

High Quality Professional Development: Will States Meet the NCLB Mandates?

For schools and districts to meet No Child Left Behind's mandates to staff all classrooms with highly qualified teachers in core academic subjects by the end of the 2005-2006 school year, investments in professional development (PD) will be essential.

NCLB provides some additional—albeit not likely sufficient—resources and programs for PD, including: Title I and Title II, Part A funds, Reading First, and Enhancing Education through Technology. Many of those investments will likely be on content specific opportunities in order to help practicing teachers become highly qualified in their main or secondary fields. However, NCLB defines PD activities in broader terms, providing an opportunity to reflect upon and improve school and district offerings and align them with improvement goals.

This issue of BestTQ analyzes the NCLB high quality PD criteria, provides data on PD offerings to date in the Southeast and poses critical questions to consider in ensuring that all teachers have access to and take advantage of activities that improve teaching practice and help students learn.

High Quality Professional Development in NCLB

While definitions for highly qualified teachers are rooted in a belief that content knowledge is the key to quality, the NCLB language around PD is far more inclusive of instructional method, particularly around reaching diverse learners. The NCLB definition of high quality PD (found specifically in the [Title IX, Section 9101(34)] statute) includes 18 activities intended to improve the quantity and quality of PD opportunities. The statute charges states and districts to:

- Improve teachers' knowledge of the academic subjects that teachers teach;
- Give teachers, principals, and administrators skills to provide students with the opportunity to meet state academic content standards and student academic achievement standards;
- Advance teacher understanding of effective instructional strategies;
- Give teachers of limited English proficient children, and other teachers and instructional staff, the knowledge and skills to provide instruction and appropriate language and academic support services to those children, including the appropriate use of curricula and assessments;
- Provide instruction in methods of teaching children with special needs;
- Include instruction in the use of data and assessments to inform and instruct classroom practice;
- Ensure that teachers, principals, parents, and administrators of schools participate extensively in the development of all these PD opportunities.

Current State of PD

The good news is that NCLB has the potential to put a bright spotlight on whether or not teachers have access to effective PD. Based on previously assembled data, we are likely to find that teachers are much more likely to receive PD in their primary content area and also in student assessment than in previous years.

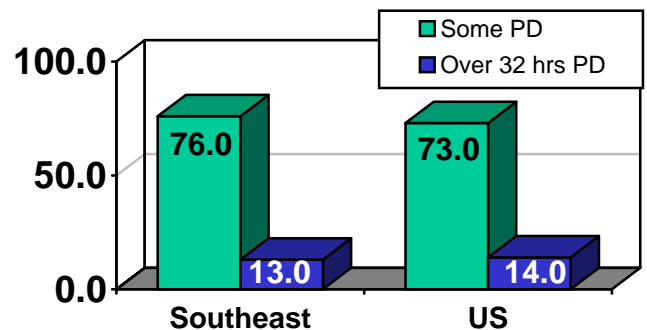
For example, using the Schools and Staffing Survey, only 30 percent of teachers in 1994 reported that they had some PD in their main teaching assignment; however, in 2000, the number jumped to 60 percent. Similarly, while 51 percent of teachers surveyed in 1994 reported receiving some training in student assessment, 65 percent did so by 2000.

While these data may portend good news, the scope and amount of such training appears to be less positive. A very small percentage of teachers reported that they had more than four days of PD in any of the areas identified.

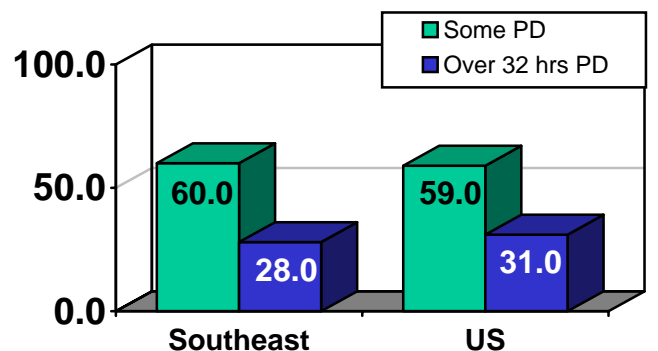
Percent of Teachers w/ PD Experience – Past 12 Months

