



# **Tear Down This Wall**

*The Case for a Radical Overhaul of Teacher Certification*

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Progressive Policy Institute  
21st Century Schools Project

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# Preface

Improving teacher quality and addressing shortages is a policy priority in many states and at the national level. A growing body of evidence illustrates just how important teacher excellence is to student learning.

In this provocative and insightful paper, Rick Hess challenges policy makers to move beyond the current system and reform teacher certification in an effort to truly treat teachers like professionals — not in name but in deed.

Hess raises some tough questions and lays bare some awkward issues. But, the importance of this issue means that this is exactly what we must do in order to formulate policies that work for our nation's students, particularly the most disadvantaged amongst them. It is worth noting that our most vulnerable youngsters are most impacted by the quality shortfall in our nation's teaching force. The questions that Hess asks come on the heels of recent studies questioning the empirical base for traditional teacher certification.

Hess proposes a Third Way approach to teacher licensure that recognizes the importance of preparation and ongoing teacher professional development, but moves past the "guild" model now employed and toward a competitive model that would increase the number of aspiring teachers and also increase competition to serve them as they prepare to embark on teaching careers.

The ideas in this paper certainly won't address the entirety of the problem. One can't divorce this challenge from issues of teacher compensation and school climate nor from other education issues. However, in conjunction with other promising reforms, an overhaul of how we recruit, train, and hire teachers will pay dividends for many students now and in the future.

The 21st Century Schools Project at the Progressive Policy Institute develops public policies to modernize American schools and ensure that all students are prepared for success in the knowledge economy. Through research, publications and articles, and work with policy makers, the project supports initiatives to increase accountability and equity, improve standards, and increase choice and innovation in public education.

The goals of the 21st Century Schools Project are a natural extension of the mission of the Progressive Policy Institute, which is to define and promote a new progressive politics for the 21st century. The Institute's core philosophy stems from the belief that America is ill-served by an obsolete left-right debate that is out of step with the powerful forces reshaping our society and economy. The Institute believes in adapting the progressive tradition in American politics to the realities of the Information Age by advocating a Third Way approach beyond the liberal impulse to defend the bureaucratic status quo and the conservative bid to dismantle government. More information on PPI and the 21st Century Schools Project is available at [www.ppionline.org](http://www.ppionline.org).

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# Introduction

America needs more teachers. Retirements, rising student enrollments, and a drive to reduce class size will create a demand for as many as 2 million new teachers over the next decade.<sup>1</sup> The needs are especially pressing in the distressed schools where teachers least want to teach and in certain subjects such as math and science.

But more is not enough: America also needs better teachers. Empirical evidence of the importance of teacher quality is mounting, and has sparked a dialogue about the quality of the nation's teaching force. In Tennessee, research by William Sanders has quantified the cumulative effects of even one or two bad teachers on a student. He found substantial differences in student achievement based on the sequence in which a student had particular teachers.<sup>2</sup> Similar studies elsewhere have shown the same results.<sup>3</sup> Perversely, the students who need the very best teachers are the ones most likely to be hurt by the shortfall of quality teachers.<sup>4</sup>

There are well-established challenges to attracting higher-caliber teachers. Research shows that academically stronger students tend to shun teaching as a profession. Moreover, the U.S. Department of Education reports that college graduates who became teachers within four years after graduating and then subsequently left the profession were more likely to have scored in the top quartile on the SAT and ACT than those who remained.<sup>5</sup> Finally, even in a slowing economy, math and science majors have lucrative opportunities available to them, further complicating recruitment for high-need subjects.

This dual quality-quantity challenge is focusing increasing attention on how we train and certify teachers. While "certification" or "licensing" varies from state to state and is punctuated by an array of exceptions and loopholes, the current system presumes that public educators should be required to earn a

state-issued license through an approved teacher education program by taking a series of courses on both pedagogy and subject matter and doing some practice teaching. While the theory is that this licensing process elevates the profession by requiring aspiring professionals to master well documented and broadly accepted knowledge and skills, the reality is very different. Unlike the cases of law or medicine, where the existence of an accepted canon makes licensure a useful device for ensuring minimal competence and consequently boosting public confidence in members of the profession, educational licensure as currently practiced imposes significant costs without yielding commensurate benefits.

Further, there is no canon. While there is some agreement on what teachers should know, there is no consensus on how to train good teachers or ensure that they have mastered essential skills or knowledge. Debate rages over what the best pedagogical strategies are, and even proponents of the existing system cannot define a clear set of concrete skills that make for a good teacher. Despite the absence of widely accepted pedagogical standards, aspiring teachers are forced to run an academic gauntlet of courses, requirements, and procedures created by accredited training programs that vary dramatically in quality. The prospect of spending substantial time and money on preparation and courses of study that may bear little relation to what it takes to be a good teacher discourages some talented people from entering the profession.

To meet these challenges, we must go beyond our traditional system of teacher education, which is archaic and demonstrably failing to meet our needs. Further, change must be more comprehensive than attempts to offer co-existing "alternative certification" programs that in practice are of mixed quality, reach only a small percentage of aspiring teachers, and fail to

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address the systemic problems posed by regarding certification as the norm.<sup>6</sup> Contrary to the claims of some critics, the problem is not the existence of schools of education and teacher preparation programs or their particular failings. The real problem lies in state laws that give these schools and programs a monopoly on training and certifying teachers.

The arguments fall into two camps. Some propose abolishing schools of education or doing away with certification altogether. Others believe that adding new barriers to entry or creating advanced “master teacher” certifications will address the quality problem and increase the “rigor” of teacher preparation programs. Neither of these approaches will adequately tackle the problems at hand.

