

Pacific Teachers of the Year: Sharing Their Message to Improve Teacher Quality

By Jennifer Padua

According to NCLB, a **highly qualified teacher** meets these three criteria:

- Holds a minimum of a bachelor's degree
- Obtained full state certification or licensure
- Demonstrated subject area competence in each of the academic subjects in which the teacher teaches

Source:

www.ed.gov/about/reports/annual/teachprep/-Report.pdf

Strategies for Improving Teacher Quality

1. All activities are referenced to student learning.
2. Schools use data to make decisions about the content and type of activities that constitute professional development.
3. Professional development activities are based on research-validated practices.
4. Subject matter mastery for all teachers is a top priority.
5. There is a long-term plan that provides focused and ongoing professional development with time well allocated.
6. Professional development activities match the content that is being taught.
7. All professional development activities are fully evaluated.
8. Professional development is aligned with state standards, assessment, and the local school curriculum.

Source:

www.ed.gov/admins/tchrqual/learn/tqstr/edlite-index.html

Title II of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB) emphasizes the importance of improving teacher and principal quality. The intent of this act is to increase student achievement through professional development strategies and interventions with the intent of having a highly qualified teacher in every classroom. The U.S. Department of Education offers eight strategies on how to improve teacher quality (see sidebar).

Every year, the director/minister of education from each of the 10 Pacific jurisdictions recognizes an outstanding educator as the Teacher of the Year (TOY). These TOYs exemplify the use of effective instructional practices and the desire to grow professionally, and are utterly passionate about being educators.

This past July, the TOYs presented workshops at the annual Pacific Educational Conference (PEC) in Majuro, Republic of the Marshall Islands. Their Pacific colleagues filled their sessions and were eager to learn what the TOYs had to share about their professional experience. The TOYs included activities referencing student learning (a strategy to improve teacher quality) in their presentations.

Gina Wusstig, Guam TOY, emphasized the importance of standards-based instruction. She integrates language arts and social studies standards by involving students in projects where they must think creatively and critically. Ms. Wusstig shared how she engaged her students to think of a commercial product they could develop and market that was grown specifically in the region where they live. Ms. Wusstig's confidence and the outcomes of the project demonstrated that integrating standards across content areas does not have to be an overwhelming task.

Margarita Kose, Pohnpei TOY, modeled how dividing students into smaller groups allows them to express themselves. As a social studies teacher, she has a wide array of topics of interest for the groups to discuss; therefore, they are less likely to remain quiet. Last fall, Ms. Kose was also awarded the Preserve American History Award sponsored by the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History.

Beyond the PEC, some of the TOYs continue to share their expertise in the spirit of improving teacher quality. Winona Oato, Hawai'i's TOY, explains:

Highly qualified teachers also mentor other teachers and take leadership roles in their school community and the wider community in their professional area. I do not mean that they have to have a title but to lead by being actively involved in areas outside the classroom, like coaching, committee work, volunteering to do chaperone duties, and so on.

As the school year comes to a close, the directors/ministers will again select their TOYs. This July at the PEC in Palau, these TOYs will share their strategies and successes to help their Pacific colleagues improve their own quality of teaching. Read more about the Pacific TOYs at www.prel.org/pec/storyboards/index.asp.

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