Source: Schools and Staffing Survey, 1999-2000

Teaching Methods



Content Knowledge

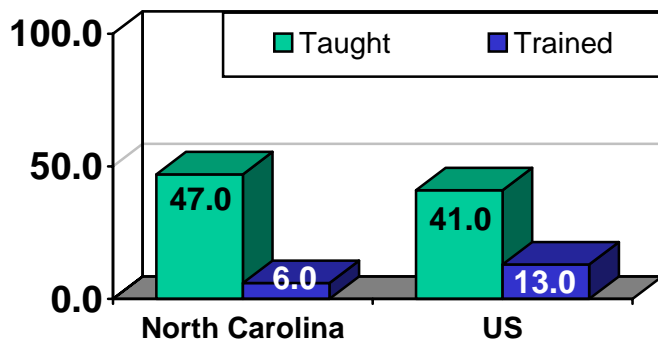


Most disheartening is the growing percentage of teachers nationwide, and in the Southeast, who are teaching second language learners with limited or no PD in this area. For example, in North Carolina, a stunning 47 percent of teachers are teaching second language learners, but only 6 percent have had eight hours of training over the last three years in learning to serve these students with very special needs. Few teachers have participated in a significant amount of PD dedicated to working well with all children, especially students that will be necessary to reach in meeting Adequate Yearly Progress across all subgroups.

Percent of Teachers who Taught LEP Students and Percent with Training*

Source: Schools and Staffing Survey, 1999-2000

*Eight or more hours training in last three years on how to teach limited English proficient students.



Critical Questions

Policy makers, practitioners, and the public all need better information about which teachers have access to what kinds of PD and how these teacher learning opportunities are influencing student learning. Also, state policy and teacher leaders need to know how current PD dollars are being spent and to what end.

- What data will states and districts gather to ensure high quality PD is being offered?

NCLB requires states to gather and publish data on access to high quality PD. States typically have not monitored PD outside of individual teacher submissions of clock hours for relicensure. While many states will likely leave decisions and data gathering in the hands of local districts, NCLB could act as a springboard toward developing a systemic approach.

- Do state requirements around PD district and/or school accreditation and relicensure align with NCLB and its high quality PD mandates?

Only PD meeting NCLB requirements for high quality teaching should be accepted for relicensure credit, and accreditation or other state policy should ensure that district and school offerings meet the NCLB definition and are aligned with school and district improvement plans.

- Are Title II, Part A funds being used differently and supporting high quality PD?

Most funds for PD are in Title II, Part A, with 95 percent of them going to districts. While local allocations can be beneficial toward ensuring that PD is catered directly to teacher needs and school/district goals, it can also lead to inequities across states due to the diversity of approach. States need to use their data gathering to assess whether investments are still flowing to programs (previously funded by discrete programs under Eisenhower and the Class Size Reduction Act) that may not be working toward creating a systemic approach that will help teacher and student learning.

- Does the federal definition of "highly qualified" teachers go far enough given the PD needs of teachers? (e.g., teaching second language learners, understanding and using student assessment data, etc.)

The federal definition focuses primarily on whether or not teachers have content knowledge. However, teachers' knowledge of content, while deeply necessary, it is not sufficient. States could use data on teachers' needs for serving all students to push for more comprehensive approaches to defining and supporting "highly qualified" teachers.

Next Steps for SECTQ

The Center recognizes the need for solid, hard and current data on teachers' direct experiences with their own PD, ensuring that educational and political leadership has the kind of fodder needed to develop the right kinds of new policies and strategies. The Center is now in discussions with a number of stakeholders in several states (in the Southeast and elsewhere) to develop the capacity to assemble and report on potentially powerful information regarding teachers and their learning opportunities.

Teaching Quality Across the Nation

- ➔ The Education Policy Analysis Archives (Darling-Hammond, L. And Sykes, G..(2003, September 17)) released a report examining policy changes needed to acquire and retain "highly qualified teachers." Read the report at: <http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v11n33/>
- ➔ In early September, the Education Trust released its report, "In Need of Improvement: Ten Ways the U.S. Department of Education Has Failed to Live Up to Its Teacher Quality Commitments." Read the report at: <http://www2.edtrust.org/edtrust/Product+Catalog/special+reports>
- ➔ For more information about the work of the Center, including new initiatives, presentations and upcoming events, visit: <http://www.teachingquality.org>

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The Southeast Center for Teaching Quality

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