This paper proposes a third way: a “competitive certification” model that breaks the monopoly education schools hold on the supply of teachers with the aim of expanding the pool of potential teachers while also addressing the issue of quality. The goal is to increase the pool of qualified applicants for teaching jobs and at the same time increase the competition among providers of preparation and ongoing professional development for teachers.

Clearly, some sort of screening process for aspiring teachers is essential; parents and the public rightly expect safeguards for those working with youngsters. A competitive certification process begins by establishing a few key criteria for entry to the teaching profession. It brings new urgency to the need to give schools greater freedom to hire and fire teachers. And, it treats teachers like professionals and their schools like professional institutions by allowing them to tailor their professional development to

their needs, rather than requiring aspiring teachers to have completed a series of courses of little demonstrable value. Under the competitive model, aspiring teachers can apply for a teaching job if they:

- ▶ hold a college degree;
- ▶ pass an examination of essential skills and content knowledge that would obviously vary by grade level and academic discipline; and
- ▶ pass a criminal background check.

The competitive model assumes that additional preparation and training, particularly on-the-job training, are not only desirable but also essential, as is true in other professions where subtle skills and interpersonal dynamics are essential to effective performance. However, whereas contemporary teacher preparation is characterized by a bureaucratic series of hurdles and a dearth of competition among teacher preparation programs, this paper argues that there should be no prescribed sequence for this work and that competition among providers of such services should be encouraged. Thus, while the current model is monopolistic and removes key incentives for quality and relevance in teacher preparation, the competitive model treats teachers as autonomous professionals able to make their own informed decisions about skills and expertise development. In short, the competitive model would move teacher certification past what is essentially a guild system and toward a meaningful professional model.

## Dare We Let Janet Teach?

**T**o grasp the practical effect of the current system, consider the following example. Imagine Janet, a 28-year-old marketing director with a B.A. in English from a liberal arts college who graduated with a 3.5 grade point average. Janet has been working for a consulting firm in Washington, D.C., since graduating from college, but is looking for a job that feels more rewarding. Janet has performed well, received strong reviews, is regarded as effective at leading teams and working with clients, and has both an academic appreciation for English and a practical background in communication. If Janet were to apply to teach English at a junior high school in the D.C. public school system through normal channels, she would be summarily rejected.<sup>7</sup>

**Why? Because Janet is not a certified teacher.**

What does it take to be a certified teacher? The conventional model, through which the vast majority of new teachers enter the profession each year, calls for aspiring teachers to complete an accredited teacher education program. Aspiring teachers complete a prescribed number of courses and serve as practice teachers in local schools.

The implicit certification assumption is that until Janet has completed the licensure requirements, the children in Washington's junior high schools (and other public schools) must be protected from the possibility that their principal will mistakenly hire Janet in a moment of weakness. This approach is problematic. Unless we believe the principal incompetent or unconcerned with teacher quality, there is no reason why the principal should not be allowed to make an informed and reasonable decision about whether Janet is likely to better serve her school's students than the alternatives.<sup>8</sup> In other words, the traditional certification model does not serve the larger interest of educating students, especially when it is failing to produce either the quantity or quality of teachers we need.

The District of Columbia is desperate for effective teachers.<sup>9</sup> Yet, regardless of Janet's demonstrated skills, or the questionable performance of some current teachers, the presumption implicit in certification is that the children will be ill served if she is allowed to teach. Similarly, certification would prohibit any member of the English faculties at Georgetown, American, or George Washington Universities from teaching in the D.C. public schools (except by way of a loophole or exception). In fact, while the nation is starved for math and science teachers, no member of the math or physics departments at these schools could teach basic algebra or earth science!

Proponents of the current licensure scheme will argue that there is no guarantee that the math, physics, or English faculty at these universities would be effective at teaching these subjects in middle and high school. That's true. However, the converse is true as well; despite the premise implicit in certification, there is no guarantee that they wouldn't make effective teachers. It is essential to remember that allowing someone to apply for a job is not the same as guaranteeing them employment. Making an applicant eligible for a position simply permits an employer to hire them in the event they are deemed superior to the other existing alternatives. The argument against certification is not that any unconventional applicant will necessarily be a good teacher; it is only that they might be. If one believes this, then case-by-case judgments are clearly more appropriate than an inflexible bureaucratic rule.

The situation is even more troubling than it appears, since many large school systems have classrooms filled with uncertified teachers and long-term substitutes.<sup>10</sup> These teachers are hired at the last minute, when the systems—having discouraged or turned away Janet and hundreds like her—are desperate for bodies. We have

adopted a patchwork of alternative certification and stopgap emergency certification processes to help allay these problems. Many of these emergency provisions simply permit districts to scramble for unqualified individuals willing to accept a last-minute position. More systematic alternative certification provisions may ameliorate the current system's worst failures but fail to provide a comprehensive approach to the problem.

Imagine if colleges and universities refused to hire any faculty lacking the "license" of traditional academic degrees. Higher education institutions have historically hired "lay practitioners" like poet Maya Angelou, journalist William Raspberry, or former public officials Alan Simpson, Julian Bond, and Al Gore. In fact, the artists and writers "in residence" at dozens of public universities would fail to meet the criteria implicit in the public school certification model. Do we believe that these universities are engaging in a regrettable disservice to the student body by using lay practitioners who lack essential training?

