

Statement of
Kate Walsh
President, National Council on Teacher Quality
before the
Committee on Education and the Workforce
United States House of Representatives
July 27, 2011

“Education Reforms: Exploring Teacher Quality Initiatives”

Chairman Kline, Ranking Member Miller, and Members of the Committee on Education and the Workforce, thank you for your invitation to participate in this hearing. I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to you today and I appreciate your interest in exploring initiatives and policy options for improving teacher effectiveness.

My name is Kate Walsh and I am the president of the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ). NCTQ is an organization that advocates for a broad range of teacher policy reforms at the federal, state, and local levels aimed at increasing the number of effective teachers in our nation’s schools. We conduct research that has direct and practical implications for teacher policy. We are a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, committed to transparency and increasing public awareness about the institutions and policies that shape teacher quality.

NCTQ’s Board of Directors and Advisory Board are composed of Democrats, Republicans and Independents, all of whom believe that reform of the teaching profession is necessary and long overdue. Our mission is to provide an alternative national voice to existing teacher organizations, and build the case for a comprehensive reform agenda that would challenge the current structure and regulation of the teaching profession.

When it comes to teacher quality, here are the facts. *Teachers matter.* Despite the great challenges faced by economically disadvantaged students, no *school-based* factor is more

important in determining their achievement gains than their teachers. Not class size, not access to technology, not per student spending – not many of the other things states and school districts pour money into in the name of education reform. *Teaching matters*. Improved student assessments, objective education data collection and reporting efforts have made it possible to consider an individual teacher's specific impact on student learning – and the difference between having a really effective teacher and an ineffective one can mean more than a year's worth of learning. Looking at the impact of student performance on economic growth, education researcher Eric Hanushek estimates that if we reduced by even half the gap between student performance in the U.S. and in top performing nations, we'd add \$44 trillion to our productivity.

What these facts suggest is that no education improvement strategy states and districts take on – and it is at the state and district level where nearly all teacher policy plays out – is likely to have a greater impact than one which seeks to *maximize teacher performance*. Improving teacher quality must be the centerpiece of any serious school reform effort.

As we look across the states, we see some important recent movement in the direction of serious attention to teacher performance and effectiveness. State efforts to secure some of the \$4.3 billion in federal funds for Race to the Top led to a number of significant new laws and regulations. Our 2010 policy review found an increase in the number of states requiring annual evaluations of all teachers (from 15 states in 2009 to 21 states in 2010) and a more than doubling of the number of states requiring that evidence of student learning be the preponderant criterion in teacher evaluations (from 4 states in 2009 to 10 states in 2010). Our review also revealed a growing number of states adopting policies for holding teacher preparation programs in their states accountable based on the academic performance of students taught by their graduates. A year later, we know that these figures are already totally outdated. As we prepare our annual update and report card on teacher policy developments for 2011, it will be another year of big policy changes. The reality is that, with or without money at stake, states have continued to push forward on the great teacher and leader priorities included in Race to the Top.

But states have a long way to go to have effective teacher policies in place. The vast majority of states do not ensure that teacher evaluations preclude teachers from receiving satisfactory ratings

if those teachers are found to be ineffective in the classroom. In addition, too many states still does not require annual evaluations of all veteran teachers, and most still fail to include any objective measures of student learning in the teacher evaluations they *do* require. In all but a few states, teachers are granted tenure with little or no attention paid to how effective they are with students in their classrooms. Requirements for teacher preparation too often fail to ensure teacher candidates have the most critical knowledge and skills. For example, despite compelling evidence about the most effective ways to teach young children to read, most states don't ensure that elementary teacher candidates enter the classroom with these essential skills. In math, only Massachusetts requires elementary teacher candidates to pass a rigorous test of mathematics content covering topics specifically geared to the needs of elementary teachers. In almost every state, licensure requirements do not ensure that teachers know the subject matter they will teach. Rather than working to expand the teacher pipeline, many states create obstacles in their alternate routes to certification.

