

Series: 2004-2005
Circular Letter: C-9

**TO: Superintendents of Schools
Regional Educational Service Center Executive Directors
Charter School Directors, Magnet School Directors**

FROM: Dr. Betty J. Sternberg, Commissioner

DATE: May 11, 2005

SUBJECT: “No Child Left Behind” and Districts’ High Objective Uniform State Standard of Evaluation (HOUSSE) Plans

Beginning in school year 2006-07, all teachers teaching in public schools at the elementary, middle and high school levels (including special education teachers) must be determined to be “highly qualified.” To be determined “highly qualified,” a teacher must use the HOUSSE plan if he or she has not passed a state subject-matter test, does not hold an undergraduate or graduate major (or its equivalent), or does not hold advanced certification (e.g., National Board Certification) in all of the core academic content areas that he or she teaches (see attached Questions and Answers document for more detailed information). As many of you are aware, the recently reauthorized Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) identifies special education teachers as teachers who must demonstrate competency (i.e., be highly qualified) in the core academic subjects that they teach.

Circular Letter C-6, dated March 11, 2005, together with the clarifying memorandum dated March 21, 2005, focused on the requirements for “highly qualified” status. It is the state’s High Objective Uniform State Standard of Evaluation (HOUSSE) plan that we are focusing on in this circular letter. Because each district’s teacher evaluation and professional development guidelines (1) were reviewed and critiqued using the State Department of Education’s peer review process and (2) include subject-matter knowledge assessment, Connecticut’s district teacher evaluation plans have been approved by the U.S. Department of Education as Connecticut’s official HOUSSE plan.

To ensure that this statewide HOUSSE is standardized across districts throughout the state, it is critical that individual districts evaluate a teacher’s subject-matter competency in the core academic content areas, based on the *Common Core of Teaching* (CCT), using both of the following:

- A. foundational skills and competencies; and
- B. the discipline-based professional standards.

Teachers Hired Prior to July 1, 2006

The following information is provided to districts as guidance concerning the implementation of their HOUSSE plans, otherwise known as their teacher evaluation plans:

- All teachers who need to use the HOUSSE plan to be considered “highly qualified” must be evaluated between January 2002 and June 30, 2006; the evaluation must involve the determination that a teacher is competent in all of the core academic content areas that he or she is currently teaching. Evaluators should use the national and state discipline-specific curriculum standards (and accompanying support materials) and the CCT foundational skills and competencies (A and B at the bottom of page 1).
- The written evaluation must specifically state that the individual has been determined to be “highly qualified” in the specified core academic content area(s) they teach.
 - This determination of “highly qualified” must be portable; an individual teacher’s evaluation must be made available to another district as demonstration of his or her achieved “highly qualified” status. We recommend that as part of the evaluation, a certificate indicating the individual’s “highly qualified” status be produced, signed by the evaluator, placed in the teacher’s employment file, and a copy given to the individual being evaluated. It is the decision of the receiving district to accept or reject the sending district’s determination of “highly qualified.”
- Evaluations must be conducted by persons appropriately qualified to conduct them (holders of the #092 – Intermediate Administrators certificate).
 - We recommend that elementary teachers be evaluated by an elementary principal with knowledge in elementary curriculums.
 - We recommend that middle school and high school teachers be evaluated by an administrator with subject-matter knowledge in the core academic content areas they are evaluating OR by a collaborative team made up of (1) department chairs “highly qualified” in each of the core academic content areas the teacher is teaching and (2) an appropriate administrator.

Teachers Hired On or After July 1, 2006

All teachers hired on or after July 1, 2006, must be “highly qualified” in the content area(s) they will teach prior to being hired. Therefore, they must (1) hold an undergraduate or graduate major in the core academic content area(s) they are being hired to teach; OR (2) have a master’s degree or an advanced certification (such as National Board Certification) in the core academic content area(s) they will teach; OR (3) have successfully passed a state standardized content-knowledge test in the core academic content area(s); OR (4) have previously been determined “highly qualified” via the sending district’s HOUSSE plan.

IDEA has provided some flexibility for special education teachers hired subsequent to July 1, 2006. In order to hire a special education teacher who will be a primary teacher of core academic content knowledge either in a resource room or self-contained classroom, that person must be “highly

qualified” in one of following core academic content areas prior to being hired: reading/language arts/English, mathematics or science. Special education teachers then have up to two years to become “highly qualified” in the additional core academic subjects they will be teaching; districts may choose to use the district’s HOUSSE process for special education teachers to become designated as “highly qualified” in additional content areas.

