

Highly Qualified Teachers in the United States: Where Are We Now?

Introduction

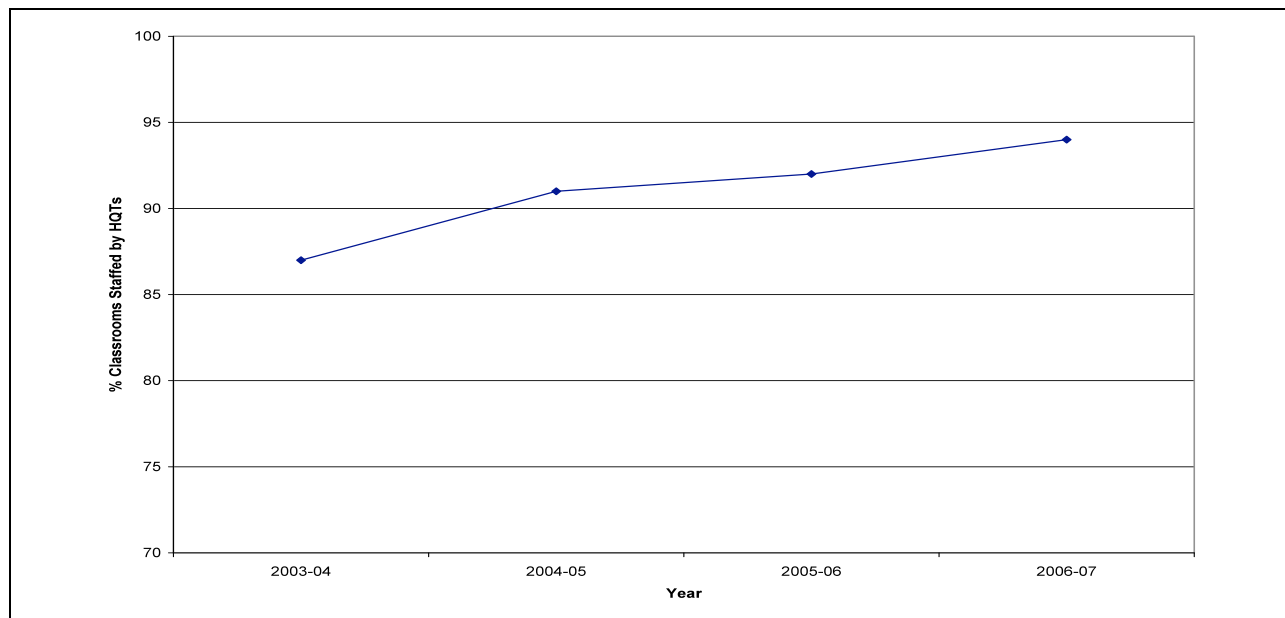
The following is an adaptation of [A Summary of Highly Qualified Teacher Data](#) released by the U.S. Department of Education.

The U.S. Department of Education released the 2006–07 Highly Qualified Teacher (HQT) data in May 2008, following a five-month lag since the time states were required to submit their HQT data. These data allow us to view states’ progress toward meeting the HQT goal set forth in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. Specifically, NCLB called for 100 percent of classes to be taught by HQTs by the 2005–06 school year. Most states have not been able to reach this ambitious goal yet.

This short overview of the data details the progress made in improving the proportion of classes taught by HQTs, differences in the proportion of HQTs in high-poverty and low-poverty schools, and explanations for any shortfalls in states’ achievement of the goal for 100 percent of classes to be taught by HQTs. It is based on the teacher-quality data that states submitted through the Consolidated State Performance Reports in December 2007. When these data were first collected four years ago in 2003–04, only 87 percent of classes were taught by HQTs nationwide. Although much progress has been made since the baseline year, by 2005–06, states fell short of the 100 percent target, instead reaching only 92 percent of classes taught by HQTs.

The 2006–2007 HQT data, shown in Figure 1, reveal that, nationwide, 94 percent of classes are taught by HQTs.

Figure 1. U.S. Progress in Meeting HQT Requirements (2003–04 to 2006–07)



Highlights From the 2006–07 Data

Although most classes are taught by HQTs and most states are moving in this direction, a significant number of children continue to be taught by teachers not meeting this minimum standard. In addition, a handful of states lost ground in the proportion of classes taught by HQTs.