Unfortunately, most state (and federal) policy making around improving teacher quality to date has focused almost exclusively on qualifications – teacher credentials, degrees, and licensing – which, while useful, do not currently ensure that teachers have mastered the content they are expected to teach and are effective in the classroom. State and district salary schedules continue to reward teachers for earning master's degrees and higher, despite the fact that study after study show no correlation between master's degrees and a teacher's effectiveness. As we demonstrate in our 2010 annual *State Teacher Policy Yearbook*, the standards set by states for elementary school teacher licensing exams are almost universally too low and there are too many loopholes allowing teachers into classrooms without demonstrating that they have proper knowledge of the subjects they are teaching. Our research indicates that the selectivity of teacher preparation programs, the knowledge they require teaching candidates to master, and the way these institutions prepare candidates for the rigors of the classroom is, at best, uneven, and often, woefully inadequate.

Regarding teacher preparation programs in particular, we think this ought to be a major focus for reformers interested in raising teacher quality because these programs *ought to* contribute greatly to teacher effectiveness. In partnership with *U.S. News and World Report*, NCTQ has launched a

first ever review of the quality of all of our nation's 1,400 education schools. This national review will for the first time enable the public to differentiate between good, bad, and mediocre education programs across the country. The standards we use to evaluate education schools set a clear, reasonable bar for what constitutes quality teacher preparation. NCTQ will identify programs whose design quality merits emulation, where prospective teachers should aim to be admitted, and where districts should go to recruit new teachers. The goal of the initiative is plain and simple: Building better teachers. Future teachers, district superintendents and policymakers need to know which institutions are graduating teachers who are 'student ready'--and which are not.

It is worth noting that this study has proved challenging and controversial. There are a number of higher education institutions that don't appreciate the scrutiny and have decided against providing us with basic information regarding their programs of study for teaching candidates: the syllabi describing the content of required courses, the textbooks that students must buy and use, student teaching handbooks, and any data that institutions collect on their graduates' performance. From our perspective, higher education institutions, whether private or public, have an obligation to be transparent about the design and operations of their teacher preparation programs. After all, these institutions have been *publicly approved* to prepare public school teachers. Although institutions' lack of cooperation makes our task more challenging, we are undeterred, and I look forward to being able to share the results of that review with this committee in late 2012.

So how do we get more effective teachers? We need more effective pathways into teaching. We need to design and implement teacher evaluation systems that differentiate our most effective and least effective teachers – and then we need to design supporting policies around that performance information. We need to get effective teachers to the students who need them most. We need to encourage and reward excellence in teaching. But there is more. NCTQ believes that it is important to be clear and honest about the full range of policies needed to transform the profession. We must attend to ineffective teaching, starting with taking a hard look at the programs that prepare teachers in our country. We also must begin to consider making

politically difficult but necessary choices about tenure, promotion and dismissal for teachers who are consistently and unequivocally ineffective.

At the foundation of current efforts to improve teacher quality are initiatives designed to develop fair and reliable teacher evaluation systems measuring teacher effectiveness in the classroom. According to NCTQ's 2010 review of state policy, 15 states require that teacher evaluations are *significantly* informed by student achievement/growth; and 10 states require that student achievement/growth is the *preponderant criterion* in teacher evaluations. Again, as I mentioned earlier, the 2010 data are likely catching just the beginning of this wave of change. We won't be surprised if the number of states adopting policies to include student achievement in teacher evaluations nearly doubles by the close of 2011.

This focus on teacher effectiveness sets the foundation for better targeted professional development for struggling teachers and higher standards for teacher preparation programs. Coupled with fair but rigorous policies for dismissing persistently ineffective teachers and better compensation for effective teachers could help attract and retain a stronger cadre in the profession, and, as a result, recast current thinking around educational equity.

Slowly but surely, the call for "highly qualified" teachers is being replaced with a call for "highly effective" teachers. NCTQ believes that the change is more than just semantics, and we think there are ways Congress can help provide a policy framework to support states in the cultivation of excellence and effectiveness within the teacher workforce.

To begin, it is worth noting that the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) did help move teacher policy in the right direction on some fronts. At the time NCLB was passed into law, only 29 states required teacher candidates to pass even a relatively simple subject matter test that would provide an objective measure of teacher knowledge. Today, 49 states require content knowledge tests that teacher candidates must pass in order to receive their licenses. On other fronts, NCLB drew attention to just how entrenched some teacher quality issues are including how much ground there was to make up to ensure that students were assigned teachers trained in

the specific subjects they were teaching and how difficult it would be to bring teacher preparation programs into the fold of accountability for teacher performance.

But NCLB also missed the boat on some teacher issues.

The highly qualified teacher (HQT) provisions in NCLB continued the almost exclusive focus of teacher quality discussions on qualifications rather than effectiveness.