The State Department of Education will sponsor two NCLB “Highly Qualified”/HOUSSE plan workshops for district superintendents and human resource directors this month at various locations across the state. The invitation to these workshops was sent electronically to all local education agency (LEA) human resource directors in late April.

We hope this information is helpful to you in designing your district’s HOUSSE evaluation process to ensure that all teachers teaching core academic content areas are “highly qualified” by the beginning of the 2006-07 school year.

BJS:np
Enclosure

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS
Highly Qualified and Districts' HOUSSE Plans

Q1: What does the acronym HOUSSE mean?

High Objective Uniform State Standard of Evaluation – The U.S. Department of Education approved Connecticut's consolidated state application, which included the intent to have each district use its Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) approved teacher evaluation plan as its HOUSSE plan.

Q2: Who is responsible for ensuring that all teachers currently teaching a core academic content area are NCLB “highly qualified” – the district or CSDE?

Each district is responsible for ensuring that all teachers in the district who teach a core academic content area are NCLB “highly qualified” in that subject knowledge. CSDE has requested that districts submit the worksheet distributed with C-Letter 6 on March 11, 2005, so that the Department receives accurate information to include with federal reports to the U.S. Department of Education. CSDE will not be determining the NCLB “highly qualified” status of individual teachers; that requirement remains with the local district.

Q3: Who must be determined to be NCLB “highly qualified” by the district?

Only those teachers who teach one or more of the core academic content areas specified in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. This includes all elementary, middle and high school teachers who teach one or more of the 10 core academic content areas, as well as special education teachers, and bilingual teachers who are the primary instructors of one or more of the core academic content areas. Administrators who currently do not have teaching responsibilities are not included in this group. Pupil personnel staff members need not be determined to be NCLB “highly qualified” because they do not teach core academic content to students.

Q4: What are the 10 core academic content areas identified in NCLB?

English, language arts/reading, mathematics, science, the arts (music, art, dance and theatre), world languages, civics and government, economics, geography and history are the core academic content areas identified in NCLB. Therefore, teachers teaching health, physical education, home economics, a trade or other subject areas are not included in these NCLB requirements.

Q5: Which Connecticut-adopted standardized tests may be considered when determining the NCLB “highly qualified” status of the individual?

Successful scores on the following tests will meet the criteria for NCLB “highly qualified” status:

- Elementary Education (predominately self-contained classrooms) – CONNECT and Praxis;
- Middle grades and High School (departmentalized setting) – CONNTENT, NTE and subject-specific Praxis II exams; and
- Elementary and Secondary World Languages – Praxis II or ACTFL (WPT and OPI) exams.
- Special Education - no test satisfies the criteria for NCLB “highly qualified” status because the Praxis II special education exam does not test content knowledge in any of the 10 NCLB core academic content areas.

NOTE: Connecticut’s assessment requirements have been revised over the years. In keeping with current policy, we will accept the above-identified exams provided that the test date and test code for either the Praxis II or CONNTENT (NTE) exam was Connecticut’s adopted test, and the individual met the minimum required score on that assessment.

Q6: Which teachers must rely on the district’s HOUSSE plan for determination of NCLB “highly qualified” status?

Teachers hired prior to July 1, 2006, must use the district’s HOUSSE plan if they (1) have not passed a state standardized teacher exam in their core academic subject area(s); (2) do not hold an undergraduate or graduate major in the core academic content they teach; or (3) do not hold a master’s degree in the core academic content area(s) they teach or an advanced certification in the content area (such as National Board Certification).

IDEA mandates that special education teachers hired after July 1, 2006, must be NCLB “highly qualified” in the core academic subject they are hired to teach. If the person will be hired to teach multiple subjects, he or she must be NCLB “highly qualified” in one of three core academic content areas [reading/language arts (elementary) or English (secondary), mathematics or science] before the person can be hired. Once the person is hired, the district may then use the HOUSSE plan within two years to determine subject-matter competency in the other core academic content areas that he or she teaches.