### **Janet Writ Large**

It is time for a commonsense reconsideration of this model, which is incoherent and poorly suited to achieving even its own proclaimed goals. Our system makes teaching more costly, penalizes talented individuals for becoming teachers, dissuades large numbers of potential teachers, and can offer no coherent accounting of the benefits that result. And the students most likely to be adversely impacted by these problems are the very ones who need the highest quality teachers—low-income and minority students.

Several scholars have recently conducted studies raising serious questions about the value of certification. These are important studies and should give policy makers cause to reexamine some long-held assumptions that are based more on ideology or custom than empirical evidence.<sup>11</sup> However, here I adopt a different approach. A danger of sophisticated statistical analyses is that

essential questions can sometimes get lost amidst the methodological wrangling. They thus fail to find their way into the mainstream public policy dialogue. In fact, sometimes the defenders of the current approach to certification seem to use just this tactic to obscure larger questions. A reading of the recent scholarship on teacher certification shows that rarely do the disputants carefully explain the merits of or problems with the certification premise.<sup>12</sup> Instead, scholars generally launch directly into analyses of student outcome data. The ensuing disputes over variable specification and measurement, while important, can make it difficult for the public or for policy makers to make sense of the competing results or remain clear about the larger issues.

What data tell us matters greatly, but we risk misinterpreting or misapplying analyses if we are not first clear on whether the arguments at stake make sense in the first place.

The issue is not whether teacher education is "good" or even whether it improves the performance of graduates, but rather whether we ought to—as best we are able—bar from teaching those who have not completed a teacher preparation program. After all, while it seems likely that graduates of journalism school will often make better journalists or that graduates of agriculture schools will make better farmers, we don't require individuals to complete mandated training before seeking work in these professions. Rather, we assume that training is factored into the hiring process, along with considerations like aptitude, diligence, and energy. Why in education do we instead embrace the model used in medicine, law, or engineering, where many aspirants are barred from seeking employment?

The problems with teacher licensure have long been recognized. Nearly 40 years ago, former Harvard University President James B. Conant asked in the first large-scale study of teacher preparation, "Do [state certification] policies effectively serve the purposes of those concerned with quality teaching?" He answered himself, "They do not. In none of the states do the rules have a clearly demonstrable practical

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bearing on the quality of the teacher [or] the quality of his preparation.”<sup>13</sup> The impetus for certification was noble: to “professionalize” teaching by elevating the induction process. But that impetus is built on a faulty premise. For decades, some policy makers have tried, largely in vain, to tweak this flawed system. It’s time for more robust measures.

It is important to clarify what is and is not being argued here. I am not denying that teacher education can be beneficial, that education courses can provide valuable training, or that

there are many effective teacher educators. However, absent a standard ensuring that aspiring teachers have attained a minimal mastery of essential knowledge or skills, our certification model is an ineffective and counterproductive way to enhance teacher quality. While teacher training is desirable and while school districts will continue to appropriately value and reward such training, “certification” as it is currently constructed should not present a barrier to entering the teaching profession.





## A Brief History of Certification

While Americans have always desired good teachers, we have not always used licensing in the manner to which we are accustomed. Through much of the 19th century, teaching licenses were granted by local officials and the licensing decision was based largely on their judgment of an aspirant's knowledge and qualifications. Statewide certification was first adopted by New York in 1843, when the state's superintendent was empowered to set examinations and issue certificates valid statewide. Such state-level exams had largely displaced local control of certification by the 1920s. The modern era of teacher certification started with Vermont in 1919, when states began to substitute professional training for exam performance in licensure. By 1937, 28 states had followed Vermont's course and eliminated examinations in favor of professional training.

This model predominated until the 1980s and 1990s, when an awkward hybrid emerged as states continued to emphasize professional training but also resurrected basic skills testing. By 1987-88, about 35 percent of public school districts required applicants to pass a state test of basic skills; by 1993-94, that figure had climbed to just under 50 percent of districts.<sup>14</sup> Today, however, aspiring teachers generally view the tests as peripheral to the central obstacle of completing a certification program.

Why has certification thrived? As James B. Conant first observed four decades ago, "The politics of teacher certification revolves around an alliance composed...of representatives of organized teacher and administrator groups, professors of education and state Education Department officials."<sup>15</sup> With a pressing interest in limiting who may teach and who may train teachers, professional educators dominate the

licensure process.

In addition, many well-intentioned people have seen certification and increasing the coursework and time required for certification as a way to professionalize and increase the prestige of teaching. This has caused much energy to be expended in an effort to define essential skills and knowledge for teachers where there is little useful data or information. The inadvertent consequences of this and the faulty assumption upon which it is based are discussed later in more detail.

Currently, each state certifies teachers according to its own guidelines. All states require a degree that encompasses courses in both subject matter and pedagogical studies, many require coursework in special education, more than a dozen in issues related to health, drugs, or alcohol, and a handful in nutrition. However, no state makes clear what teachers need to learn in these courses or ensures that teachers have indeed acquired essential knowledge or skills. For instance, as of 1998-99, about half of all states required a basic skills and/or a content-based exam.<sup>16</sup> While such exams could constitute a useful screening device if "basic skills" were defined rigorously, the required skills tend to be defined and measured at the eighth- or 10th-grade level.<sup>17</sup> According to an analysis by the Education Trust, most of the subject area tests now in use are simply too weak to determine knowledge.<sup>18</sup> States also vary in the amount of practice teaching and classroom observation they require, with some states requiring an internship of 10 or more weeks and others requiring no internship at all.

