purpose of improving teaching and learning, initial steps have been taken, and careful nurturing of these new state data systems through federally funded incentive programs will result in long-term improvements

by states in support of the teacher workforce.

### **MOVING FROM “HIGHLY QUALIFIED” TO “HIGHLY EFFECTIVE”**

Debate over the utility of the HQT data, given that they focus exclusively on teacher credentials as opposed to evidence of effective classroom instruction, surfaced almost as soon as the current provisions of ESEA were implemented. Calls from every advocacy organization concerned with improvements in teacher quality (e.g., Berry, 2007; The Commission on No Child Left Behind, 2007) recommended raising the bar in the next round of ESEA reauthorization from what currently constitutes a “highly qualified” teacher based solely on inputs or teacher credentials to a focus on effective classroom instruction as measured by outputs or teacher performance. Despite broad general agreement on the need to move toward a measure of teacher effectiveness, however, few proposals included recommendations on how to define or measure teacher effectiveness.

In response to states requesting guidance on how to proactively plan for this shift, the TQ Center introduced several resources intended to inform state policy conversations and build state capacity in collaboration with RCCs to expand their existing data collection and reporting efforts. For example, the TQ Center’s *Communication Framework for Measuring Teacher Quality and Effectiveness: Bringing Coherence to the Conversation* (Coggshall, 2007) and *A Practical Guide to Evaluating Teacher Effectiveness* (Little, Goe, & Bell, 2009) are intended to assist states in a proactive approach to the next wave of federally funded reform efforts targeted at improvements in educator quality.

Although the Obama administration’s guidance to states on how to measure and report on teacher effectiveness is still under development, initial direction came from Education Secretary Arne Duncan. A letter addressed

to the governors in April 2009 included an early indication of how states would be held accountable for meeting the teacher effectiveness and equitable distribution goal of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). Specifically, the letter provided examples of the types of data that might be requested: “the number and percent of teachers and principals rated at each performance level in each local educational agency’s (LEA’s) evaluation system” and “the number and percent of LEA teacher and principal evaluations systems that require evidence of student achievement outcomes” (Duncan, 2009, p. 3). These examples indicate that the Obama administration will continue to intently focus on the quality of educators in schools and districts and that states will continue to have a role in supporting increased effectiveness and access on behalf of all students living within their state borders.

### **MAKING CONNECTIONS ACROSS THE EDUCATOR CAREER CONTINUUM**

Applying a comprehensive framework that details the evidence base for each component of effective educator quality policymaking—from recruitment and hiring to induction and professional development to working conditions and compensation—can facilitate the creation of a more systemic approach to educator talent management and development.

No single reform effort, program, or initiative—whether it focuses on the preparation, recruitment, early support, or compensation of educators—can address the unique challenges faced by the 3.8 million full-time elementary and secondary school teachers (public and private) currently working in classrooms in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). Taking a cue from the business world, where a focus on effective human capital management is characteristic of competitive organizations that ensure the best and brightest are recruited and retained,

systemic educator talent management and development is a way to incorporate the whole continuum of teacher quality policies in an integrated, purposeful, and holistic approach (see Figure I.1).

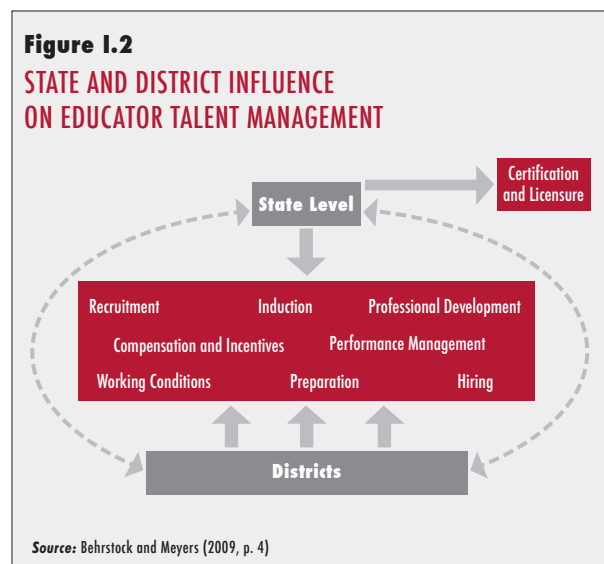
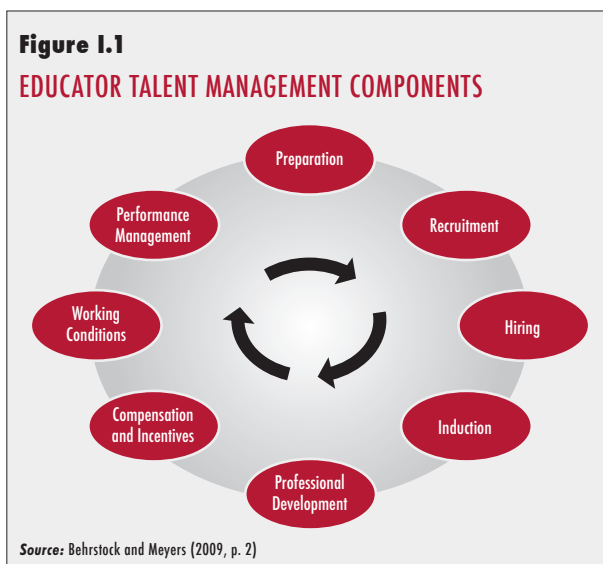
Historically, school districts have not connected the various components of the educator career continuum. For example, compensation decisions typically are made in isolation of evaluation data, which in turn are infrequently tied to teachers' opportunities to access professional development (Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern, & Keeling, 2009). Furthermore, states most often are disconnected from the local stewardship that districts have over human resources functions. However, as illustrated in Figure I.2, states have taken on greater responsibility for improvements in the overall teaching force. This situation is due, in part, to increased federal scrutiny as well as the growth in "education governors," who frequently make education reform a priority.