Special education teachers who exclusively teach students with disabilities that are assessed using the CMT/CAPT checklist must be NCLB “highly qualified,” but may be evaluated based on the instructional level of the students rather than the age level of the students (e.g., if the curriculums that are taught to these students are elementary curriculums, then that teacher should be “highly qualified” for elementary education).

Q7: Do all teacher exams suffice for determining that an individual is NCLB “highly qualified?”

No. Special education teachers currently must pass a Praxis II exam in special education in order to be certified. This assessment tests special education processes and pedagogy, but not content knowledge in the core academic content areas; therefore, passage of this exam will not suffice for a special education teacher to be NCLB “highly qualified.”

Q8: Which middle grade exams and endorsements will determine a person to be NCLB “highly qualified?”

Several different endorsements allow teachers to teach one or more subjects in a middle school departmentalized setting. Most teachers who hold the PK-Grade 8 endorsement (#001) will use the district’s HOUSSE plan to achieve NCLB “highly qualified” status. Most teachers who hold the generalist middle grades endorsement (#006) will also use HOUSSE to become NCLB “highly qualified.” While the CONNECT exam taken by many #006 endorsement holders did test content knowledge, it tested that knowledge at the elementary level; therefore, this early exam will only suffice for self-contained classroom teachers in an elementary setting to be NCLB “highly qualified.” Additionally, the generalist middle grades Praxis II exam did not test content knowledge and will not suffice for a teacher to be NCLB “highly qualified.” Therefore, the content-specific middle grades Praxis II exams are the only exams that will determine a middle grades teacher teaching in a departmentalized setting to be NCLB “highly qualified.”

Q9: Are teacher assessment exams passed by a teacher in another state acceptable for determining a person to be NCLB “highly qualified” in Connecticut?

Teacher assessment exams adopted by other states have not been validated by Connecticut; therefore, we cannot claim that these exams measure appropriate content knowledge in the core academic content areas.

Q10: Must the district’s teacher evaluation plan involve an observation?

No. A district’s teacher evaluation plan must evaluate subject-matter competency in the core academic content areas(s), based on the *Common Core of Teaching*, using both the (1) foundational skills and competencies and (2) discipline-based professional standards. However, this may or may not involve an observation of a teacher teaching. Consideration may be given to other avenues in which the teacher has demonstrated competency of subject-matter knowledge, such as successful completion of the BEST portfolio or action research. For example, individual special education teachers who have met the acceptable performance standard on a BEST portfolio with a focus on English/language arts (or mathematics) may be deemed to be NCLB “highly qualified” in English/language arts (or mathematics), but no other content areas. This evaluative tool may assist a district with determining NCLB “highly qualified” status for its special education teachers in one content area.

Q11: Within which core academic content areas must elementary teachers be NCLB “highly qualified?”

Elementary subject areas include language arts/reading, mathematics, science and social studies. The Praxis II exam and the earlier CONNECT exam tested subject-matter knowledge in each of these four areas. Therefore, individuals who have passed these exams are NCLB “highly qualified.” For teachers certified prior to the implementation of teacher testing in 1989, an elementary education major (not a degree) received either at the undergraduate or graduate

level will suffice to be NCLB “highly qualified.” A concentration or emphasis in elementary education does not equate with a major.

Q12: Must teachers who teach in nursery or prekindergarten classrooms be NCLB “highly qualified?”

If a school district employs nursery or prekindergarten teachers, those teachers should be determined to be NCLB “highly qualified.” An early childhood education major would deem a nursery or prekindergarten teacher to be NCLB “highly qualified.” Currently, no state standardized content knowledge test is required for certification to teach nursery or prekindergarten classes.

Q13: Are charter school teachers required to be NCLB “highly qualified?”

Yes. Charter school teachers are considered public school teachers in Connecticut, and the NCLB requirements apply to all public school teachers.

Q14: Must teachers who teach multiple core academic subjects be NCLB “highly qualified” in all of the content areas they teach?

Yes. Teachers must demonstrate competency in subject-matter knowledge in each of the core academic content areas they teach. A district may evaluate a teacher for competency in multiple subjects in one HOUSSE evaluation. Additionally, elementary teachers must demonstrate competency in multiple subjects (reading/language arts, mathematics, science and social studies). Elementary teachers who hold an undergraduate or graduate major in elementary education will satisfy the “highly qualified” requirement in all four of the core academic subjects covered in elementary education.

