
America's Challenge: Effective Teachers for At-Risk Schools and Students

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GLOSSARY



Glossary

This glossary is intended as a guide to the specialized language of educational policy literature used in this report. Where applicable, alternative definitions and usages are offered as well. The reader is cautioned that the definitions in this glossary are intended neither as comprehensive nor as absolute statements of a term's meaning or significance in educational policy and practice.

accountability—The primary form of accountability practiced in education policy today is *outcomes-based accountability*, which seeks to hold any or all of the following entities responsible for improving student achievement: state education agencies, local education agencies, schools, and teachers. Sanctions used to hold these entities accountable include withholding federal and state funds, publicly reporting schools' failure to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) targets, school restructuring, or state takeover.

achievement gaps—The difference between the academic achievement of underserved groups of students and their more privileged peers, often attributed to differences in resources and opportunities to learn. Specifically, there is a gap between the average test scores, grades, and educational attainment of low socioeconomic status, black, and Hispanic students and those of high socioeconomic status and white students.

at-risk schools—High-poverty, high-minority, and low-performing urban and rural schools that may not be able to facilitate good educational outcomes for their students due to insufficient physical, financial, and human resources, among other things.

at-risk students—Students in jeopardy of poor educational outcomes, such as low achievement, dropping out of school, or developing behaviors that interfere with learning. Student risk factors include low socioeconomic status, membership in an under-represented racial or ethnic group, attendance at a low-performing school, disability status, health, and lack of role models for healthy cognitive and social development.

AYP—Adequate yearly progress. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act mandates that schools must demonstrate AYP toward the goal of 100 percent student proficiency on annual achievement tests. Each state has developed its own formula for assessing progress toward specific, state-defined AYP goals and targets.

benchmark—A standard of practice or performance to which an individual or organization, such as a school, can strive.

effective teacher—In the context of this report, *effective teacher* denotes one who makes an average or larger contribution to his or her students' learning, usually as reflected by increases in student test scores. Teacher effectiveness focuses on the effect or output of teachers' work in the classroom rather than on the qualifications or input that teachers bring to the classroom (see Goe, Chapter 1). In teacher quality research and policy discussions, more generally, the word *effective* connotes direct impact—or effect—on outcomes such as high school graduation rates, student motivation, efficacy beliefs or other social outcomes, as well as achievement test scores.

ELLs—English language learners. Students who are not native speakers of English. Also referred to as ELs (English learners), ESL (English as a second language) students, and LEP (limited English proficiency) students.

endorsement areas—The specific subject or licensure areas in which a teacher is licensed to teach. Teachers who are certified or licensed in one primary subject area can attain endorsements to teach additional subject areas in which they have demonstrated competency (see Coulter, Chapter 4).

equitable distribution of teachers—

Providing at-risk students the same level of access to highly qualified and highly effective teachers as is afforded to more privileged students. This is called for under Title I of NCLB (Pub. L. No. 107-110, Section 1111(b)(8)(C); www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg2.html#sec1111):

the state educational agency will take [steps] 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 ... evaluate and publicly report the progress of the state educational agency with respect to such steps.

equity plan—NCLB requires states to have *equity plans* to detail the strategies and actions that the state will take to ensure that poor or minority children are not disproportionately taught by inexperienced, unqualified, and/or out-of-field teachers. These plans should identify challenge areas, indicate state-specific equitable teacher-distribution goals and benchmarks, and describe initiatives and processes for tracking progress toward meeting equitable teacher distribution goals (see Coulter, Chapter 4).

free or reduced-price lunch—Often used as an indicator of the socioeconomic status of students, free or reduced-price lunch is available to those who meet state-defined poverty guidelines, which usually derive from official federal poverty guidelines (see also, *poverty*).

high-needs schools—In the context of this report, high-needs schools are those reported as having 51 percent or more students participating in the free or reduced-price lunch program. Considering other factors as well, such as teacher turnover, may help rank the “neediest” schools within the larger category of *high-needs* schools. In teacher quality research and policy discussions, more generally, *high-needs* is often used synonymously with *at-risk*.

HOUSSE—High, Objective, Uniform State Standard of Evaluation. NCLB’s HOUSSE provision allows states to set equivalencies for veteran teachers who need to demonstrate subject-area proficiency in their fields under NCLB requirements. Without requiring additional coursework or testing, HOUSSE permits states to grant points toward highly qualified status to veteran teachers based on their teaching experience, previous coursework, professional development, and so forth, to meet the highly qualified teacher (HQT) requirements of NCLB (see www.ed.gov/nclb/methods/teachers/hqtflexibility.html).

ICs—Innovation configurations. ICs translate learning standards into action to help schools design and implement professional development that will facilitate increased student learning. Often displayed as “maps,” ICs align structures, policies, practices, roles, and responsibilities to specify how they contribute to increased teacher capacity and student learning (see Reschly, Smartt, & Oliver, Chapter 2).

IDEA—The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA) (Pub. L. No. 108-446) is a law to ensure that “all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living.” It was originally enacted as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975 (see Reschly et al., Chapter 2; idea.ed.gov/).

IEP— Individualized education program; see *students with disabilities*.

learned society—Societies of professionals who share some type of expertise, such as teaching mathematics. The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics is an example of a learned society (see Reschly et al., Chapter 2).

LEAs—Local education agencies. District-level organizations responsible for student, staff, and school accountability reporting. LEAs include regular local school districts, local school district components of supervisory unions, supervisory union administrative centers, and regional education service agencies.

linked student-teacher data—Educational data collected and stored in such a way that student and teacher information are connected. Linked student-teacher data enable researchers to attribute changes in student learning to a student’s assignment to a particular teacher (see Goe, Chapter 1).

