I. The Current Landscape of Federal Teacher Policy

Most Federal programs designed to address teacher issues are authorized under one of the two primary Federal education laws – ESEA (aka NCLB), or The Higher Education Opportunities Act. Here is a quick précis of the major federal teacher policy programs.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB):

Title I - Title I requirements aim to provide “Highly Qualified Teachers” (HQT) for all Title I schools. States must ensure that Title I schools meet the HQT provisions for both entering teachers and teachers already in service, who must meet the High Objective Uniform State Standard of Evaluation (HOUSSE) requirement, specified by each state and oriented around teachers’ content knowledge in all subjects taught. NCLB also requires annual reports by states and districts on their compliance with the law, and specifies uses of Title I funds for content-driven professional development, together with other funds supplied under Title II, Part A and Title III, Part A (the latter directed to preparation of educators of limited and non-English speaking students).

Title II, Part A - Improving Teacher Quality State Grants, a formula-based program that provides funding to States that in turn make formula-based sub-grants to local education agencies (LEAs). States and LEAs are free to use this money at their discretion, so long as it increases the number of highly qualified teachers (defined in the NCLB legislation) in classrooms and is aligned with state standards for content areas and assessments. Includes professional development and class size reductions

Title II, Part A - Advanced Certification (AKA Advanced Credentialing) addresses teacher supply concerns by furnishing competitive grants to “LEAs, SEAs, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) working with an LEA or SEA, the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) working with an LEA or SEA, or another certification or credentialing organization working with an LEA or SEA” for numerous purposes including the promotion of recruitment efforts tied to achieving advanced teaching credentials.

Title II, Part C - Transition to Teaching is a much smaller program than the other two mentioned, extends federal funding to federal, regional, state and local alternatives-to-certification program sites, specifically partnerships between IHEs, non or for-profit agencies supplying alternative route programs and a high-need SEA, LEA or consortium
of multiple entities. Participants may be mid-career professionals looking to fast track a teaching certificate, or recent post-graduates with a degree in a specific content area, who take part in a program site’s efforts to certify and place teachers in high-need schools.

**Higher Education Opportunities Act (HEA):**

Recently reauthorized as the Higher Education Opportunities Act of 2008 or HEOA, the new HEA consolidates several previous Teacher Education programs into one overarching program, Title II, entitled *Teacher Quality Partnership Grants*. These grants support preservice preparation programs, new teacher recruitment and induction programs, teaching residency programs (see below), leadership development programs, and targeting to literacy and digital education. Under Section 205, “Accountability for Programs That Prepare Teachers,” this Title also includes a new and more detailed set of regulations and reporting requirements imposed on institutions and states.

Also incorporated into the new HEOA are the Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education or TEACH Grants. A form of loan forgiveness, TEACH grants provide teachers with $4000 towards a degree allowing them to teach in high-need areas. These grants are new attempts in a long history of loan forgiveness and scholarship programming designed to attract and retain qualified teachers in areas of need. Though there are multiple programs currently offering these scholarships or forgiveness options, the research on the effectiveness of this kind of programming is extremely limited.

**Teacher Incentive Fund:**

Outside both ESEA and HEA is a relatively new endeavor, the *Teacher Incentive Fund* (TIF). Authorized through Title V of the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act (PL 109-149), TIF supports efforts by SEAs or LEAs (often larger urban school districts) to develop comprehensive pay-for-performance programs for principals and teachers. This is a relatively new approach to improving teaching, and seems to be gaining political ground. TIF aims to positively impact student achievement by rewarding teachers and principals for student success. There are currently over 30 such programs operating around the country.

**II. Themes in Teacher Policy**

**Teacher Recruitment Policy**

The federal government operates several programs aimed at recruiting teachers. The most common kinds of recruitment programs are service payback programs, loan forgiveness programs, grants and fellowships, and sponsored employment opportunities. This kind of policy effort has enjoyed political support over many years, as funding has been part of more general, bipartisan efforts to encourage college attendance. However, we found no studies that illuminate the effects or impact of this family of policy on teacher recruitment or retention, especially in shortage areas.
Teacher Professional Development (PD) Policy

The federal government has also invested heavily over the years and across many programs in professional development for teachers. The largest, is ESEA Title II (A) (see above) with an annual appropriation of $3B. The National Science Foundation also has supported much of this activity especially through summer institutes for math and science teachers, and many other federal programs have underwritten professional development. Efforts to identify the most effective forms of professional development have proven elusive and difficult to study, although hallmarks of effective PD have been identified based on the research literature.

