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# Economic Policy Institute

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**PREVIEW embargoed report:** [http://www.epinet.org/books/teacher\\_quality\\_all.pdf](http://www.epinet.org/books/teacher_quality_all.pdf) Password=School

## **REPORT EXAMINES WHAT MAKES GOOD TEACHERS**

**Research shows importance of research-based policies for schools to survive  
under *No Child Left Behind***

Highly skilled teachers who can improve children's chances for success are like gold for the nation's schools, which are under pressure from tough accountability standards and deep budget cuts. But the question of what makes a teacher good is a lot more complex than the simplistic measures and assumptions found in state and federal policies, including the federal No Child Left Behind act.

A new Economic Policy Institute report - *Teacher Quality: Understanding the Effectiveness of Teacher Attributes* - makes the murky picture clearer. Author and University of Maryland professor Jennifer King Rice discovers what factors in teacher education and experience raise teacher effectiveness and student achievement, emphasizing the need for teacher training practices and policies to be based on solid evidence of what really works in the classroom.

One key finding is contrary to a central theory behind No Child Left Behind, which emphasizes course content over teaching methods in teacher training. In fact, *Teacher Quality* shows that training in both the subject area and education methods are essential to maximizing classroom success. An algebra teacher shouldn't just know algebra, but also how to teach it to high school students. Rice's work demonstrates the complexity of teacher training and readiness, and the need for educators to create practices and policies that reflect what the research shows works for the different types of school settings, students, classes and teachers. Rice points out that there are too few funds invested in research that can determine what makes a teacher effective.

"Teacher quality is the most important school-related factor that affects how well students learn," Rice said. "Officials need to invest time and money into what really works in our nation's schools, especially now that budgets are being squeezed."

*Teacher Quality* takes an extensive look at such areas as certification, experience, preparation programs and degrees, coursework and test scores. Rice - an EPI research associate who examined nearly 80 studies of the links between teacher characteristics and teacher effectiveness - uncovers research that sometimes contradicts assumptions made in the teacher reform debate. The book provides a comprehensive look at what the available research shows us about teacher quality. Some of the highlights include:

- The National Teacher Examination – the gatekeeper test for the teaching profession – and other state-mandated teacher tests are not consistent predictors of teacher or student performance.
- Tests that measure literacy levels or verbal abilities of teachers have been shown to be associated with high levels of student achievement, particularly with low-income students.
- Research suggests that the selectivity of the university attended by the teacher has a positive effect on student achievement, especially at the high school level.
- Teachers with advanced degrees in math and science have a positive impact on high school student achievement in those subjects.

The report provides significant insight as the question of how to accurately judge and ensure teacher quality becomes very crucial for the nation's public schools that must improve under the federal No Child Left Behind Act. Good teachers are seen as essential tools to increase student performance, and an effective teacher policy is a promising way to achieve equity and quality in public schools.

Moreover, the fact that teaching is the largest category of educational spending – most school districts spend half of their budget on teacher salaries, while \$400 billion was used to employ 2.9 million teachers in 2000-2001 – shows that teachers are a school's most valuable resource. Yet deep budget cuts school districts face could diminish how much is invested into development and recruitment of quality teachers.

The evidence uncovered in *Teacher Quality* strikes a middle ground in the teacher policy debate between those who favor eliminating requirements and traditional certification programs to enter the profession and those who favor a stronger system of credential monitoring. As the research suggests, aspects like teacher preparation matter, but an advanced degree in a traditional teacher's college doesn't necessarily guarantee better classroom performance than another certification.

What does matter, Rice argues, is using solid research to identify the traits and programs that make teachers more prepared to help students learn better, and then forming policies and funding around that.

“Policy makers are sidestepping sound research to move forward with teacher policies that aren't proven to work or help students succeed,” Rice said. “We need to look at what the evidence says. Then we can better train and keep good teachers.”