For example, the 2006–2007 HQT data show that in 81 percent of states, more than 90 percent of classes are taught by HQTs. In 63 percent of states, more than 95 percent of classes are taught by HQTs. Yet, only 10 percent of states have succeeded in providing an HQT for 99 percent or more of their classrooms. One year after the 2005–06 deadline, only one state (North Dakota) achieved the goal for 100 percent of classes to be taught by HQTs. Figures 2 and 3 depict the percentage of states that achieved or failed to achieve various benchmarks.

Figure 2. State Achievement on HQT Benchmarks: 2006–07 HQT Data

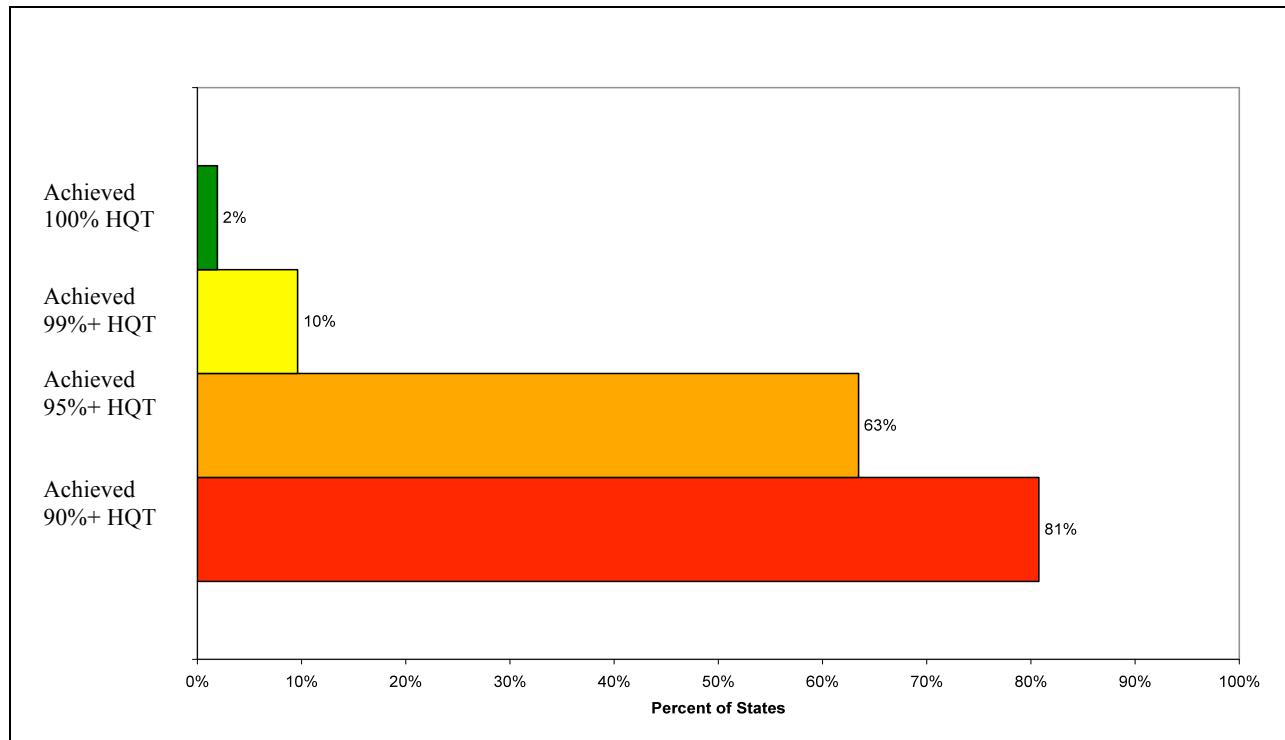
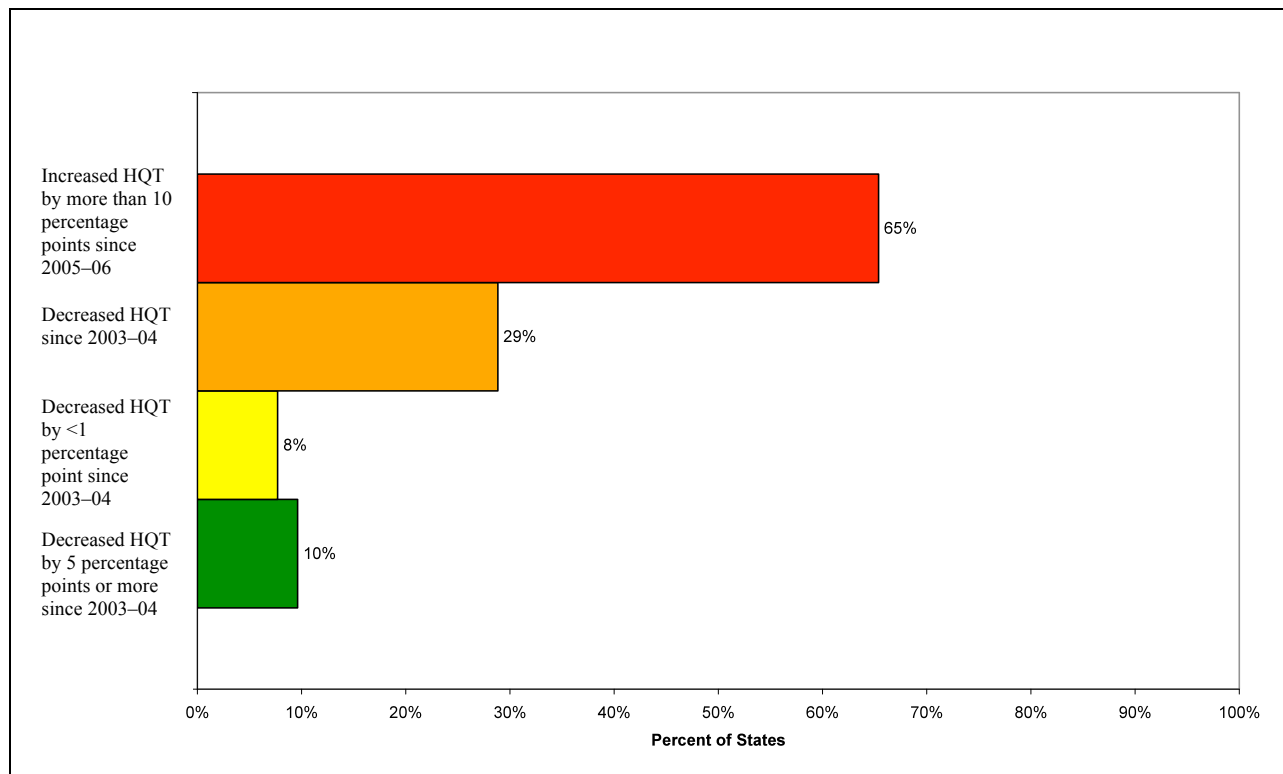