More than 1,300 institutions provide the training required for licensure.<sup>19</sup> Many observers are unaware that these institutions include schools ranging from the University of Michigan

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and UCLA to such lesser-known schools as Bellarmine College (Ky.), Villa Julie College (Md.), and the State University of West Georgia. While defenders of the current approach to certification often focus on the certification programs at elite institutions, the top 25 education schools train less than 5 percent of the roughly 200,000 new teacher graduates that teacher programs produce each year.<sup>20</sup> It is the regional colleges, not the Stanfords and Ohio States, that train and license the vast majority of teachers.<sup>21</sup> For instance, in 1999, Harvard University trained 101 teachers, a

number surpassed by at least eight Massachusetts institutions, including Lesley College, Bridgewater State College, Fitchburg State College, Wheelock College, and Westfield State College.<sup>22</sup> Nationally, the 10 programs reported to produce the most certified teachers included Cal State-Fresno, Cal State-Northridge, Cal State-Dominguez Hills, Illinois State University, Cal State-Hayward, and Southwest Texas State University. The value of certification turns not on the quality of elite programs but on that of regional colleges.

# The Case for Certification

## *Three Key Assumptions*

**T**hree assumptions support the existing approach to certification. The first is that the training one receives while getting certified is so useful that uncertified people will not be able to perform adequately. This argument presumes that the training and preparation required for certification develops essential skills, knowledge, or expertise that uncertified personnel lack.

The second assumption is that certification weeds out unsuitable people and keeps them out of schools. The premise is that protecting the clients—the students, in this case—requires that we screen out unacceptable teachers. A minimalist version of screening would simply try to pick out felons, unstable individuals, and the uneducated. However, our current system is based on a more ambitious model in which undergraduate and graduate teacher training programs are presumed to select out aspirants on the basis of more subtle factors relating to their abilities and professional suitability.

The third assumption is that certification helps to make teaching more “professional” and thereby bolsters its allure. This argument is primarily relevant because of the claim that certification enhances professionalism by increasing the quality of aspiring educators and screening out interlopers. However, both the belief that certification-inspired professionalism attracts a better class of teachers and the belief that careerists will be more effective than “interlopers” are open to question.

Each of these three presumptions is flawed. Before explaining why this is so, it is necessary to first consider the incoherence at the heart of teacher certification.

### **The Contradiction in the Certification Presumption**

Certification is most effective when the licensing

body ensures that aspiring professionals have mastered essential skills or knowledge and denies a license to inadequate performers. Licensing is generally thought most essential where tasks are critical and when members of the public may have trouble assessing provider qualifications. For instance, licensure is considered particularly appropriate for engineers, doctors, and attorneys because those who design bridges, tend us when we are ill, or defend our rights all perform tasks essential to our well-being and are frequently charged with aiding us at our most vulnerable. Moreover, it can be difficult for members of the public to know whether a bridge is properly designed, whether a doctor is performing appropriately, or whether an attorney is knowledgeable in the law.<sup>23</sup> Licensing is not an assurance that these professionals are talented practitioners, but it does ensure that they have demonstrated an established degree of professional knowledge.

Like the professionals just identified, educators are charged with a crucial task. However, the oversight challenge is very different in education, where we have refused to establish a specific, measurable body of skills or knowledge that teachers must master. The educational “experts” argue that teaching is so complex that it can be difficult to judge a good teacher outside of a specific classroom context. This makes it difficult, if not impossible, to abstractly determine which aspirants possess satisfactory teaching skills. Meanwhile, there is widespread agreement that colleagues, supervisors, and families can generally gauge whether a teacher is effective with a particular child or group of children. Given these circumstances, it is unclear how standardized licensing helps to safeguard teacher quality.

This point is not an attack on the teaching profession, but follows if one accepts the claims made by professional educators. The effort to pin down educators as to just what aspiring

teachers need to know or what skills they must possess makes clear just how inchoate is our conception of what teachers ought to be able to do. Professional educators themselves readily illustrate this point when they seek to explain what makes a teacher competent, what teachers need to know and be able to do, and what standards ought to characterize teacher preparation.

Consider the widely praised standards that the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) has painstakingly constructed in 27 distinct fields. Since its 1987 launch, the NBPTS has been hailed by certification proponents as a breakthrough in quality control. The area where the NBPTS

ought to have the easiest time crafting straightforward standards is high school math and science teaching, where there is widespread consensus as to what teachers are supposed to do. Even in these areas, however, the NBPTS's "exemplary" standards are so broad and vague as to make concrete judgments of competence nearly impossible. For instance, to receive National Board certification to teach high school math, teachers are to demonstrate mastery of eleven standards, including: "commitment to students and their learning," "the art of teaching," "reflection and growth," and "reasoning and thinking mathematically." The Board tries to clarify these standards by explaining, for instance, that "commitment" is interpreted as meaning that "accomplished mathematics teachers value and acknowledge the individuality and worth of each student, believe that all students can learn," and so on. Mastering the "art of teaching" is taken to mean that teachers "stimulate and facilitate student learning by using a wide range of formats and procedures...." While these are certainly pleasing sentiments, nowhere in the National Board's rarified standards is it clear how we are to gauge just what constitutes "competence" in these tasks.<sup>24</sup> The result, unsurprisingly, is that the Board has been assailed for the capricious way in which the standards are being interpreted and applied.<sup>25</sup> Perhaps not surprisingly, critics point out that there is no evidence that NBPTS-certified teachers "are any better than

other teachers at raising student achievement."<sup>26</sup>

The broad and subjective standards are the product of a professional education culture that is confused as to what constitutes mastery. In their recent book *Failing Teachers?*, education professor Ted C. Wragg and three colleagues never quite get around to explaining what it means to be a "failing" teacher.<sup>27</sup> Because teaching is "a multidimensional set of activities," they explain, "being competent or incompetent in the classroom...is not as clear cut a distinction as being 'short' or 'tall,' where fairly exact heights

