

EXISTING FLEXIBILITY

A common theme emerged from frequent meetings, visits and listening sessions with teachers and state and local officials across the country: States haven't been taking full advantage of flexibility (in requirements and in funding) already at their disposal through No Child Left Behind. Outlined below are some of these untapped areas:

I. HOUSSE for Current Teachers

No Child Left Behind does not require current teachers to return to school or get a degree in every subject they teach to demonstrate that they are highly qualified. The law allows them to provide an alternate method (HOUSSE) for experienced teachers to demonstrate subject-matter competency that recognizes, among other things, the experience, expertise, and professional training garnered over time in the profession.

II. Middle School Teacher Requirements

Importantly, states have the authority to define which grades constitute elementary and middle school. States may determine, by reviewing the degree of technicality of the subject matter being taught and the rigor of knowledge needed by the teacher, whether demonstrating competency as an elementary or as a middle school teacher is appropriate. In addition, states may approve rigorous content-area assessments that are developed specifically for middle school teachers aligned with middle school content and academic standards.

III. Testing Flexibility

NCLB provides flexibility in developing assessments for teachers to demonstrate subject-matter competency. States may tailor teacher tests to the subjects and level of knowledge needed for effective instruction.

IV. Special Education Teachers

The highly qualified teacher requirements apply only to teachers providing direct instruction in core academic subjects. Special educators who do not directly instruct students in core academic subjects or who provide only consultation to highly qualified teachers in adapting curricula, using behavioral supports and interventions or selecting appropriate accommodations, do not need to demonstrate subject-matter competency in those subjects.

Congress, in the context of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) reauthorization, is considering modifying how the highly qualified teacher provisions of NCLB apply to special education teachers. The Department looks forward to working with Congress in addressing this need.

TERMS TO KNOW: HIGHLY QUALIFIED TEACHERS

- **Highly Qualified Teachers:** To be deemed highly qualified, teachers must have: 1) a bachelor's degree, 2) full state certification or licensure, and 3) prove that they know each subject they teach.
- **State Requirements:** NCLB requires states to 1) measure the extent to which all students have highly qualified teachers, particularly minority and disadvantaged students, 2) adopt goals and plans to ensure all teachers are highly qualified and, 3) publicly report plans and progress in meeting teacher quality goals.
- **Demonstration of Competency:** Teachers (in middle and high school) must prove that they know the subject they teach with: 1) a major in the subject they teach, 2) credits equivalent to a major in the subject, 3) passage of a state-developed test, 4) HOUSSE (for current teachers only, see below), 5) an advanced certification from the state, or 6) a graduate degree.
- **High, Objective, Uniform State Standard of Evaluation (HOUSSE):** NCLB allows states to develop an additional way for current teachers to demonstrate subject-matter competency and meet highly qualified teacher requirements. Proof may consist of a combination of teaching experience, professional development, and knowledge in the subject garnered over time in the profession.