

Essential Elements of Teacher Policy in ESEA: Effectiveness, Fairness, and Evaluation



Center for American Progress



The Education Trust



To: Honorable Members of the 112th United States Congress
From: The Center for American Progress and The Education Trust
Re: Essential Elements of Teacher Policy in ESEA: Effectiveness,
Fairness, and Evaluation
Date: February 21, 2011

Dear Honorable Members of the 112th United States Congress,

Our nation does too little to ensure that all students have the strong teachers they need and deserve. This must change if our country is going to remain a global economic leader, and we believe the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) offers a seminal opportunity to provide all students with effective teachers.

Please see our recommendations on how ESEA can improve teacher equity and effectiveness. They focuses on two key topics:

- Collecting and reporting on teacher-quality indicators in an actionable way, to provide much-needed information about the distribution and assignment of strong teachers among schools; and
- Developing new teacher evaluation systems, to give educators the information, support, and tools that they need to improve teacher effectiveness.

We hope you find these recommendations insightful, and we are happy to answer any questions you might have.

Sincerely,

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Essential Elements of Teacher Policy in ESEA: Effectiveness, Fairness, and Evaluation

Effective teachers are critical to raising achievement and closing longstanding gaps among student subgroups. Indeed, the research on this point has become absolutely clear: Students who have three or four strong teachers in a row will soar academically, regardless of their racial or economic background, while those who have a sequence of weak teachers will fall further and further behind.¹

Research also, unfortunately, demonstrates that access to effective teachers is not equitable or fair. Although there are strong teachers in many schools, research shows that students in high-poverty schools are more likely than students in more affluent schools to have the least effective teachers.²

Despite the importance of teachers and the overwhelming need to match our struggling students with our strongest educators, few states or districts have good information on teacher performance. Fewer still use that information to ensure that low-income students and students of color gain access to the teachers they need and deserve. If we are going to ensure that all students receive a rigorous K-12 education, we must get serious about accurate ways to evaluate teachers based on their performance in the classroom and their individual impacts on student learning, and use that information to improve the practice for all teachers.

States, districts, and schools will have to do the hard work of developing and implementing teacher evaluation systems and ensuring that students have access to great teachers. But federal policy can and should support this work.

Specifically, federal policy should challenge states to set big goals for teacher effectiveness and fair teacher distribution—and to assess both through meaningful evaluation. These goals will embolden leaders who are already moving down this path and will spur others to action.

This work is made more difficult by the need to move far and fast in an environment of incomplete and rapidly changing information. But if we fail to address the critical issues of teacher effectiveness and equal access to strong teachers, then there's little reason to believe that other reforms will have much impact. That's an outcome our nation can ill afford.

As the 112th Congress considers the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), it must revamp Title II of the ESEA and target additional dollars toward improving teacher effectiveness and equity. States and districts must engage in important reforms as a condition of receipt of their Title II funds. We call on Congress to consider the recommendations outlined below: to collect and report school-level teacher-quality measures, implement new evaluation systems, and hold states and districts accountable for ensuring that all students have access to strong teachers.

1. COLLECT AND REPORT SCHOOL-LEVEL TEACHER QUALITY MEASURES

We recommend a specific set of timelines, incentives, and sanctions for states to implement robust evaluation systems that incorporate measures of teacher impact on student growth. Building these systems is a critical step toward ensuring a fair distribution of teachers. But, at the same time, we cannot afford to wait until every state has a new evaluation system before moving forward. Therefore we further recommend that, while we build stronger evaluation systems that include information on student achievement, Congress continue to require states to collect, report, and act upon measures of teacher quality to ensure a fair distribution of teachers among schools.

Specifically, we recommend that states collect and report on the indicators included in current law for equity purposes:

- Percentage of teachers beyond their first year of teaching;
- Percentage of course sections taught by in-field secondary teachers; and the
- Percentage of certified teachers.

We define an in-field secondary teacher as an educator teaching a course in the core academic subjects in grades 7 through 12 who has either a major in the subject area or passed a relevant subject-matter exam.

To make this information more readily actionable, states should be asked to create a Teacher Quality Index (TQI) combining the collected data. By creating a composite index, states can more easily measure progress on inequities within and among districts.

To keep data collection burdens to a minimum, states should be allowed to use an index composed only of the three measures outlined above—that is, the ones they are required to collect and report on under current law. If states have data on the percentage of teachers in the top quartile of teacher impact on student growth, however, they should include those data within the index as well.

In addition, states that have additional measures of teacher quality should be allowed to include any of the additional measures below:

- Percentage of teachers prepared by a high-performing teacher preparation program;
- Percentage of teachers with fewer than ten absences;
- Percentage of teachers hired before the first day of school;
- Percentage of teachers with a passing score significantly above the minimum on the state’s professional licensure exam for basic skills; and
- Percentage of teachers in the top quartile of teacher impact on student growth.