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could be specified and then measured....[I]t is possible that incompetent teachers may be capable in one aspect but incapable in another.... That

'competence' is not an all-embracing quality is demonstrated by the frequent use, in educational writings, of the plurals 'competences' or 'competencies' for aspects of the job that teachers can do adequately or well" (p. 3). Under these conditions, how can a standardized process screen out the inadequate? Seeking to rescue some conception of teacher competence, Wragg et al. resort to banalities, asserting, "Good teachers...must be keen and enthusiastic, well organized, firm but fair, stimulating, know their stuff [sic], and be interested in the welfare of their pupils" (p. 5).<sup>28</sup> They take a final stab at explaining good teaching, offering three rules for "defining teaching skill," before abandoning the issue. They explain that a "teaching skill" should: "[facilitate] pupils' learning of something worthwhile," "be capable of being repeated," and "enable children both to learn and understand" (pp. 7-8). Just how the traits and skills that Wragg et al. identify might be taught or assessed is unclear.

In their award-winning 1999 Harvard University Press book, *Teaching in America*, education professors Gerald Grant and Christine E. Murray identify five "essential [teaching] acts" that can be analyzed and taught.<sup>29</sup> The five are: "listening with care," "motivating the student," "model[ing] caring by hearing and responding to the pain of others, and by creating a sense of security in their classrooms," evaluating by "clarifying, coaching, advising, and deciding on an appropriate challenge for this boy or that girl,"

and “reflecting and renewing” (pp. 31-52). How is one to teach these five “essential acts,” much less determine whether a teacher has satisfactorily mastered them?

Mary Diez, dean of an acclaimed graduate education program at Alverno College, wrote a chapter for the 2000 volume *Dispelling Myths About Teacher Education* that she intended to be a bracing defense of the ability of teacher training programs to set and enforce clear professional standards.<sup>30</sup> Diez offers the Alverno program as a model of clarity that requires students to demonstrate concrete mastery. Unfortunately, she instead illustrates just how vapid even the “clearest” standards are. The eight “abilities” required for the degree are: 1) “communication,” 2) “analysis,” 3) “problem solving,” 4) “valuing in decision making” [sic], 5) “social interaction,” 6) “global perspective-taking,” 7) “effective citizenship,” and 8) “aesthetic responsiveness.”<sup>31</sup> How are expert overseers to judge whether a student has adequately mastered “global perspective-taking” or “aesthetic responsiveness”?

Some professional educators simply deny that essential pedagogical skills can be systematically identified and assessed or that content tests are a useful barometer for future teacher performance. More sophisticated certification proponents argue for standards but then construct “meaningful” standards that turn out to be vague upon close examination. Even the nation’s most commonly hailed experiments in certification reform, such as Connecticut’s portfolio-based BEST system, turn out to rest upon criteria that can be interpreted in a variety of ways and subjective determinations regarding requisite mastery or demonstrated performance. Both those who reject any science of teaching and those reformers who seek to clarify the basis for certification inadvertently offer a compelling argument against licensure. Absent concrete benchmarks, certification demands that any screening of aspirants rely on subjective judgments about what kinds of preparation and behavior is acceptable. In essence, proponents of teacher education suggest that teaching is more like the crafts of cosmetology or athletic training—where the key criteria for licensure are completion of a specified set of courses or workshops, a sufficient number of apprenticeship hours, and the willingness and ability to behave in specified ways—

than professions with concrete requirements such as engineering, law, or medicine.

## What Certification Can and Cannot Do

Effective certification requires clear standards by which aspirants can demonstrate competence. Such measures make it possible to determine whether and in what ways individuals are inadequate. If we agree that lawyers need to know a certain body of law or that civil engineers need to know how to calculate stress tolerance for a bridge, then it becomes straightforward to judge whether the aspirant is competent.

However, if clear standards of professional competence do not exist, we typically (and appropriately) hesitate to prohibit some individuals from practicing a profession. This is not to say that we think incompetence is acceptable in such a profession—only that we recognize licensing as an ineffective and potentially pernicious way to control quality. Licensing without concrete benchmarks leads to public officials (or, even more frightening, the leaders of independent organizations) making subjective decisions about who is permitted to pursue a given career, and we are properly fearful of such an outcome.

While licensure could protect community members (including children) from exposure to “bad” entrepreneurs or journalists, we do not prohibit some people from seeking to start businesses or work for a newspaper. Instead, we trust that potential investors or employers are the best judges of who ought to be supported or hired; and we understand that the investors and employers are ultimately accountable to their backers and to their customers.<sup>32</sup> If an aspiring writer or entrepreneur is unsuccessful, we trust that they will eventually be persuaded to find a line of work for which they are better suited. This free-flowing process fosters diversity, opens the door to new ideas and approaches, and ensures that unconventional workers are given a chance to succeed.

Even in professions with clear knowledge- or performance-based benchmarks for certification, as in law or medicine, licensure is primarily useful as a way to establish minimal competence. A medical or a law license is not imagined to ensure competence in ambiguous, subtle skills like

comforting a patient or swaying a jury—skills analogous to the interpersonal relations thought crucial to teaching. Few would choose a doctor or attorney solely on the basis of a test score without considering recommendations, experience, manner, or methods. However, basing certification on such traits is difficult, because we may disagree about what they entail or how they can be assessed devoid of context. The skills that teacher educators deem most important—listening, caring, motivating—are not susceptible to standardized quality control. Certification will work poorly in professions where practice depends on amorphous interpersonal relationships, criteria for determining effectiveness is lacking, and different kinds of styles may prove more or less effective with different clients.

