

Access to High Quality Teachers for All Students

One of the most important factors in a high quality education is the knowledge, experience, and capability of the classroom teacher. There is strong evidence that having a high-quality teacher affects learning and is an important factor in explaining student test score gains (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002; King Rice, 2003; Loeb, 2000; Wayne & Youngs, 2003). One widely cited study by economist Eric Hanushek (1992) suggests that the estimated difference in annual achievement growth between having a good and bad teacher can be more than one grade-level equivalent in test performance (p. 107). Since the impact of teacher quality on student achievement is larger than effects from other education interventions, improving minority and low-income children's access to skilled teachers could substantially reduce the achievement gap over the long-run.

If the achievement of low-income and minority students is to improve, increasing access to high-quality teachers is imperative. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) includes provisions that highlight the inequities in the distribution of teachers. These provisions require states and districts to develop plans to insure that minority and low-income children are not taught at higher rates than other children by inexperienced, unqualified, or out-of-field teachers.

While these provisions hold promise in bringing attention to the inequities in access to good teachers, minority and low-income students continue to be taught disproportionately by inexperienced, unqualified, or out-of-field teachers. While having a high-quality teacher is important for student learning, there is substantial evidence that teacher quality varies across schools and districts, with some better able to attract and retain high-quality teachers than others (Betts & Danenberg, 2002; Freeman, Scafidi, & Sjoquist, 2002; Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002; Loeb, 2000). Typically, students in high-minority, high-poverty schools are more likely than other students to have teachers who are not certified, are inexperienced, or lack an educational background in the subject they teach (DeAngelis, Presley, & White, 2005; Jepsen & Rivkin, 2002; Olson, 2003; Peske & Haycock, 2006).

Ensuring that low-income and minority students have access to high-quality teachers is confounded by structural barriers in the teacher labor market that make it difficult to attract and retain teachers to some schools, as well as the decision making process that governs the hiring, assignment, and utilization of teachers in particular kinds of schools (Ingersoll, 2004). Teacher preferences for teaching in schools close to their hometown and in regions similar to those where they grew up make it difficult for urban areas, where low-income minorities are concentrated, to recruit new teachers (Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2003). These problems are compounded by the fact that the teaching force remains overwhelmingly White. Urban districts, which typically have more positions than qualified candidates, must recruit teachers from other regions. The use of salary and incentive pay to attract teachers is subject to the budgetary constraints of particular localities, and the challenging working conditions of many urban schools make it

difficult to retain high-quality teachers. However, addressing the distribution of teachers is necessary if students in low performing schools are to have access to high-quality teachers.

Retaining teachers once they enter the field can help improve access to quality teaching. The evidence suggests that working conditions within schools are a primary influence on teacher attrition, much more so than student demographics, pay, or teaching in challenging schools (DeAngelis & Presley, 2007; Marvel, Lyter, Peltola, Strizek, & Morton, 2007; Viadero, 2008). Teachers report that they leave their jobs because they have inadequate support from school administrators, too many intrusions on classroom learning time, and limited input into school decision making (Ingersoll, 2001, 2004). Working conditions can be particularly important for urban schools. For example, in one urban district researchers found that high turnover related to problems in planning and implementing a coherent curriculum and sustaining positive working relationships among teachers (Guin, 2004). Whether new teachers stay or leave the profession is strongly related to working conditions, professional connections, and the support they receive in their first years of teaching (Markow Martin, 2005). The culture created by the principal and the availability of mentoring opportunities are important factors affecting teacher retention. As teachers gain experience or invest in credentials specific to teaching they are the more likely to stay in the field (Goldhaber, Gross, Player, 2007).

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