For these indicators, we define a high-performing teacher preparation program as one in which at least 75 percent of graduates in their first or second year of teaching have demonstrated impact on student achievement that is significantly higher than the average of first or second-year teachers. The U.S. Department of Education would provide guidance on how to define what counts as a passing score that is significantly above the minimum passing score on the state’s basic skills professional licensure exam, as well as how to define what counts as the top quartile of teacher impact on student growth.

In the index, states must weight each indicator equally. States must also annually report data for each element in the index for each school and district within the state. And in order to monitor progress, the selected indicators within each state’s index should remain consistent until the state’s new evaluation system has been in place for at least two full years.

2. IMPLEMENT NEW EVALUATION SYSTEMS

There is widespread need for better information on teacher performance. School leaders need good information to make important decisions about staffing, compensation, and tenure. Teachers need good information so that they can improve their practice. And parents need good information about teacher performance to inform their decisions about their child’s education. Our recommendations aim to address these needs by requiring states to develop new teacher evaluation systems that identify effective teachers based on student achievement and other rigorous measures of practice.

Part A: Principles for Creating Evaluation Systems

To ensure that fair and accurate information about teacher performance is available, Congress should require that states do the following as a condition of receipt of their Title II funds:

- Develop a statewide method for measuring teacher impact on student growth in tested subjects and grades as well as create guidelines for districtwide measures of student growth for teachers in non-tested subjects and grades. Growth in non-tested subjects and grades could be measured in a variety of ways, including externally graded assessments or external reviews of student work.
- Develop statewide minimum parameters for the evaluations that districts will use to inform critical human resources decisions, including those about tenure, compensation, professional development, equitable access to effective teachers, and dismissal. Districts should adhere to these statewide parameters in designing their local evaluation systems but should also have the flexibility to go above and beyond these practices. At a minimum, evaluation systems should:
 - Include measures of teacher impact on student growth as a substantial—but not the only—

factor in a teacher's evaluation. Another significant part of a teacher's evaluation must be based upon rigorous observations of practice, with multiple observations per year, some announced and some unannounced.

- Differentiate teachers into at least four groups of performance. These categories must be defined by the evaluation system and do not have to contain equal proportions of teachers.
- Ensure that teachers and administrators receive data on impact on student growth in a timely fashion.
- Report out at the district and school level the percentages of teachers in each rating category each year.
- Ensure that measurements accurately differentiate among teachers, by monitoring—and assuring—alignment among the different measures, including teacher impact on student growth, assessments of classroom practice, and overall teacher evaluation ratings. Also to ensure the validity of all measures, states should publish a report each year showing the average estimate of teacher impact on student growth for each of the performance categories. The Department of Education would provide regulations on procedures for states to use in documenting the validity of the measures; this should require that the numerical order of value-added averages corresponds with the levels of effectiveness and that there are meaningful differences among evaluation categories.

Part B: Timeframe for Creating Evaluation Systems

The need to get good information on individual teacher impact on student growth quickly is balanced by the need to do this right. Many states and districts are making good progress in this area, but a lot of work remains, from developing accurate teacher-student data links to creating instruments that assess teacher practice through observations. Moreover, it is critical that state and local efforts to reform teacher evaluation are aligned with new college and career-ready standards and assessments.

Below is a timeline that pushes this work forward while acknowledging how much there is yet to be done. The timeline centers around states that commit to setting college and career-ready standards and the assessments necessary to implement these standards. This timeline has been designed for use by states that are at the very early stages of developing the necessary elements of a new evaluation system. States that are already working on one or more of these elements should be able to move at a faster pace than the one outlined below. States must meet the deadlines detailed in the timeline as a condition of Title II funding.

The timeline below assumes that states will need to make progress on deliverables while awaiting further guidance from the Department in some areas. The Department of Education will need a year to develop the necessary regulations, and we assume that the regulations from the Department will take effect in the 2013-14 school year.