To make teaching certification more akin to certification in law or medicine, it would be necessary to determine a core of essential mastery. The obvious candidate for such a role is the content knowledge of aspiring licensees. While few believe that encyclopedic knowledge alone makes someone a good teacher—just as knowledge of case law alone does not make one a good attorney—it would clearly seem an essential ingredient. Although information alone does not make for an effective professional, lawyers who do not know the law or doctors who do not know human physiology are unlikely to be effective. Unsurprisingly, research suggests that teacher preparation and knowledge in subject matter has a significant effect on student learning.<sup>33</sup> Ironically, professional educators who defend certification tend to oppose rigorous content-based testing because of a fear that it fails to fully capture the array of important teaching skills—as if administering the bar exam implies that there are no other relevant criteria for being an effective lawyer. And again, while content tests are commonly used in state certification systems, the tests are generally so easy and state-established minimal passing scores are so low, that the tests do little to actually ensure content mastery.

This brings us to the issue of practice (or “stu-

dent”) teaching, which often becomes a red herring in discussions about certification. Let us begin by ceding that some student teaching is helpful and improves the performance of some aspiring teachers. That has no bearing on the larger issue, which is that student teaching is a poor basis for certification because it is not designed to ensure that aspiring teachers are prepared to enter classrooms. If student teaching is essential because aspiring teachers need to acquire certain skills, then let us determine what

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those essential skills are and ensure that no one enters teaching—no matter how much practice teaching they have done—until they have mastered them. However, it is not clear what

student teachers are supposed to master during their classroom experience. Standards vary from program to program and even overseer to overseer, with “field supervisors” and “mentor teachers” frequently disagreeing as to what skills are important. Moreover, the training itself is of questionable value, with many student teachers assigned to weak or disinterested teachers or placed in school environments unrelated to those in which they will eventually teach. If practice teaching is not ensuring that teachers achieve a minimal level of competence, children may be best served by permitting more potentially effective teachers in the classroom—in place of the teachers that administrators deem less competent—and then providing them with mentoring and supervision tailored to their workplace context.

Rejecting knowledge-based and skill-based criteria, certification emphasizes various hard-to-judge personal qualities. Such a model is the norm in professions like marketing, journalism, consulting, or policymaking, where a subtle blend of people skills and relevant expertise is required.<sup>34</sup> In professions like these, where there are a number of ways for practitioners to excel but where it is difficult to know in advance how any particular practitioner will perform, the most sensible way to find talent is to allow aspirants

to seek work and to permit employers to screen on a variety of criteria—such as education, experience, and references.

## A Dubious Screen

While certification can serve to screen out aspirants who fail to meet a minimal performance standard, our current system is not designed to do so. Generally speaking, schools of education are not selective, fail out few if any students for inadequate performance, and see that more than 95 percent of their graduates receive teacher licenses. The licensing exams are simple and standards for passage are generally so low that the Education Trust concluded they exclude only the “weakest of

the weak” from classrooms.<sup>35</sup> As a 2001 report for the National School Board Association—no enemy of professional educators—stated, “It would appear that traditional certification routes provide no guarantee of teacher quality.”<sup>36</sup>

Teacher preparation programs neither screen out nor weed out weak candidates, with even elite programs generally admitting 50 percent or more of applicants. This is very different from the case of law, medicine, or engineering, and means the demand that aspiring teachers complete a course of teacher preparation produces frighteningly little quality control. The results have been evident when states have sought to impose some semblance of meaningful quality control.<sup>37</sup> As former Pennsylvania Secretary of Education Eugene Hickock has observed, an examination of Pennsylvania’s traditional certification system revealed “a teacher preparation and licensure system that was focused on seat-time and inputs...but could give only limited assurance of competence and quality.... Few teacher-education programs had meaningful admissions standards...[and] grading standards in teacher education programs were extremely low....”<sup>38</sup>

Comparing the acceptance rates of graduate teacher training programs and schools of law or medicine at top public universities can help to illustrate the lack of quality screening in teacher certification programs. For instance, in fall 2000,

UCLA accepted 20.3 percent of applicants to the law school and 3.8 percent of applicants to the medical school. However, the master of education (M.Ed.) program, which includes those seeking post-graduate training for teacher certification, accepted 58 percent of applicants. At the University of North Carolina, the law school acceptance rate was 27.1 percent and the medical school rate was 7.0 percent, while the M.Ed. acceptance rate was 58 percent. At the University of Michigan, the law school rate was 35.3 percent and the medical school rate 7.3 percent, while the M.Ed. rate was 72 percent. Even though law school and medical school applicants generally have significantly higher grade point averages and test scores than do applicants to

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graduate schools of education, education schools accept a much higher percentage of applicants. Moreover, officials at several prominent schools of education make clear that they do not see it as the task of their schools to weed students out. Notes one such official, “We’re here to develop teachers, not to screen people out. For the most part, everyone who enters the program is going to complete it, unless they decide that teaching’s not for them....”

Teacher educators also suggest that certification keeps out “interlopers” who might teach three or four years and then move on to another career. This would be an interesting argument if there were evidence that children benefited more from the presence of senior, traditionally certified careerist teachers than the noncertified applicants that principals might choose to hire in the absence of licensure. No such evidence exists. In fact, the validity of the concern is questionable, in light of some evidence that noncertified teachers are no more likely (or even less likely) to leave teaching than are their certified peers.<sup>39</sup> Regardless, it is not at all self-evident that our current model of careerist teaching, with the attendant problem of teacher “burnout,” is preferable to the private school model where a faculty is comprised of a core group of exemplary careerists and a large number of individuals who do not plan to be lifelong

educators.