While NCLB helped push states towards demonstrations of content knowledge, the rigor of the required assessments and the standards states set for teachers to demonstrate that they are “HQT” have been disappointingly low. The law’s provisions for declaring veteran teachers highly qualified – the High Objective Uniform State Standard of Evaluation (HOUSSE) – were, to be kind, extremely weak. In our December 2004 report, *Searching the Attic*, NCTQ showed that the strategies states employed in their HOUSSE plans demonstrated a near-universal disregard for the goals of the highly-qualified teacher provision.

Finally, the class size reduction and professional development programs that consumed the bulk of ESEA Title II funds in the past largely continued under NCLB. For 2009–2010, the U.S. Department of Education reported that the majority of the funds were used for professional development activities (42 percent) and to reduce class size (36 percent). Only 5 percent of funds were reportedly used for promoting growth and quality in teaching. Given that research shows general reductions in class size are expensive with little or no systematic relationship to improvements in student achievement and typical professional development programs are poorly designed, it is not surprising that Title II has been largely ineffective at generating the kinds of teacher reforms most likely to make a difference to student achievement. Title II will continue to consume precious federal funds unless Congress sets stronger and clearer priorities.

On behalf of NCTQ, I’d like to offer a “top 10” list of ways we think Congress could set stronger and clearer priorities for states on teacher quality that will lay a foundation for excellence in the profession:

- 1) Congress should require states, and reserve Title I funds, to develop sophisticated state data systems that can track student growth and allow value-added measurement.

With increasingly sophisticated education measures available, we are able to discern a great deal more information than ever before on how individual teachers affect student achievement. This, to be clear, includes controlling for the things teachers can't control – that is isolating the ways the actual teaching itself is really influencing student learning. Systems of teacher evaluation that differentiate performance and can truly help discern teacher quality have great potential in the ongoing quest to improve teaching and learning in our schools.

At present, not every state and district has the capacity or will to use student growth measures to evaluate their teachers and make employment decisions. But most states recognize that student growth and value added are performance measures worth examining when it comes to teaching and learning. With that in mind, states must continue to grow and refine their capacity to collect, analyze and make available sophisticated data on the progress of teaching and learning in their schools. Congress can ensure that states, districts, schools and school leaders have the kinds of education data they need to make informed decisions.

The good news is that states have come a long way in developing their education data systems. The bad news is that many states won't use the data they have to bring about change unless Congress demands it. To set the foundation for more accurate and nuanced school accountability policies under Title I as well as policies to ensure that students are taught by effective teachers, Congress should require that, as a condition of states receiving federal education funds, every state develop a data system with the capacity to link individual teachers to students and individual assessment results to school personnel records.

- 2) Congress should convert Title II to a competitive grant program, requiring states that want Title II funds to develop performance-based teacher evaluation systems aimed at improving teacher effectiveness.

We think that Title II should be a competitive program because building performance-based systems of teacher effectiveness is an initiative states should take on only if they are ready, willing and able. Not all states have the will, or in some cases the capacity, to get serious about performance-based teacher evaluation.

For those states that are serious about teacher effectiveness, absolute priorities for Title II funds should include that states: define “highly effective” teaching, with evidence of student learning as the preponderant criterion; require annual teacher evaluations for all teachers regardless of tenure status, with clearly defined levels that differentiate teacher performance; require that teacher evaluation ratings be based to a significant extent on objective student data and are not limited to standardized test scores; require that performance evaluation systems generate consequences – that is, ensure that such systems are designed to advance the highest performers, develop the middle and deny tenure to and dismiss the lowest, absent improvement; and finally, require that districts and principals provide support structures for teachers identified as poorly performing and set a pre-established timeline for how long such support should last before other consequences kick in.

Congress must be clear that Title II funds previously allowed for reducing class size and professional development activities too often of poor quality and poorly targeted will now be devoted to ensuring that comprehensive teacher evaluation systems measuring teacher effectiveness are implemented well. This includes directing substantial Title II resources towards reviewing and validating these new systems, as well as providing professional development and training on performance-based evaluation systemwide. Title II could be used to provide for third party peer reviewers to help implement and validate teacher evaluations. Title II funds must be directed towards professional development that is targeted to teachers’ needs, as identified by evaluations, with specific emphasis on helping teachers who perform poorly to improve.

3) Congress needs to scrap HOUSSE and stop allowing college majors to suffice for HQT.