TEACHER EFFECTIVENESS TIMELINE: 2012 – 2017

Phase	Deliverables for States Implementing New Assessment Tools in 2014-15 or Earlier
Year 1: 2012-13	<p>Evaluation System</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop statewide evaluation guidelines that include the minimum requirements for all districts. <p>Measures of Classroom Practice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create statewide definition of “effective teaching” and adopt explicit professional teaching standards against which teachers’ practice will be assessed.• Develop a model evaluation observation instrument aligned with teaching standards that districts could choose to adopt.• Identify districts to pilot the measures of classroom practice.³ <p>Measure of Impact on Student Growth</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure an accurate data link between teachers and their students.• Develop statewide method for measuring teacher impact on student growth in tested subjects and grades, which will eventually be a required part of the statewide evaluation. Develop statewide guidelines for non-tested areas.
Year 2: 2013-14	<p>Evaluation System</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Begin training staff in the new evaluation system. Begin public communications efforts.• If developing their own evaluation systems, districts submit the components of the systems to states for approval and for verification of alignment with state guidelines. <p>Measures of Classroom Practice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Districts either adopt the state observation instrument for measuring classroom practice or develop an observation instrument and any other instruments in accordance with state guidelines.• Selected districts pilot measures of classroom practice to identify and work through implementation challenges in anticipation of full rollout. <p>Measure of Impact on Student Growth</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Test and implement verification procedures for the teacher-student data link statewide.• Finalize the statewide method for measuring teacher impact on student growth in tested subjects and grade levels.
Year 3: 2014-15	<p>Evaluation System</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continue training staff in the new evaluation system. Continue public communications efforts. <p>Measures of Classroom Practice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• All districts implement instrument (or instruments) to measure classroom practice. <p>Measure of Impact on Student Growth</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conduct “backroom” testing of the statewide measure of impact on student growth for tested grades and subject areas.
Year 4: 2015-16	<p>Evaluation System</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• All districts using approved measure of classroom practice.• Teachers and principals receive information on impact on student growth in order to familiarize them with the data. <p>Measure of Impact on Student Growth</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Using the statewide measure of teacher impact on student growth, states generate data on student growth using results from the new college and career-ready assessment.• States continuing with current assessments implement the evaluation system with all schools and districts in the state using the statewide measure of teacher impact.
Year 5: 2016-17	<p>Evaluation System</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Full implementation of evaluation system.• Teacher evaluation ratings based on measures of classroom practice and measure of impact on student growth in both tested and non-tested subjects.• Districts use evaluation information to inform personnel decisions.

3. HOLD STATES AND DISTRICTS ACCOUNTABLE FOR ENSURING THAT ALL STUDENTS HAVE ACCESS TO STRONG TEACHERS

Congress must hold states and districts accountable for ensuring the even distribution of strong teachers so that students of color and low-income students have access to successful educators. We propose a series of incentives and sanctions that will help states identify inequities and take the actions necessary to correct them.

- Using the TQI, states must monitor and publicly report within district and between district inequities by patterns of access. Specifically, states must examine distribution within each district by race and poverty and among districts by race and poverty. States should look at elementary and secondary schools separately, as well as examine the gap in average values between schools in the highest and lowest quartiles by concentrations of poverty and race.
- Once a state has a new evaluation system in place, it must use the results to identify inequities within districts and among districts by looking at patterns of access within each district by race and poverty and among districts by race and poverty. States should also continue to monitor and publicly report inequities within districts and among districts by patterns of access using the TQI for two years following the implementation of the evaluation system.
- If a school's achievement on standardized tests is above the statewide average for students overall as well as for each of its student subgroups—even if there are issues of inequitable teacher distribution—then the district does not have to address any teacher inequity problems that may exist at that school.
- If a district has not significantly narrowed gaps in teacher quality between schools within two years from the date of enactment using the TQI, the district shall use Title II funds for the sole purpose of eliminating those inequities.
- If a district has not significantly narrowed gaps in teacher quality between schools within four years, then the district shall receive only 50 percent of the Title II funds received in the prior year and shall be required to provide an equal match of state or local funds.
- If a district has not significantly narrowed gaps in teacher quality between schools within five years, then the district shall not receive any Title II funds.

NOTES

- ¹ Robert Gordon, Thomas J. Kane, and Douglas O. Staiger, "Identifying Effective Teachers Using Performance on the Job" (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2005).
- ² Tim Sass, Jane Hannaway, Zeyu Xu, David Figlio, Li Feng "Value-Added of Teachers in High-Poverty and Low-Poverty Schools" (Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, November 2010).
- ³ Pilot districts should include a representative sample of districts in the state. A representative sample would take into consideration the number and demographics of students served by districts statewide.

ABOUT THE CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS

The Center for American Progress is a nonpartisan research and educational institute dedicated to promoting a strong, just, and free America that ensures opportunity for all. We believe that Americans are bound together by a common commitment to these values and we aspire to ensure that our national policies reflect these values. We work to find progressive and pragmatic solutions to significant domestic and international problems and develop policy proposals that foster a government that is “of the people, by the people, and for the people.”

ABOUT THE EDUCATION TRUST

The Education Trust promotes high academic achievement for all students at all levels—pre-kindergarten through college. We work alongside parents, educators, and community and business leaders across the country in transforming schools and colleges into institutions that serve all students well. Lessons learned in these efforts, together with unflinching data analyses, shape our state and national policy agendas. Our goal is to close the gaps in opportunity and achievement that consign far too many young people—especially those who are black, Latino, American Indian, or from low-income families—to lives on the margins of the American mainstream.

A paper jointly released by The Center for American Progress and The Education Trust.

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