Given their growing involvement in the development of policies and programs to improve educator quality, states struggle to develop reforms to address the whole spectrum of issues that influence educator effectiveness in the classroom. Reform efforts are frequently incremental or disconnected

from one another and, in some cases, work against one another. In response to this issue, the TQ Center developed a state policy inventory data collection process to facilitate conversations among state-level policy groups to identify priorities based on existing gaps in knowledge and policy across the educator career continuum (National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality, n.d.). In addition, the TQ Center addressed this issue at its 2008 What Works Conference, "Building Capacity for a Systems Approach to Improving Educator Quality" (National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality, 2008).

## ABOUT THIS REPORT

Educator talent management is the process of managing and developing teacher and school leader talent—across all the stages of the career continuum—to optimize the workforce in an education system. The TQ Center's second Biennial Report, *America's Opportunity: Teacher Effectiveness and Equity in K–12 Classrooms*, has been designed to assist RCCs and SEAs as they move away from piecemeal reform strategies and think systemically about policies and practices that support an effective educator workforce. The following section introduces the main content of this report and illustrates the TQ Center's approach to integrating multiple reform efforts on various



fronts to ensure long-term improvements in the educator workforce.

### Focus of the Report

Questions about whether states play a role in ensuring access to high-quality teaching talent in local communities have ceased. Increasingly, states are encouraging and requiring more robust preparation programs; more efficient human resources departments that identify, recruit, place, and support the most effective educators; and more continuous and focused support for efforts to promote and retain the best and brightest in the profession. *America's Opportunity: Teacher Effectiveness and Equity in K–12 Classrooms* documents the growing recognition among state policymakers of their leadership responsibility to incentivize, support, and monitor local educator quality reforms; their capacity to address these issues more aggressively; and examples of innovative policies and practices that have emerged during the last few years.

### Chapter Themes

The chapters in this report are cowritten with colleagues in RCCs and states to illustrate the advances in building state capacity to lead change in reforming the teaching profession.

**Chapter 1** describes the changing profile of America's teachers, with a particular focus on generational shifts in the workforce that have implications for future policies to recruit and retain effective educators. The chapter also examines how federal and state policies have responded to the public dissemination of educator supply and distribution data during the last 10 years. Two case studies documenting work in Montana and several Midwestern states served by the Mid-Continent Comprehensive Center illustrate the considerable efforts made in these locales to better understand the current composition, credentials, and experience of their teacher workforce.

**Chapter 2** examines multiple interconnected components along the educator career continuum: teacher preparation, new-teacher support, and ongoing professional development. The chapter addresses the changing demographics of the student population, underscoring the need for states to improve preparation programs and provide ongoing teacher support for classroom instruction to meet the diverse needs of today's learners. The authors argue that significant growth in the identification of students with disabilities and higher prevalence of English language learners necessitates changes in how all teachers are prepared and developed throughout their careers, as specialized certificates and endorsements no longer can fill the differentiated instructional requirements in every classroom context. In addition, TQ Center tools and strategies for assisting states with policy shifts related to these demographic changes are introduced, along with a detailed case study documenting a statewide effort spearheaded by the New York Comprehensive Center to bring together key stakeholders to improve the preparation of teachers for culturally and linguistically diverse urban classrooms.

**Chapter 3** reviews some of the challenges related to recruitment, hiring, and poor working conditions that states have faced in addressing the equitable distribution mandates in the law. It outlines steps that states can take to address these challenges. In addition, the chapter presents case studies on two states (Delaware and Tennessee) with unique approaches to collecting and acting upon the data they have collected to better understand their teacher distribution challenges.

Finally, **Chapter 4** moves the policy conversation away from traditional measures of educator quality to a discussion of how to define, evaluate, and compensate educators based on effective practice. The TQ Center's initial definition of *teacher effectiveness*

is introduced, and a special section of the chapter is devoted to the use of the TQ Center's *Communication Framework for Measuring Teacher Quality and Effectiveness* (Coggshall, 2007). The chapter also describes recent innovations in educator evaluation and compensation, including Ohio's investment in the development of state evaluation guidelines and Utah's early experimentation with developing a statewide pay-for-performance initiative.

The research, policy, and practical resources introduced in this report are testaments to the steady transformation of the teaching profession occurring in states and districts throughout the country. With significant support from the network of RCCs, the

TQ Center has been a proud partner to states that are aggressively seeking opportunities to ensure that every student in their geographic borders has access to the most effective teachers and leaders.

Although there is still much to do to build the capacity of states to shape the conditions that support effective teaching and learning, America's opportunity to support teacher effectiveness in every state, district, and school has arrived. It is time that the education community embraces not only the concept of systemic educator talent management and development but also the vision, collaborative spirit, and sustained will to promote meaningful, evidence-based improvements across the educator career continuum.

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