

High Quality Teachers: At What Expense?

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Abstract

Section 1119 of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB Act), which requires all core teachers to be highly qualified by the end of the 2005-2006 school year, should be repealed. This piece of legislation was rushed into law and thus is not carefully crafted in the best interest of the U.S. education system. Furthermore, it will shift power from experienced educators to the government. Section 1119 has met with strong disapproval from teachers, contains significant inequities, and will not ensure that America has truly excellent teachers. Consequently, this legislation will not achieve equal, high quality education for all students.

On January 8, 2002, President George W. Bush signed the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which Bush termed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB Act). Bush had made the NCLB Act one cornerstone of his 2000 presidential bid, and one of his top agenda items. It is generally claimed by proponents that the NCLB Act's main goal—to ensure that every child in America has equal access to a high quality education—is buttressed considerably by the fact that the NCLB Act provides regulations to enhance the preparation of the most important people in education—teachers. Proponents claim that in order for students to get the most out of education, all of their core teachers (science, math, reading, and writing) should be highly qualified¹. Summarizing the practical results of Section 1119, Lynn Olson, senior editor of *Education Week*, says that highly qualified teachers will have to be “fully certified through traditional or alternative routes and have demonstrated competency in the subjects they teach, either by having an academic major or its equivalent, or by passing a subject-matter test” (“Final Rules” 26). Furthermore, highly qualified paraprofessionals should have an associate's degree and should meet rigorous state testing standards. According to the Qualifications for Teachers and Paraprofessionals, outlined in Section 1119 of the legislation, all core teachers and most paraprofessionals—except those who translate or who are solely involved in parental activities—are required to be highly qualified by the end of the 2005-2006 academic year (U.S. Department of Education, *Improving Basic Programs*). Also, beginning the 2002-2003 school year, no teacher may be hired unless she is highly qualified. In addition, individual states are to draft legislation regarding how to achieve these goals, including how much to spend—within set guidelines (U.S. Department of Education, *Improving Basic Programs*).

The requirement for teachers to be of high quality is ill-advised and not nearly sufficient to address many of education's most pressing concerns. Section 1119 of the NCLB Act should be repealed since (1) it is clearly opposed by teachers, (2) it fosters inequity between the education of students in different states, (3) it is economically unsound for the best and worst school districts, and (4) it does not get to the root of the problem—getting good teachers into classrooms.

Teachers oppose the requirements of Section 1119 since the act (1) is perceived as a step by the government to take away more of their autonomy in the classroom; (2) fosters an inequity between core teachers, who must be highly qualified, and other teachers; and (3) requires all teachers to be licensed earlier than it is logistically possible to do so. First, teachers believe, with significant reason, that their finely-crafted teaching programs cannot be improved by government bureaucrats. Therefore, any imposition by government regarding how they teach is generally rebuked. In fact, most teachers would prefer to have more responsibility for educational decisions, not less. This desire for responsibility and independence at work is normal in American political culture. Thus, teachers' desires for independence are supported by American political values such as liberty and individualism. Barbara B. Tye and Lisa O'Brien, professors of education at Chapman University and Claremont Graduate School respectively, assert that by enacting more legislation to control teachers, teachers are driven away from the field of teaching since they can no longer teach in the way they feel is best (25). Teachers would logically object to the government telling them that their colleague of eighteen years who has coached 450 students to fives on AP tests and is loved by parents and administrators alike is not highly qualified and must therefore be more thoroughly trained, or fired. In fact, according to Michael Baker, education correspondent for the BBC News in the United Kingdom and former visiting

¹ Throughout this paper, the terms highly qualified and high quality are used by the formal definition which follows.

professor at the Institute of Education, London University: “In countries where accountability measures have undermined teachers’ autonomy, there is now a recruitment crisis” (36). Baker also states that these other countries include England, Canada, and Australia, and that such a recruitment problem in America would only exacerbate the fact that current teachers are already leaving the profession (36). However, John I. Goodlad, a professor emeritus at the University of Washington and president of the Institute for Educational Inquiry, Seattle, offers a recommendation: “If teaching our young in schools became a lifelong professional career—adequately rewarded and supported, with decision-making authority commensurate with responsibility—teacher shortages would fade away” (20). This may be optimistic; however, it is clear that any action, such as Section 1119 of the NCLB Act, which takes autonomy away from teachers is contrary to maintaining, let alone increasing, teacher recruitment. Furthermore, such legislation is even more dangerous in light of the fact that teachers have, over the last several years, become increasingly disenfranchised by mounting outside influences which tell teachers how to do their jobs (Tye and O’Brien 28). Under the likely scenario that the U.S. will face the same problems in hiring new teachers as others have after introduction of similar programs, Section 1119 of the NCLB Act will indeed prove its imprudent nature.