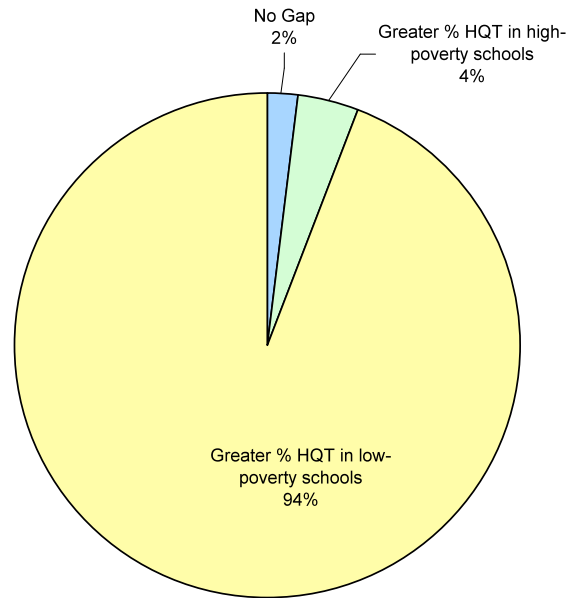
Figure 3. State Movement on HQT Benchmarks: 2003–04 to 2006–07 HQT Data



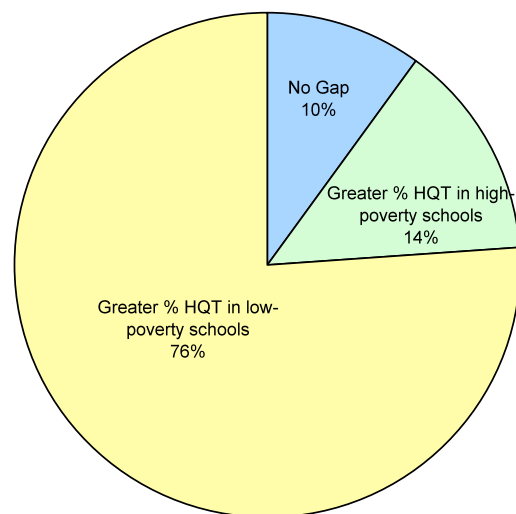
Overall, states are making progress toward the goal that Congress set, with 65 percent of states increasing the proportion of classes taught by HQTs by at least 10 percentage points since last year. In contrast, the proportion of classes taught by HQTs in the past year decreased for 29 percent of states. Eight percent of states experienced a decline in HQTs that was less than 1 percentage point, suggesting that in some cases the decrease is negligible. However, in 10 percent of states, this decline may be a more serious problem, with the decline in the proportion of classes taught by HQTs exceeding 5 percentage points.

The 2006–07 HQT data also showed that nearly across the board, children in high-poverty schools had less access to HQTs than they had in low-poverty schools, particularly at the secondary school level. A gap between high- and low-poverty schools existed at the secondary school level in 48 states (94 percent) and at the elementary school level in 38 states (76 percent). In the state with the greatest contrast between high- and low-poverty schools, the gap was as great as 89 percent of teachers in low-poverty secondary schools being HQTs compared with 63 percent of teachers in high-poverty secondary schools being HQTs. However, there were a handful of states (2 percent at the secondary level and 14 percent at the elementary level) that proactively worked to close student achievement gaps by providing a greater proportion of HQTs to high-poverty schools than to low-poverty schools.

Figure 4. HQT Gaps Between High-Poverty and Low-Poverty Schools: 2006–07 HQT Data



Secondary



Elementary

Explaining the Trends

Two main reasons account for why some teachers fail to meet the HQT standard: The first reason is that teachers are not fully certified and not enrolled in an approved alternative route program; the second reason is that they have not demonstrated subject mastery either by passing a subject-knowledge test or through meeting the High Objective Uniform State Standard of Evaluation, or HOUSSE, criteria. Across states, there was some variation in which of these two reasons accounted for classes not being staffed by HQTs.

For example, in New York elementary and secondary schools, 94 percent of classrooms that were not staffed with HQTs were so staffed because the teacher of record in those classrooms was neither fully certified nor enrolled in an alternative route program. Yet, in other states, this explanation accounted for only 35 to 40 percent of non-HQTs, and in roughly one fifth of states, not a single non-HQT lacked state certification or was not enrolled in an alternative route program.

It was more common for non-HQTs to be the result of a failure to demonstrate subject mastery, particularly in secondary schools. At the elementary school level, 26 states (approximately half) reported that lack of subject mastery accounted for most of their classes taught by non-HQTs, and at the secondary school level, 32 states (approximately 60 percent) said the same.

This lack of subject mastery is a particular problem in special education, as teachers often span a variety of subject areas. In fact, in a handful of states, such as Kentucky and Rhode Island, the majority of classes taught by non-HQTs were the result of certified special education teachers not having demonstrated subject mastery.

States are employing a variety of approaches to address the issue of special education teachers failing to achieve HQT status for each subject they teach, including employing special and general education coteaching models or providing increased access to professional development (for more information and resources on this topic, please visit [TQ Connection](#)).

Conclusions and Looking Ahead

Achieving an education system in which 100 percent of classrooms are staffed by highly qualified teachers is possible, as is demonstrated by the recent increases in the number of classes taught by HQTs in many states and by the progress of North Dakota in reaching this target. As states continue to eliminate the gaps between their high- and low-poverty schools and improve education for all students by securing a highly qualified teacher workforce, it is important to also bear in mind that the HQT criteria represent a minimum standard and that there is still more work to be done.

While working toward meeting the HQT target, states must also think beyond technical compliance and toward the development of a comprehensive plan for improving all children's access to high-quality teachers. States must be vigilant, creative, and nimble to ensure that policy instruments are in place to sustain improvement, to address emerging areas of need, and to ensure that the emphasis on highly qualified status does not detract from the underlying need to improve teacher effectiveness at helping students to excel and succeed across the United States.