As the emphasis shifts to effectiveness, there’s one qualification we shouldn’t ignore: ensuring that all teachers know their subject(s) as demonstrated by performance on rigorous content tests.

Under the current law, the content knowledge test requirement applies to elementary school teachers. But new secondary teachers in most states must either pass a state test in each core academic subject they teach or have completed an academic major, course work equivalent, or an advanced degree. While a major is generally indicative of background in a particular subject area, only a subject-matter test ensures that teachers know the specific content they will need to teach.

NCTQ encourages Congress to make sure that state content tests for teacher licensing are rigorous and require that ALL teachers pass them – whatever route they take into the profession.

- 4) Congress must ensure that teacher content knowledge tests are rigorous; if not, the current requirement for content testing is not going to move us towards more effective teachers.

The hitch in the last recommendation is that the requirement is meaningless if the subject matter tests new teachers are required to pass are not rigorous and if prospective teachers can pass the tests without truly mastering the content. NCTQ has serious concerns on this front. First, we have very serious doubts about the rigor of most current content-knowledge assessments. At the elementary level, most states administer general subject-matter exams that combine different subject areas into an overall composite score. Such tests have questionable standards for performance and make it possible to pass an overall assessment without mastering all subject areas.

NCTQ's 2010 *State Teacher Policy Yearbook* presents data on where states set their passing scores on elementary level content licensing tests. Most states set the bar for allowing teachers in the classroom too low on tests that are of questionable rigor to begin with. (Massachusetts, the highest performing state on national and international assessments, is a notable exception.) At the secondary level too, there are important questions about the rigor of content assessments. The combination of very general content tests and below average expectations for teacher performance across the states calls into question whether many or most current state teacher licensing assessments are capable of providing any assurance whatsoever of content knowledge.

Congress could help rectify the situation by requiring that all new elementary teachers must pass stand-alone tests of scientifically-based reading instruction and elementary content mathematics. Despite compelling evidence about the most effective ways to teach young children how to read, NCTQ identifies only six states with policies in place to ensure that elementary teacher candidates enter the classroom with these essential skills. At a minimum, Congress should require that any content assessments for new elementary school level teachers be able to provide separate scores or performance results by individual subject area, particularly reading/language arts and mathematics. The goal here is to improve assessment quality by ensuring transparency about where states set the bar for entry into the teaching profession and ensuring that a teacher's limited knowledge of a critical subject area, such as mathematics, isn't masked by a composite score.

Congress also might consider establishing a national commission that recommends subject-by-subject passing scores that ought to be expected for new teachers to have the content knowledge required to teach, at both the elementary and secondary levels and aligned with the new Common Core State Standards. This commission could examine the nation's widely-used commercial teacher licensing tests, as well as the assessments used by those states that have their own tests. While this commission need not require that states adopt the recommended scores, Congress could require states to report whether their states meet, exceed or do not meet the cut scores recommended to ensure that teachers have the content knowledge to teach to the Common Core. At the very least, Congress should require states to report data that show what their cut scores actually mean in terms of percentage of questions answered.

5) Congress should not allow subject teachers to be generalists.

In our review of state teacher policies, NCTQ finds that 22 states still allow generalist K–8 teaching licenses—allowing too many elementary-trained educators to teach grades 7 and 8. Clearly, teaching kindergarten and 8th grade are not the same enterprise. And neither is teaching subjects such as biology or physics the same enterprise. NCTQ finds, in fact, that all but 11 states allow secondary science teachers to obtain general-science certifications or combination licenses

across multiple science disciplines. In most cases, these teachers need only pass a general knowledge science exam that does not ensure subject-specific content knowledge.

Addressing this issue also means recognizing that special education teachers must teach subject matter. They are not babysitters. But state certification policies for special education teachers suggest otherwise. All states, without exception, now ignore the content preparation special education teachers need in order to be effective. All but 12 states, by NCTQ's count, allow K–12 special education certification; this is the *only* license offered in 22 states. NCTQ recognizes that special education teachers, especially at the secondary level, are in short supply. But we think that this failure to distinguish between elementary and secondary special education teachers and certifying them with a generic K–12 license addresses the supply issue at the expense of our most vulnerable students.

