
Letters were sent out to parents when their teachers were not meeting this definition of highly qualified. I did not get one. Does that mean that my child's teacher is highly qualified?

The federal definition of “highly qualified” addresses only a part of what is necessary to be a high quality teacher. If you did not receive a letter, it means basically that your child’s teacher has a strong background in the subjects she or he teaches, but it does not necessarily speak to his or her skills or preparation as a teacher.

If my child's teacher is not labeled "highly qualified," does that mean she is going to be fired?

The legislation requires that schools and districts reduce the number of teachers who are not highly qualified every year until 2006, when all teachers must meet this definition. The law requires that extra training be offered to teachers who need it, but there is no mention of firing teachers in the law. How to meet the requirements of the law is up to the school district.

How can our parents' organization work with our schools to help them attract and keep highly qualified teachers?

Parents can be effective advocates for improving schools by supporting the things that we know work to attract and keep highly qualified teachers. Schools that are clean, safe, have small class sizes, and supportive administrators can usually find highly qualified teachers. Teachers who are provided with effective training, adequate materials, time to teach well, and fair salaries are more likely to stay in the profession.

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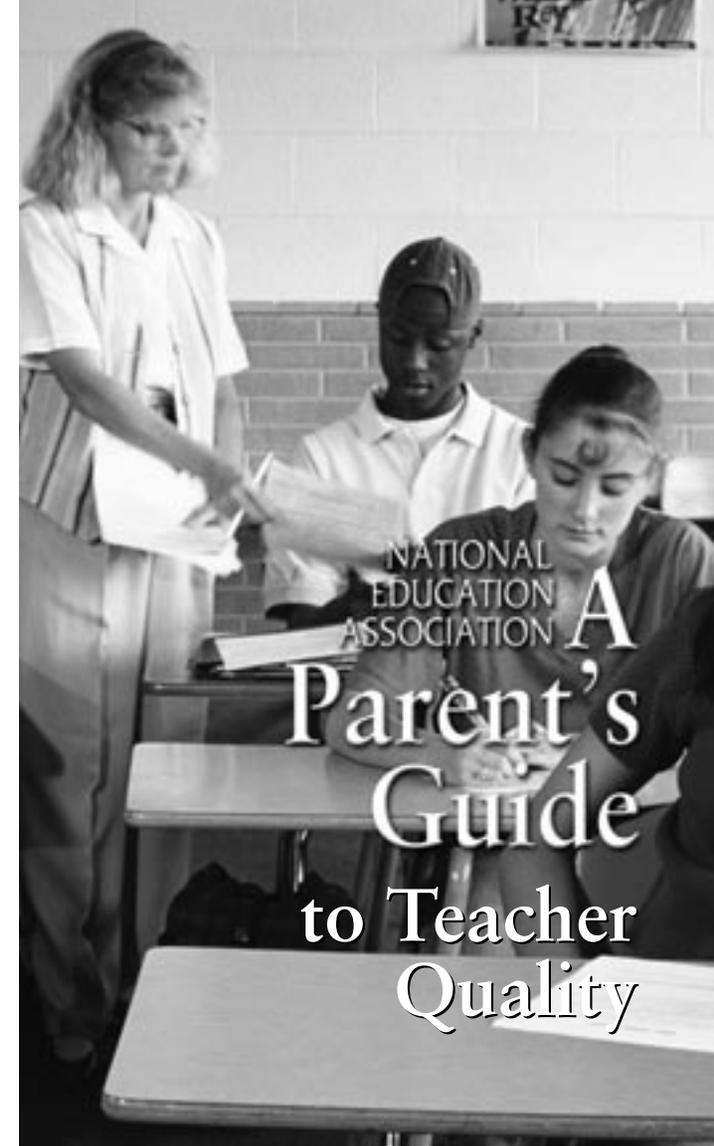
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Great Public Schools for Every Child

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This guide was developed to help parents understand how a new federal law defines teacher quality.

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Great Public Schools for Every Child

A great teacher is the most important factor in providing a great education. Every child deserves a great teacher—one who knows the subject she or he teaches and also how to teach it well to all children. This guide explains the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2001 (often called No Child Left Behind), and how it helps, but also gets in the way of providing a great teacher for every classroom. The guide also has some ideas from NEA about how to provide every child with the great teacher all students deserve.

I've heard a lot lately about teachers being "highly qualified" or "not highly qualified." Where is this coming from?

The No Child Left Behind Act—sets a very narrow definition of a “highly qualified” teacher, and requires that all teachers meet this standard. The federal definition of “highly qualified” is based almost entirely on teachers’ knowledge of the subjects they teach.

Are there problems with the federal government definition of “highly qualified teacher”? Does NEA support every teacher being highly qualified?

Under this federal legislation, teachers can be labeled “highly qualified” even

if they have no experience teaching students, no experience working with students from different racial and cultural backgrounds, and no preparation to be a teacher. By this definition, someone who has no idea how to maintain classroom discipline or how to meet the needs of each individual child can be labeled “highly qualified.”

NEA wants a great teacher in every classroom, but disagrees with this federal definition of high quality. It is too limited. Just because someone knows a subject very well does not mean she or he will be an effective teacher. Teachers must know their subjects well and also know how to teach those subjects. Every child deserves a teacher with strong knowledge and strong teaching skills.

If I learn that my child's school has a large number of teachers who are not highly qualified, should I transfer my child from the school?

Not necessarily. This label means that a teacher has not met certain measures required by the law. Sixth-grade math teachers in a middle school are required to have passed a test in math, for example. It is possible that these teachers have taught math successfully for many years, but if they have not taken and passed a math test, they might not be called “highly qualified” by the law regardless of their knowledge, teaching skills, or how well their students are achieving in math.

Are there enough teachers who meet the definition of “highly qualified” to staff all our schools?

No. In many subject areas such as math, science, or special education, there is a severe shortage of teachers who meet the federal definition. It may be that your school hired the best available person it could find. If one of your school’s teachers does not have the background required, you might need to encourage the school and the principal to help this teacher get the training and skills necessary to meet the requirements.

I have been very happy with my child's teacher, but I got a letter stating that my child's teacher is not highly qualified. Should I transfer my child out of that teacher's class?

If you receive such a letter, you need to investigate the reason it was sent. It may be that the teacher had to meet different requirements when she obtained her license, or she may have met the requirements in a way not recognized by the federal government. Sometimes teachers are assigned by the school to teach a subject for which they have not been prepared. If your child’s teacher is experienced, and you are satisfied with your child’s progress, you should work with other parents to encourage your school officials to provide the professional development the teacher needs to meet the requirement.