

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ESEA REAUTHORIZATION

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1. Teacher effectiveness should be measured by a performance assessment that includes reliable measures of student achievement gains.

HECSE and TED support the move from “highly qualified” teacher to “effective teacher” and “highly effective” teacher; however, effectiveness cannot be determined solely by using value added models involving standardized tests. While this approach is parsimonious, a value added approach for defining an “effective” or “highly effective” teacher is not without its problems.

First, to apply growth models standardized achievement data must be available for several years prior to the year for which predicted scores are calculated. While the bank of scores needed for these complex statistical calculations is growing, the data are generally limited to math and reading/language arts scores (Goe et al., 2009). There are few states that have yearly data sets in other academic areas. Moreover, effective teachers in general and effective teachers of students with disabilities in particular often contribute to the social/behavioral outcomes that make academic achievement accessible. These outcomes are not measured using standardized data and may not be analyzed using the growth models currently available.

Second, growth modeling involves complex statistical approaches and includes a number of assumptions that do not fit our public school systems. For example, many growth models assume that teachers are randomly assigned to schools and that students are randomly assigned to teachers. These assumptions are not met in many districts and schools. Additional research is needed to examine the effects of violating these assumptions.

Third, value-added models using student achievement scores to determine the individual effectiveness of teachers have poor reliability estimates (.30 to .50) (Hill & Schilling, 2008). Thus, these models do not reliably predict which teachers will be in the upper echelon of teachers from year to year. Fourth, value-added models only account for the amount of between classroom variance that exists in student achievement performance, and some of this between classroom performance, often a substantial amount, is accounted for by the characteristics of the student group in a particular class (Roehrig, Brownell, Schatschneider, & Yaacov, 2010). In

value-added models there is simply no way to account for peer effects (Braun, 2005). Finally, students with disabilities spend at least part of their day working on critical academic skills with special educators. It is not clear how a student's achievement might be divided to account for the instruction received from a special educator and instruction received from the general educator.

Ultimately, teacher performance should be measured by valid and reliable assessments of teacher knowledge and classroom performance that are linked to student learning. Such assessments should be comprehensive. However, this requirement will require funding to support research necessary to develop valid and reliable measures that may be used to assess a broad range of academic and social/behavioral outcomes for students with disabilities.

Finally, attention must also address how to determine whether special education teachers, who work primarily with students with intellectual and developmental disabilities who are assessed using alternate assessments, are "effective" or "highly effective." Although these students may not be able to demonstrate academic growth at a rate commensurate with their peers without disabilities, determining teachers who are most effective at meeting these students needs in multiple domains is necessary.

2. Alternate routes to certification and traditional preparation programs should be held to the same rigorous standards.

The federal government should not fund alternate route or traditional preparation programs unless they are high quality and lead to full certification. Individuals participating in these programs should not be deemed highly qualified or highly effective until they demonstrate their instructional competence through a performance assessment that is linked to positive student outcomes. All alternate route and traditional preparation programs receiving federal resources must provide clear approaches for preparing teachers to implement evidence-based academic and social/behavioral practices with diverse learners, including those with disabilities and ELL students.

Finally, ESEA should prohibit the certification of any special education teachers through a fast-track preparation program, regardless of the organization providing such preparation, Fast-track programs lead to higher attrition rates and are unlikely to provide special education teachers opportunities to learn about evidence-based practices. Moreover, observational research comparing special education teachers with very minimal preparation to those with more extended preparation suggests that fast-track programs are unlikely to result in effective special education teachers (Nougaret, Scruggs, & Mastropieri, 2005).

3. Professional development should target evidence-based instructional skills as well as pedagogical content knowledge for veteran general educators and special educators. Such skills and knowledge will be essential to improving their effectiveness with diverse learners and struggling students.

Evidence-based curricula and practices are available that promote a differential approach to instruction and are effective with ALL students (e.g., see Division of Early Childhood of CEC – Recommended Practices http://www.dec-sped.org/About_DEC/Recommended_Practices; Research and Training Center on Early Childhood Development - <http://www.researchtopractice.info/index.php>; National Standards Project- <http://www.nationalautismcenter.org> ; What Works Clearinghouse- <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>; Promising Practices Network - <http://www.promisingpractices.net/> ; NICHY Research to Practice Database- <http://www.nichcy.org/Research/Summaries/Pages/Default.aspx>; Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning - <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel/wwb.html>; National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center - http://www.nsttac.org/ebp/ebp_main.aspx ; Best Evidence Encyclopedia - <http://www.bestevidence.org/>). All teachers should be familiar with the variety of curricula and instructional resources that are available so they may maximize achievement for the range of diverse learners in their classrooms. In addition, both teachers and school administrators should know how to implement schoolwide evidence-based strategies that promote improved achievement including universal design for learning, response to intervention and positive behavioral supports.

Finally, general educators and special educators must be prepared to work together to deliver content to a diverse array of learners. This requires an understanding of both content and pedagogy and is essential for special educators as well as general educators. Recent research in mathematics and reading supports the need for teachers to have pedagogical content knowledge; that is, knowledge of how to represent content for students (Ball, Thames, & Phelps, 2007; Brownell et al., 2007).

4. ESEA should strengthen the role for higher education teacher preparation in partnership with K-12 schools to prepare and support effective teachers, including special education teachers.

The blueprint offered by the Obama Administration calls for the creation of a new program, “Teacher and Leader Pathways”. This program eliminates existing programs and uses those funds for a generic competition for teacher and leader preparation with a focus on alternate routes. Effective alternative route programs are characterized by collaboration among SEA’s, LEA’s , and IHE’s, are of adequate length and intensity (more than 30 hours of special education preparation that includes integrated seminars, supervised fieldwork, and traditional courses), have rigorous and coherent programmatic content, and include frequent observation and mentoring (Rosenberg & Sindelar, 2005; Humphrey & Wechsler, 2007). ESEA should require partnerships among LEA’s, SEA’s and IHE’s. Rather than limiting where the partnership originates, and whether a program is an “alternate route” or a “traditional route,” ESEA should focus on establishing and supporting partnerships that prepare teachers who can effectively instruct the range of diverse learners in their classrooms.

HECSE and TED support an increase of the set aside in Title II of ESEA for higher education from 2.5% to 5%. The additional funds should be used to expand partnerships between higher education and high need K-12 schools to prepare teachers in shortage areas, including special education teachers.