NAEP—The National Assessment of Educational Progress. NAEP, also known as The Nation’s Report Card, is a longitudinal assessment program of a nationally representative sample of 4th-, 8th-, and 12th-grade students administered by the U.S. Department of Education. NAEP results inform educational policy by providing information about trends in education and are often used in research about influences on student achievement (see nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/).

NCLB—The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. Among its other provisions, this federal law requires teachers to be “highly qualified,” with the intention that this will “ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic assessments” (Pub. L. No. 107-110, Section 1001; see www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/107-110.pdf).

out-of-field teachers—Certified teachers teaching in subject areas in which they are not certified. Teachers who are not able to demonstrate competency in their assigned subject areas may also be considered to be teaching out-of-field (see Coulter, Chapter 4).

performance-based pay—Broadly refers to a system that ties teacher or administrator salaries, bonuses, or other financial awards to their job performance or to the performance of their students. Performance-based pay program models vary by state and district and may include individual teacher or schoolwide awards based on student achievement, teacher evaluations, and/or working in a high-needs subject area or in an at-risk school (see Rowland & Allen, Chapter 5).

poverty—Official federal poverty guidelines were first developed in the 1960s by the Social Service Administration and reflect the cost of the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s economy food plan multiplied by three. The Department of Health and Human Services updates the official federal poverty guidelines annually for inflation using the Consumer Price Index (see *free or reduced-price lunch*; aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/faq.shtml).

qualified teacher—Under NCLB, a *highly qualified teacher* (HQT) is one who has the following professional qualifications: a minimum of a bachelor’s degree, full state teacher certification (or a passing score on the state teacher licensing examination[s], where applicable), a state teaching license, and demonstrated subject-area competence in each of the academic subjects taught. In the context of this report, teacher qualifications reflect the credential inputs that teachers bring to the classroom (see Goe, Chapter 1). In teacher quality research and policy discussions, more generally, *qualified teachers* refer to those who are fully credentialed, meaning that they have successfully completed a state-approved teacher preparation program (whether traditional or alternate route). Such programs usually involve coursework in a specific content area, pedagogy, educational foundations, and a teaching practicum.

quartile—In research, scores in a distribution can be grouped into four groups, or *quartiles*, with the same number of scores in each group. Quartiles are used to describe the scores or to facilitate comparisons between groups.

RCCs—Regional Comprehensive Centers. RCCs serve the states in their regions, providing technical assistance, capacity-building, and other expertise to support state initiatives to improve teacher quality and student achievement to meet NCLB requirements. Nationally, 16 RCCs are funded with five-year grants from the U.S. Department of Education.

RTI—Responsiveness to Intervention. RTI is an alternative to the traditional method of referring underachieving students for special education. Although RTI can be implemented in a variety of ways, its key features include continuous progress monitoring to identify underachieving students at an early age, multiple tiers of increasingly concentrated educational intervention, differentiated curriculum tailored to specific student needs (as indicated by screening and assessment results), specialized instructional staff at the higher tiers of intervention, and use of research-based instruction and interventions (see Reschly et al., Chapter 2; nrcl.org/publications/papers/mellard.shtml).

SBR—Scientifically based research. NCLB calls for SBR as the standard for evidence to inform strategies to improve student learning. Originally, the criteria for SBR emphasized a specific type of experimental approach, randomized control designs; in more recent discussions, the term *SBR* has evolved to mean *evidence-based research*, which includes evidence from a greater number of studies utilizing various methodologies (see Reschly et al., Chapter 2).

scientifically based reading instruction—Scientifically based reading instruction focuses instruction on five components of reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension), integration of the components, and frequent progress monitoring and feedback for students (see Reschly et al., Chapter 2).

school context—The many educational, cultural, social, political, economic, and physical conditions of schools and classrooms that can influence student achievement as well as teacher performance or effectiveness. School context also may play a role in teacher turnover.

SEAs—State education agencies. SEAs are state-level organizations that oversee educational administration and policy. State departments of education and state boards of education are examples of SEAs.

standardized tests—Tests designed to be written, administered, scored, and interpreted in the same way for every test-taker. The advantage and weakness of using standardized tests is that all test-takers, regardless of age, sex, creed, color, background, experience, disability, or other characteristics, are treated exactly the same and judged on a common scale. Standardized tests can be developed by teachers or by external test-makers.

students with disabilities—Under IDEA and state NCLB reporting definitions, students with disabilities are usually defined as those with *Individualized Education Programs* (IEPs). Under federal law, an interdisciplinary team of educational professionals must determine that a student has a disability and requires special education and related support services for him or her to have an IEP. Students with disabilities are also sometimes referred to as *students with special needs*.

teacher attrition—Also known as teacher turnover or teacher mobility. Two types of teacher attrition may lead to workforce instability in schools: (1) teachers who move to different schools and (2) those who exit the teaching profession (see Coulter, Chapter 4). Generally, at-risk schools are defined in part by high teacher turnover, regardless of the cause.

teacher practices—Instructional strategies, classroom management techniques, and other behaviors that teachers enact in the classroom to facilitate learning (see Goe, Chapter 3).

teacher preparation—The training, usually in a college of education, intended to provide teachers with the knowledge and skills necessary to be successful in the classroom. Teacher preparation includes alternative certification programs as well as college or university-based programs (see Goe, Chapter 3).

value-added models—Statistical techniques that use multiple years of student achievement data to estimate the effects of schools or teachers on student learning. Individual or cohort growth models also look at multiple years of student achievement data to estimate the rate of change over time. Results from value-added models can be used to identify low- and high-performing teachers to target supports, tailor professional development opportunities, and identify potential mentors (see Goe, Chapter 1). Value-added models do not explain why or how schools or teachers differ in effectiveness.