Ronald Newell, Learning Program Director for the Gates-EdVisions Project and adjunct professor at Capella University, claims that many teachers would like to address the accountability issue by developing a “system of teacher-driven professional accountability,” in which teachers, rather than the government, set standards for all aspects of education (209). Clearly, teacher control is better than the capriciousness of government intervention. Also, Section 1119 will require all but a few paraprofessionals—who are translators or involved in parental activities—to be able to assist in the teaching of science, math, reading, and writing. Furthermore, the act defines specific boundaries between the jurisdiction of teachers and paraprofessionals. This is a governmental control which could lead to some significant tribulations since it ensures that paraprofessionals will not teach classes. Thus, in the case that a sufficient number of highly qualified core teachers have not been hired yet, students would be in the presence of an educator—a paraprofessional—who may have the knowledge and ability to teach them, but who will, by government regulation, be forced not to teach. Such a situation, which could become widespread under the new regulations, is clearly not in the best interest of educating America’s children, and therefore should be avoided by repealing Section 1119 of the NCLB Act.

The second strong objection of teachers to the requirement for all core teachers to be highly qualified by the end of the 2005-2006 school year is that this requirement will foster an inequity between core teachers (science, math, reading, and writing) who will all be highly qualified, and other teachers who will not necessarily meet the same requirements. As a result, it may reasonably be assumed that schools may resort to drafting already highly qualified teachers from non-core areas to teach in core areas. Thus, the quality of education that is provided for students in areas other than science, math, reading, and writing would be in jeopardy. Furthermore, some teachers would have more autonomy from governmental regulation than others. As discussed above, teachers strongly desire their independence in the classroom, and the unequal levels of government regulation could potentially cause undue animosity between core teachers and other teachers. It is clearly a peculiar component of the legislation that only some teachers need to be of high quality while other teachers do not. This begs the question: Why are some subjects more important than others? Proponents of the legislation will state that the core subjects of science, math, reading, and writing require the most attention, and thus they

are singled out (U.S. Department of Education, *The Facts About*). However, this is undoubtedly an example of Section 1119's ineffectual and piecemeal approach to solving the education problem. The legislation falls significantly short of producing an equitable and valuable plan; rather, it will create rifts between teachers and their colleagues and endanger the advancement prospects of American students in non-core areas.

Another objection of educators to Section 1119 is that it is impossible for most school districts to meet the deadlines set under the Bush proposal. Indeed, many teachers and politicians believe that America does not have the facilities to train all of the necessary teachers by the 2005-2006 deadline (Saland et al.). This point of view is supported by a study conducted by the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future in 1996. In it they outlined a policy that would provide for "competent, caring, and qualified teachers in every classroom by 2006" (Goodlad 20). This plan, if provided the proper resources, could have been completed successfully in ten years. On the other hand, the Bush plan gives only three school years to achieve an even more ambitious goal which Saland et al. of the Education, Labor and Workforce Development committee feel is simply logistically impossible (Saland et al.).

Section 1119 of the NCLB Act fosters inequity between the education levels of students in different states by not specifying what the phrase "alternative methods" indicates. Instead, the legislation allows individual states to determine what "alternative methods" they will allow for licensing teachers in their states (U.S. Department of Education, *Improving Basic Programs*). The states are only told that they must produce teachers of high quality, then they are allowed to define high quality as they please—with some vague guidelines. Consequently, teachers of high quality will vary in level of training from state to state. This is yet another way in which the high quality requirement fails to meet the White House's claim that the act will leave no child behind. Clearly, if high quality teachers are better educators, states that can afford to set higher guidelines will have better educated students. Thus, Section 1119 is written specifically to maintain imbalance in our education system, and should therefore be repealed.

The method presented to pay for ensuring that all teachers are of high quality by the end of the 2005-2006 school year is economically flawed and incredibly inequitable. The plan requires that a school district with all or most highly qualified teachers cannot spend less than 5% of the funds given by the legislation to improve the few who are not highly qualified. Conversely, districts that will scramble to meet the deadline are restricted from spending more than 10% of the money, even if they have disproportionately high numbers of teachers who do not meet the new requirements (U.S. Department of Education, *Improving Basic Programs*). This is clearly a backwards constraint which does not allow school districts to spend the funds in the manner which is most crucial to meeting the deadlines in Section 1119. Furthermore, the insistence on such a quick turnover to highly qualified core teachers could result in a shift of teachers to more wealthy districts, which could offer more money to attract them. This would further disadvantage the teachers who live in poorer areas who will probably already have trouble becoming fully certified, especially since their district may be allocating the minimal 5% to training their teachers to become highly qualified, as they need the funds elsewhere. Obviously Section 1119 is not equitable to all concerned and does not allow for effective use of funds to achieve high quality teachers.