In the meantime, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) specifically permits a HOUSSE option for secondary special education teachers to demonstrate that they are highly qualified. While we think it is a lot to ask that secondary level special education teachers demonstrate mastery of every secondary subject area, it is worth noting that *not one* state requires teacher preparation programs to ensure that secondary special education teachers are highly qualified in even two subject areas upon program completion. NCTQ finds that 16 states require secondary special education teachers to be qualified in one core area. But the remainder—35 states—do not require that secondary special education teachers graduate highly qualified in *any* core academic areas.

Such state practice is strikingly incompatible with teacher quality goals. States might rethink the viability of K–12 special education certification if Congress required that incoming special education teachers pass the same requisite content assessments for the grade levels and subjects they teach as any other teacher. We've looked the other way while far too many special education teachers have been given no means of demonstrating their content knowledge or have been allowed to pass tests of even more dubious quality and rigor as the tests general education teachers are expected to pass. Holding firm on special education HQT requirements might help states reconsider K–12 certification for special education.

I return to a basic point in each of these cases. In order to cultivate a highly-effective teacher workforce, teachers must be trained for the grades and subjects they are going to teach—that is, teacher certification must be meaningful. General, broad certification that treats teaching 5-year-old or 17-year-old special education students as all the same or fails to distinguish between the knowledge required to teach anatomy, electrical currents and Newtonian physics flies in the face of what we know it takes students to achieve, to compete and to succeed in the world. It also makes certification not a very strong foundation for ensuring that all students have access to highly qualified and effective teachers.

- 6) Help states collect meaningful data and develop workable policies to ensure that all students have access to effective teachers.

We believe that Congress should require all states, as a condition for Title I funding, to develop a teacher quality index to examine and publicize teacher equity issues in a uniform and meaningful way. This index should look at more than years of experience and HQT status. It should also avoid factors that have not been shown to correlate with student achievement. The Illinois Education Research Council has developed and validated such an index, which includes data on teachers' undergraduate institution's average SAT or ACT scores; the percentage of teachers failing basic skills licensure tests at least once; the percentage of teachers on emergency credentials; average selectivity of teachers' undergraduate colleges and the percentage of new teachers.

States should be required to report school-level data reflecting teacher performance publicly and regularly. Parents, the public and education stakeholders deserve access to these important data, which will hopefully drive both recognition that good teaching really does matter and policy reforms demanding more effective teachers in more schools.

- 7) Congress should require that states remove barriers to alternate routes to teacher and principal certification.

One of the pre-conditions for the Obama Administration's Race to the Top program was that states remove barriers to alternative pathways for teacher and principal certification and provide for preparation diversity by allowing providers other than traditional university-based teacher preparation programs. NCTQ's 2010 *State Teacher Policy Yearbook* finds that there are 23 states that either don't have alternate routes or that restrict those routes to traditional college or university providers or the state department of education itself. This limits the opportunities for talented people to enter the profession. Congress could solidify opportunities to broaden alternate route usage and providers—thereby opening the pipeline to the teaching profession—by making these changes a precondition for states to receive Title I funds and an absolute priority for states applying for Title II funds. At the very least, Congress should prohibit practices that treat alternatively certified teachers as hires of last resort. At present, many states require a district to certify that no traditionally certified teacher was available for a given position. When it comes to attracting and retaining sufficient numbers of qualified STEM teachers, this strategy is an important point of attack on shortages in these fields.

With strong performance evaluation and management policies, along with appropriately rigorous policies for allowing teachers into the profession only if they can demonstrate knowledge of the subjects they will teach on subject-matters tests as a condition of licensure, states will have the kinds of mechanisms in place to monitor and ensure teacher quality without unnecessarily restricting the profession.

8) Strengthen accountability for all teacher preparation programs.

When it comes to colleges of education—the primary institutions that prepare America's teachers—a lack of accountability won't cut it. The institutions and programs responsible for preparing our nation's supply of teachers (higher education-based or run by local school districts or other providers) too must bear some responsibility for the quality of teaching and learning in our schools. Colleges of education have yet to prove that they are graduating teachers who truly advance student achievement in the classroom. Congress should take action and require states to assess the effectiveness of each approved education school. The best way to do this is by aggregating and reporting value-added data for each school's graduates. Congress should also

require states to post annual data on the number of recent education school graduates who are prepared to teach in shortage areas, and require states to identify these areas and set targets for programs to meet. Current federal reporting requirements allow states to set the bar way too low, as virtually all programs are identified as performing satisfactorily.