Teacher Preparation Policy

A basic federal strategy has been to create partnership arrangements for teacher preparation that include school districts, universities, and possibly other interests such as local communities. “Grow your own” teacher preparation programs in large urban districts have evident advantages in tailoring training to district priorities and in recruiting teachers who wish to teach close to home. These programs also have sought to work changes in organizations that cooperate in the preparation of teachers. Past efforts along these lines have yielded uneven results and such programs have waxed and waned over the years; the Teacher Residency programs in the new HEOA represent the latest development in this vein.

Alternative Route Program Policy

With support for programs like Teach for America, Troops to Teachers, and Transition to Teaching, the federal government joined in developing alternate route programs for entry to teaching. Though such programs offer an innovation on the recruitment front, they have failed by and large to deal with teaching’s retention problem, especially in high needs schools and districts. As these programs are currently unregulated by the federal government (except for ESEA’s Highly Qualified Teacher requirements), the quality of teachers hired is uneven. One danger in the turn to largely unregulated alternate route programs of uneven quality is that such programs could be regarded as the solution to systemic problems for which they can serve, at best, as a supplementary solution. Still, evaluation evidence suggests that entrants from such programs often produce comparable learning results in comparison with entrants from traditional college programs. Alternate routes also are successful in recruiting minorities to teaching, but retention rates tend to be lower than for traditional routes.

Teacher Qualifications Policy

Teacher licensing is firmly established as a state responsibility, but the federal government in recent years has supported a number of forays that take up questions about qualifications to teach, and several of these initiatives suggest both the promise and the difficulties. Federal qualifications policy, as evidenced through class-size reduction (CSR) efforts and advanced credentialing programs, represent efforts to intervene directly in the teacher labor market either by supplying funds to hire teachers or by supporting the development of qualifications to teach. Federal CSR policy has not had major influence, typically adding a few teachers in elementary grades; and the trade off between lower class sizes and teacher quality is open to question. Federal preferences re qualifications
have included initiatives that increase standards for teaching (such as the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards [NBPTS]) and those that decrease standards (such as the Passport to Teaching). Consequently the federal role here has wavered between opposing perspectives. While the NBPTS has sustained a range of rigorous evaluations concluding overall that board certified teachers are effective, no comparable research has supported the value in lowering standards for entry.

**Teacher Incentives Policy**

In Fall of 2006 the federal government launched the first Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grants to support innovative uses of incentive funding to address teacher workforce issues. Technical advances such as the development of value-added models for measuring student achievement and of state-wide databases that permit tracking of achievement at teacher and student levels hold promise for resolving some of the difficulties of determining how to assess teachers. That said, incentives-based programming has proven difficult to implement in turbulent political environments where sustained cooperation among the interested parties is hard to achieve and maintain. Still, experiments are underway that deserve time to unfold and to study closely.

**Teacher Accountability Policy**

Currently, NCLB’s Highly Qualified Teacher provisions hold localities accountable to state standards for licensing and credentials, and additionally require states and districts to complete annual reports on their compliance with the law. And, beginning in the late 1990s and continuing through the new HEOA, federal policy also has attempted to regulate teacher preparation. Evidence to date on the results tends to cast doubt on the effectiveness of such policy. For example, out of field teaching remains a problem in many locales, and response to the HOUSSE requirements has been brief, thin professional development not likely to exert much leverage on teaching. Higher Ed accountability has received less attention, but anecdotal evidence suggests that institutions comply with the regulations without changing much in their operations.

**District and School Working Conditions Policy**

Working conditions exert strong influence on such matters as teacher recruitment and retention in particular schools, as well as teacher effectiveness. Federal policy today emphasizes a combination of accountability and incentives without much attention to school conditions, which present a difficult target for policy. Federal funds over the years have been allocated to improve various aspects of Title I schools, but little research has examined how such efforts might influence teacher working conditions, which in turn plays a significant role in teachers’ decisions about their work and employment.

**Policy Management Issues**

The increasing body of policy directed to teachers and teaching is not currently managed and coordinated to yield coherent strategies up and down the federal system of education. The sum of teacher policy has increased dramatically, but the overall management and the combined effects of so much involvement is uncertain. Problems include policymaking and implementation without much knowledge for guidance; both gaps and duplication in policies; policies that work against one another; inefficient and
wasteful uses of funds; inadequate accountability for programs; and poor management of human resources at the local level.