Finally, the requirements of Section 1119 do not solve the problems that plague the American education system. In fact, the NCLB Act is a hastily written document that was rushed into law under the strong-arm tactics of George W. Bush and Secretary of Education Rod Paige. The big push to pass this legislation came after the September 11, 2001 attacks at the

World Trade Center and the legislation was signed into law less than four months later (Saland, et al.). The American education system has been the focus of a large amount of research and discussion. According to Michael Trevisan, Director of the Assessment and Evaluation Center, Washington State University, Pullman, said research has especially focused on ways to improve test scores and increase accountability (766). This legislation should not be hurried, given that adequate education reform is exceedingly important to the American people. In fact, the U.S. Department of Education conducted a study, which showed that 89% of Americans support measuring academic progress and holding schools accountable to their goals (*The Facts About*). It, therefore, logically follows that some changes must be made to the U.S. education system. However, these changes should be carefully thought out and debated. Instead, according to Saland, et al., "...expediency has triumphed over good policy. The proposals were not researched thoroughly and their ramifications were not thought through adequately" (Saland et al.). This inattention could potentially pose innumerable problems in the future. At the very least, the American people deserve to have carefully thought-out and planned-for legislation, not the haphazardness of the NCLB Act.

In order to meet the guidelines of Section 1119 of the NCLB Act, it will be necessary to rush the hiring of new teachers and licensure of old ones. In fact, in a memo to other congresspersons, members of the Education, Labor and Workforce Development Committee expressed concern regarding the possibility that "Pressuring states to comply before they are able could lead to policymakers diluting the certification process" (Saland et al.). Indeed this is a real risk. The NCLB Act may meet, or at least come close to, the goal of putting a "highly qualified" core teacher in every classroom by the end of the 2005-2006 school year. However, many of these highly qualified teachers could, potentially, have forged certifications. Clearly it would do no good—for students or teachers—to require that teachers be certified, if the certification were a fraud. Forcing this massive and hasty change in requirements for teachers could do just that. With the illusion of more qualified teachers, but the reality of the same or even fewer certified teachers, as qualified teachers quit due to loss of autonomy, the results could be catastrophic for the U.S. education system. As Gerald W. Bracey, a research psychologist and education writer who annually publishes "The Bracey Report" in the *Phi Delta Kappan*—a peer reviewed education journal—points out, conservatives will claim that teachers under the current public education system simply cannot produce results (141). Consequently, conservatives may use a so-called failure of the U.S. education system, even with their highly touted accountability practices, as a catalyst for more radical change, such as the adoption of a voucher system. Without a doubt, the changes in the school system observed after this flawed legislation is practiced for several years may be misinterpreted and further lead U.S. education away from constructive reform.

The definition for highly qualified that is used in the legislation is not representative of the change in teacher education that is required in order to increase the quality of American students. Thomas J. Lasley II, Dean of the School of Education and Allied Professions at the University of Dayton in Ohio, William Bainbridge, president of SchoolMatch and Distinguished Research Professor at the University of Dayton, and Barnett Berry, Executive Director of the Southeast Center for Teaching Quality at the University of North Carolina, conclude that merely requiring teachers to have completed four years of college or some equivalent does not guarantee that a teacher will have all of the modern teaching tools. In fact, Lasley, Bainbridge, and Berry lament the fact that many students seeking certification leave college without understanding "standards-based lessons, how to assess student work, and how to work with parents and

families” (19). If teacher quality is to be improved, more thorough, modern certification programs must be developed. Furthermore, currently the average SAT scores for students entering teaching accreditation programs lags far behind the averages of business, engineering, and arts and humanities students. Therefore, Lasley, Bainbridge and Berry conclude that, for the sake of our students, we must stress quality over quantity (20). Hopefully then, teachers could be produced who would like education for their whole careers. These programs may reasonably include a fifth year of education for teachers before they become licensed (Lasley, Bainbridge, and Berry 16).

Clearly, Section 1119 of the NCLB Act, which requires that all core teachers be highly qualified by the end of the 2005-2006 school year, should be repealed. The legislation is overwhelmingly opposed by teachers since it will reduce their autonomy in the classroom, creates a disparity between the quality of teachers in different subject fields, and sets an impossibly early deadline for all core teachers to be of high quality. Furthermore, it begets inequity between the levels of education of students in different states, is a rushed piece of legislation that is economically unbalanced, and does not truly address the most severe problems of America’s education system in an effective manner. Obviously, in order to recruit necessary teachers of high quality, increase teacher retention, promote equality between school districts, and ensure for our future generations a tradition of high quality education, Section 1119 of the NCLB Act must be repealed.

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