

Although these criteria are important, a quality teacher is not necessarily the same as a highly qualified teacher. Due to the differences in state definitions, for example, in establishing criteria for “full state certification,” the connections between “highly qualified” and “teacher quality” are not always clear and direct.

Although there is no single “definition” or description of a **quality** teacher, research confirms many characteristics that have a positive effect on student learning. The Alliance for Quality Teaching believes that, first and foremost, **quality teaching** is evidenced by producing high levels of student learning.

Among characteristics associated with teacher quality that have been studied by researchers:

- Intellectual ability (verbal ability, college entrance tests, college selectivity)
- Academic subject matter preparation
- Knowledge of how to teach (learning theory, instruction and assessment, classroom management)
- Teaching experience
- Race and ethnicity
- Cultural and multilingual competencies.

## WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT TEACHER QUALITY

- **Experience is very important.** The ability of a new teacher to support student learning increases greatly during his/her first year of teaching and continues to grow through at least the first several years of teaching (Clotfelter, Ladd & Vigdor, 2007; Clotfelter, Ladd & Vigdor, 2004; Hanushek *et al.*, 1998).
- **Teacher attrition matters.** Districts and schools with relatively high rates of teacher attrition are likely to have more inexperienced teachers and, as a result, instructional quality and student learning suffer (Alliance for Quality Teaching, 2008).
- **Ability matters.** Teachers with higher scores on college admission or licensure tests as well as those from colleges with more selective admission practices are better able to support student learning (Gitomer, 2007; Rice, 2003; Wayne and Youngs, 2003; Reichardt, 2001; Ferguson & Ladd, 1996; Greenwald, Hedges & Laine, 1996).
- **Teachers' subject matter knowledge helps students learn.** Students learn when their teacher knows the subject, particularly in secondary science and mathematics (Floden & Meniketti, 2006; Rice, 2003; Wayne and Youngs, 2003; Reichardt, 2001).
- **Preparation and training in how to teach makes a difference.** Knowing how to teach improves student learning, particularly when a teacher is in his/her first years of teaching (Rice, 2003; Allen, 2003; Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb & Wyckoff, 2005).
- **Teacher diversity may also be important.** There is emerging evidence that students learn better from teachers of similar racial and ethnic background (Dee, 2004; Dee, 2001; Hanushek *et al.* 1998).