Sadly, the model currently embraced by champions of teacher certification is actually more akin to that of cosmetology than of law or medicine. In a field like the former, certification does not screen out the unskilled or provide an assurance of specialized mastery so much as it provides assurance that the aspirant has completed a prescribed course of study and logged mandatory practice hours. In terms of performing a screening function, disputes about whether or not education school students are less able than their peers are largely irrelevant. Whether or not most teacher training graduates are able, certification currently provides no protection against incompetent students who manage to complete the prescribed regimen.

### **The Faulty Prestige Presumption**

Contrary to received wisdom, there is nothing about certification that necessarily raises a profession's prestige or lures more able individuals into the profession. Teacher advocates fret that teachers lack the professional esteem of lawyers or doctors, and argue that stricter licensure could help address the issue. However, such complaints fail to note that teachers often lag in the esteem accorded to such uncertified groups as journalists, farmers, athletes, entrepreneurs, or business executives. If certification were truly the key to professional respect, we might expect that more respect would be accorded to cosmetologists, traffic school instructors, athletic trainers, nail care professionals, and the practitioners of the multitude of other certified fields for which the public exhibits no special regard. In fact, a few moments' reflection makes clear that there is little evidence of a relationship between the mere existence of certification and the respect accorded to a profession.

The oft-cited cases of law and medicine do not offer the guidance that advocates of teacher

certification believe. In such professions, licensure contributes to prestige in three essential ways. First, the public has evidence that practitioners have demonstrated mastery of essential knowledge. Second, practitioners are held accountable for certain professional norms and standards of behavior, and the licensing agencies and judicial system ensure that dissatisfied clients have formal mechanisms for pursuing grievances. Third, professional training programs are intense and demanding, and applicants must survive a rigorous application process if they wish to obtain graduate training.

In the case of education, there is no established and research-based canon of essential knowledge, and certification does not play a clearly defined role in establishing professional norms (except possibly in a negative sense) and plays no role with regard to grievance mechanisms. And it is rarely demanding or rigorous, or a screening procedure for competence or expertise.

Educational certification, as currently practiced, does nothing to address these concerns. In fact, certification may "de-professionalize" teaching by dissuading many talented individuals from seeking to enter the profession. Eliminating the certification barrier would make education more akin to the other professions that emphasize soft skills, like journalism or consulting, and would be likely to lure more talented and better educated individuals into the profession.

If proponents of certification wanted to adopt a rigorous certification model—in which aspirants were held to clear standards and in which training programs therefore had more reason to be choosy about who they accepted and then permitted to graduate—certification could help to address these concerns. However, given their continued opposition to efforts to adopt such tests in states such as Massachusetts or Illinois, there is no evidence that this is what certification proponents have in mind.



## The Costs of Certification

**T**hat certification fails to achieve its intended goals is problematic, but the larger concern is that it also imposes significant costs. It makes teaching more costly, reducing the real compensation of teachers; dissuades potentially effective teachers from entering the profession; stifles intellectual diversity; and undercuts professional development.

### Opportunity Cost

Certification raises the “opportunity cost” of teaching by requiring potential teachers to become familiar with the procedural requirements, pay tuition, sacrifice the opportunity to work in order to attend courses, practice teach for eight or 12 weeks without compensation, and endure the red tape of obtaining additional certification if one wants to work in a state other than the one in which they trained.<sup>40</sup> All of this must be done before the individual can apply for a job. If the same individual wished to be a consultant or a journalist, the only concern would be seeking out a willing employer.

Other things being equal, many potential candidates would be much more likely to pursue teaching absent the opportunity costs. This reduces the number of potential teachers and shrinks the talent pool. One response to this observation is that those unwilling to pay these costs ought not be in the classroom anyway. Such a response is misguided. These costs do not particularly serve to screen out the unmotivated, untalented, or undesirable. Rather, by requiring aspiring teachers to jump through a series of time-consuming but little regarded hoops, this system will disproportionately deter the entrepreneurial and energetic.

For those who do enter teaching, the costs of the required preparation are significant. To take an oversimplified example, imagine two recent

graduates (Janet and Jim) who are looking at a variety of jobs. Jim decides to enroll in a teacher certification program that costs \$13,000 in tuition and expenses and that entails a full-time obligation for a year. Meanwhile, Janet takes a job that pays \$35,000. After his one-year program, Jim gets a teaching job that also starts at \$35,000. After five years, assuming that each receives a \$1,000 raise each year they work, Janet has earned \$185,000 and Jim \$146,000. Moreover, Jim paid \$13,000 for tuition, leaving him with \$133,000 after educational expenses. In other words, Janet’s net income averaged \$37,000, nearly 40 percent more than the \$26,600 Jim netted for a job with comparable pay. Given that teaching is not especially lucrative in the first place, it seems ludicrous to build a system that imposes significant additional costs on people who choose to teach unless there are compelling reasons to do so.