- 9) Tie federal grant opportunities to the adoption of “break the mold” state and district teacher policies that promote effectiveness.

Because teachers are truly at the center of all school reform efforts, Congress should require that all discretionary Title I and Title II funding opportunities include a commitment to increasing the pool and retaining highly effective teachers. Without increasing student access to highly effective teachers, the implementation of Common Core State Standards can’t succeed; the lowest-achieving schools won’t be turned around; and the issue of equitable distribution of teachers doesn’t have a chance of being addressed.

But these have to be break the mold initiatives. More seat time or clock hours of poorly designed or directed professional development won’t get our nation’s students the more effective teachers they need. Priorities Congress should consider include: incentivizing states and/or districts to ban seniority-based layoffs; leveling the playing field for higher needs districts and schools to attract and retain effective teachers through genuine alternate route programs; and developing state or district-level teacher corps to place the state’s most effective teachers in high needs classes as an intra-district loan or as state employees.

- 10) There are some areas where Congress might unintentionally do more harm than good, so caution is warranted.

NCTQ is one of the few education reform organizations to express doubt about policy recommendations floating around regarding Title I comparability. Comparability requires districts to evenly distribute their state and local funds across schools before allocating Title I funds. The major issue is that districts can exempt salary differentials when determining how to distribute their state and local funds. When average salaries are used, high needs schools, which

often employ more junior-level, lower-paid teachers, can be shortchanged. As a result, there are some strong feelings that Congress and the U.S. Department of Education must do more to make districts level the playing field in salary disparities that exist between their poor and less poor schools.

We worry about this strategy. We think that efforts to equalize teacher salaries across schools will result in all sorts of district tomfoolery, leading districts to make decisions about school staffing that have less to do with what's good for a school and more to do with meeting some federal requirements. While there are other options to shuffling around staff to more evenly distribute funds across schools—from providing bonuses to teachers in needy schools to concentrating support staff in needy schools, or by adjusting per-pupil allocations to remedy the gaps—most require that districts come up with additional resources. We still worry that cash-strapped districts will opt for the free solution: reassigning teachers.

NCTQ believes that the principle that must be preserved above all else, including in efforts to equalize funding, is each principal's ability to select staff at the building level. With states building systems for evaluating and making key employment decisions based on effectiveness of teachers, there are better ways to address access issues.

A recent economic analysis by Eric Hanushek is telling on this point. Replacing even the lowest performing 8 percent of teachers with an average teacher (not even a highly effective teacher) could put the U.S. on par with top performers on international tests of math and science. That kind of transformation of student learning based on increasing access to effective teachers can't be accomplished by playing shell games with the profession as it is. It can be accomplished if we focus energy and resources into policies that promote and compensate effective teachers and remove the ineffective teachers.

We also are skeptical at this point about new teacher performance assessments. The jury is still out. If there were only a crystal ball that could predict if a new recruit was going to become an effective teacher, so many seemingly intractable problems would be solved. But until that crystal ball is invented, states and districts continue to look for ways to make better predictions. The

latest strategy is performance-based assessments, licensure tests that aim to measure what new teachers are actually able to do. Nineteen states, as part of the Teacher Performance Assessment (TPA) Consortium, are ready to jump on the bandwagon, but does the TPA really separate wheat from chaff among prospective teachers? That rather central question remains unanswered. There appears to be little evidence (available publicly, at least) that these assessments are a useful screen for determining teacher effectiveness.

In conclusion, NCTQ's work during the decade of No Child Left Behind, and our mission to help ensure that every child has an effective teacher, drives us to embrace a comprehensive set of policies to address teacher quality. We need to establish more effective pathways into teaching. We need to get more effective teachers to the students who need them most, and we do need to do more to recognize, encourage and reward excellence in teaching. In this sense, we find ourselves joining a chorus of advocates calling for moving from highly qualified to highly effective teachers.

Not all teacher policies ought to be mandated from on high from Congress, of course. But we know that the policy context set by Congress and states is of central importance to ensuring that our nation's students are exposed to the most well-trained, knowledgeable and effective teachers possible. An effective teacher in every classroom is not a far-fetched proposition. The vast majority of our nation's teachers are qualified and capable. However, we think that a serious effort to cultivate highly effective teachers requires us to be clear and honest about the full range of policies needed to transform the profession. Cultivating excellence and truly improving access to effective teachers will mean not only growing more effective teachers, but also attending to ineffective teaching.