Q15: Must special education teachers who teach core academic subjects be “highly qualified” under NCLB and IDEA?

Yes. Special education teachers who provide instruction in core academic subjects to one or more students must meet the NCLB “highly qualified” teacher requirements for those core academic subjects that they teach. These requirements apply whether a special education teacher is the primary provider of core academic instruction in a regular classroom, a resource room or another setting.

Q16: What activities may special education teachers carry out if they are not NCLB “highly qualified” in the core academic content area being taught?

There are many activities that special education teachers may carry out that would not require those teachers to be NCLB “highly qualified” in a particular subject matter. Special educators who are not the primary provider of instruction in any core academic subjects or who provide

only consultation to NCLB “highly qualified” teachers of core academic subjects in adapting curriculums, using behavioral supports and interventions, or selecting appropriate accommodations do not need to demonstrate subject-matter competency in those subjects. These special educators could also assist students with study skills or organizational skills and reinforce instruction that the student has already received from an NCLB “highly qualified” teacher in that core academic subject.

Q17: If a local district enters into a contract with a private special education facility for the education of children in the area served by the district, do the NCLB “highly qualified” teacher requirements apply to teachers in that facility?

No. The current interpretation is that NCLB “highly qualified” teacher requirements only apply to public school teachers.

Q18: Subsequent to July 1, 2006, can the district’s teacher evaluation plan (otherwise known as the district’s HOUSSE plan) be used to deem newly hired teachers as NCLB “highly qualified?”

No, unless the teacher is a special educator. Once the 2005-06 school year ends, all teachers hired for the beginning of the 2006-07 school year must be NCLB “highly qualified” in the content areas that they are being hired to teach. IDEA specifically states that special education teachers who are hired after July 1, 2006, must be NCLB “highly qualified” if teaching one or more core academic subjects. If special education teachers are hired after July 1, 2006, to teach multiple subjects, they must be NCLB “highly qualified” in one of the following core academic content areas: reading/language arts or English, mathematics or science before they can be hired. Once they are hired, the district may then use the HOUSSE plan to determine subject-matter competency in the other content areas in which they will serve as a teacher of core academic knowledge within two years of hire.

Q19: Does a special education teacher who is co-teaching with an NCLB “highly qualified” core academic content teacher need to be NCLB “highly qualified?”

No, as long as the primary core academic content teacher is NCLB “highly qualified” and responsible for the oversight and implementation of the content-area curriculum.

Q20: Must special educators who instruct students with disabilities who are assessed using the alternate achievement standards (students evaluated using the CMT/CAPT checklist, in place of the CMT or CAPT tests) be determined to be NCLB “highly qualified?”

Yes. Special education teachers who instruct ONLY students with disabilities who are assessed using the alternate achievement checklist must be NCLB “highly qualified.” However, these teachers may be NCLB “highly qualified” in the core academic subjects taught for the cognitive level of their students, not the age level of the student. Therefore, a special education teacher teaching several high school-age students whose instruction is on an elementary level may demonstrate competency in the elementary curricular content areas, even though the students are of high school age.

Q21: What process must the district implement for teachers who are not able to demonstrate competency in the core academic subject knowledge?

The intent of NCLB is to raise the subject-matter knowledge of teachers who teach one or more of the core academic content areas; it is not the intent of NCLB to release teachers from employment. Therefore, districts must develop a multiyear plan to increase subject-matter knowledge and assist a teacher who has not been able to demonstrate competency in one or more of the core content areas being taught by that individual. Another option is to transfer the individual teacher into another content area in which they are certified and can qualify as NCLB “highly qualified.”

Q22: What documentation should a district send to the State Department of Education per the C-6 circular letter request?

Each district should return a form completed by only those teachers who teach one or more core academic content areas and all special education teachers. Therefore, all elementary, middle grades and high school teachers who teach a core academic content subject would need to complete the form identifying the core academic subject(s) that they teach, the subject in which they received their bachelor’s and master’s degrees, and the higher education institution(s) that awarded both the bachelor’s and master’s degrees.

If the person will be using the district’s HOUSSE process for gaining NCLB “highly qualified” status, he or she should check the box on the bottom of the form. The teacher’s signature is simply attesting to the information provided on that form and will not be used against any individual.