III. Mission and Recommendations

Four basic goals should inform the federal teacher policy agenda:

1. Attract and retain qualified teachers for high need districts and schools
2. Attract and retain qualified teachers for high priority fields
3. Attract and retain high priority candidates to teaching
4. Improve teacher/teaching effectiveness

We offer several strategies for realizing these goals:

Strategy 1. Zero-based Accountability and Innovation

- Decrease a regulatory role through a process of “zero-based accountability.” The Department of Education (ED) should conduct a careful review, within both NCLB and HEOA, of (1) specific regulations; (2) their implementation; and (3) responses to regulation aimed at selective deregulation where the evidence indicates either that the regulations are serving no useful purpose, or are producing adverse, unintended consequences.
- Sponsor innovation and testing of new accountability models, procedures, and measures that states and localities might use for program improvement and capacity-building. The appropriate federal role here is to supply ideas that states and localities can use in their approaches to accountability.

Strategy 2. Target and Strengthen Teacher Recruitment

- Establish an expert study group for the purposes of conducting a thorough review of the impact of the federal government’s investment in teacher recruitment programs. The study group should issue a report on their findings intended to shape all of the current federal policies aimed at recruitment to teaching, with guidance regarding the size, timing, nature, and oversight of recruitment policies.
- Concentrate on the three strategic goals of drafting teachers for high need schools; in high priority fields; and for high priority candidates. Encourage special recruitment efforts aimed at potential minority teachers by targeting Historically Black Colleges and Universities and others serving minority populations.

Strategy 3. Build Capacity for Teacher Preparation and Development

- Establish a standard of safe practice in order to protect children from the equivalent of malpractice in the early years of teaching. A standard would rule out easy entry programs that are unselective, lacking in practical training and experience, and unsupported by district policy that supplies protected assignments and proper induction.
- Create sound guidance in the regulations governing Urban Teacher Residency programs, as well as supply technical assistance; study the implementation and effects; and disseminate best practices based on research results.
- Invest in research in order to know more about what makes teacher preparation and development effective in producing good teaching and learning, and in building instructional capacity. The current round of studies on teaching are
driven strongly by the production function analyses of economists that, while valuable, omit consideration of important qualitative issues involved in teaching and teacher education. A research and development strategy should involve new competitions, targeted grant programs, and a continuing round of clinical field studies that supply rigorous tests of promising ideas.

- Develop a new strategy around financing for professional development by investing in research and development that determines how to make better and more targeted use of these funds to the advantage of high needs schools. The federal government should (1) articulate standards for effective PD, but (2) promote a wide variety of approaches to such standards, then (3) study these carefully. As a first step in this process, ED should assemble an expert study group to make recommendations on how to implement this strategy within the context of ESEA Title II and other federal programs that supply PD funding.

**Strategy 4. Study Effects of Qualifications Policy**

- Invest in research that examines the effects of qualifications policy on a range of outcomes including teacher supply, effectiveness, retention, and others. Studies of teacher qualifications should be extended in several directions. New research should include subjects beyond reading and math and should include attention to instructional quality in addition to teacher qualifications.

**Strategy 5. Expand Uses and Kinds of Incentives**

- Continue experiments with incentives in teaching, and continue to invest in research that carefully monitors development in those areas.
- Launch a new initiative aimed at enhancing school working conditions in support of teachers and teaching. In parallel with the Teacher Incentive Fund establish a Teacher Working Conditions Fund and advocate for improvements around this dimension of teaching.

**Strategy 6. Improve Policy Management and Coordination**

- Assist in improving both district and state operations around the teacher workforce. Public funding is needed to improve capacity at both levels, especially in regard to recruiting and retaining good teachers. A new, targeted initiative should be developed that supplies funding to states and districts for development of human resource management strategies.
- Disseminate models of good practice that have emerged in exemplary states; and allocate funds to study the effects of state policy systems on the three key federal policy goals. States should be encouraged to monitor improvements in these goals through improved data collection and tracking.

**Strategy 7. Develop Information Systems**

- Support better information management systems at state and local levels. Computing technologies and other advances now create possibilities for collecting, analyzing, linking, and tracking a wide range of data that can be instrumental to policy development, including dollars, students, and teachers.