### Dissuading Potential Teachers

By making it more complicated and costly to become a teacher, certification dissuades many potential educators.<sup>41</sup> Those seeking a traditional teacher license either have to decide to major in education at the age of 18 or 19 or they have to attend a graduate program in education later. Such programs typically run one to two years and cost thousands of dollars in tuition, supplies, housing, and related costs. These barriers make other professions relatively more attractive, so that potentially talented teachers who are unsure about their interest are less likely to try it. Whereas a person can readily try to be a journalist or a consultant or a marketer for a year, she has to make an extensive commitment before she can try public school teaching. The result is that many who might make fine teachers never enter the profession. There is disturbing evidence that certification may especially dissuade education-

ally accomplished minorities—who have a number of attractive career options and who are often less well situated to absorb the costs of teacher preparation—from entering teaching.<sup>42</sup> As Jay Matthews observed in the *Washington Post*, “The certification system drives away many talented college graduates who don’t want to pay for and then endure jargon-filled textbooks and lectures.”<sup>43</sup> Former U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley worried in his 1999 State of American Education speech that “too many potential teachers are turned away because of the cumbersome process that requires them to jump through hoops and lots of them.”<sup>44</sup>

This would pose no real problem if we were blessed with a surplus of good teachers. In such a case, we might scoff “good riddance” to those dissuaded from teaching. However, we have a desperate need for competent teachers. Moreover, rather than a lack of commitment to teaching, a reluctance to pursue certification may indicate that individuals have attractive alternatives. It is the most talented and hardest working individuals who have the most career options and who sacrifice the most by entering a profession where compensation is unlinked to performance and where opportunities for advancement are few. They may wish to teach but be unwilling to forgo work for a year, sit through poorly regarded courses, or jump procedural hurdles.

It is those individuals with fewer attractive options who will find the tedious but intellectually undemanding requirements of certification less problematic. In fact, by suppressing the supply of teachers, certification provides teachers with enhanced job security. Coupled with a compensation scale that rewards seniority rather than performance, this may well make the profession more attractive to graduates seeking a less demanding line of work. We might wonder whether a willingness to fulfill the bureaucratic and time-consuming—but unchallenging—requirements of certification might be grounds for questioning the abilities and motivation of some aspiring teachers.

## **Ideological Gatekeeping**

Certification makes gatekeepers of those who do the licensing. In a diverse nation marked by disagreements about what constitutes desirable pedagogy or a good curriculum, this poses a philosophical concern. During their training, prospective teachers are at a formative and impressionable stage. By entrusting schools of education with control over entry into teaching, certification lends the instructors a privileged position in sensitive social and moral discussions.

This would be of little concern if education faculty mirrored the divisions within the larger society, but such is not the case. Professors of education tend

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**“Too many potential teachers are turned away because of the cumbersome process that requires them to jump through hoops and lots of them.” —Richard Riley, Secretary of Education, 1999**

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to espouse a “constructivist” conception of pedagogy, curriculum, and schooling. It is received wisdom in teacher education that aggressive multiculturalism is a good thing, that aspiring white teachers ought to be forced to confront society’s ingrained racism, that girls are victims of gender discrimination in public schooling, and so on.<sup>45</sup> While these are legitimate views, they are normative, subject to fierce debate, and often diverge sharply from those of most voters (as reflected in public opinion surveys). The result is that the state essentially endorses a particular and fairly radical philosophy, rather than permitting all approaches to compete on an equal basis in the real world of schooling. It is unclear why one particular educational philosophy ought to enjoy an official imprimatur. Basing certification on anything besides demonstrated mastery of specified tasks or knowledge inevitably entails infusing the normative and moral leanings of the gatekeepers with quasi-official status.

## **Undercutting Professional Development**

Although certification proponents suggest that it pushes teachers to continue developing in a profession characterized by continuous growth, the licensure model can undercut substantive

professional development. Since certification—rather than demonstrated performance—is rewarded, teachers focus on clocking the courses or hours of study necessary to retain their certification. For instance, states generally require teachers to obtain about six semester hours of credit every five years in order to retain their license.<sup>46</sup> Since teachers need not demonstrate proficiency in particular skills or knowledge and since they are not rewarded for such mastery, they generally seek out the least demanding and most convenient courses available. The result has been a cottage industry of desultory “professional development” courses that teachers view as a chore and for which they often have little respect.<sup>47</sup>

For instance, while nearly all teachers report engaging in professional development during the course of a given year, most report that the total time devoted to such activities amounts to between one and eight hours, or the equivalent of one day or less of training.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, more than half of teachers who had participated in professional development indicated that they still felt unprepared to meet classroom needs in the very area in which they had received training.<sup>49</sup>

Comparing teaching to other professions makes the problem clear. Consulting firms, for example, tend to provide intensive internal professional development even though it is not mandatory that they do so. These firms provide training because they see evidence that it makes employees more productive. Employees desire the training because it makes them more valuable, helping them retain their jobs and reap individual rewards.

Outstanding professional development routinely takes place at thousands of schools across the country. I have personally observed numerous such sessions on topics ranging from reading acquisition to the use of classroom technology, conducted by teachers, trainers, administrators, and academics. Such professional development tends to be focused, clearly linked to school or district efforts, regarded as useful by practitioners, and supported by accountability mechanisms. This kind of preparation looks like that provided by any effective organization and is precisely the kind of thoughtful, productive development that ought to be increased. It may well be that a limited amount of such training surpasses in value a more time-consuming regime of obligatory, procedural preparation (such as that provided in most required coursework).

In fact, it is largely because the training is voluntary that it is effective. If employers believe training is not worth the cost, they have incentives to cut it back or eliminate it. Similarly, employees have no incentive to participate unless they believe it useful or the employer—believing it useful—rewards participation. The result is that both employer and employee monitor the quality of training. Under the certification model, on the other hand, district officials charged only with seeing that employees accumulate the specified number of hours have little reason to worry about the quality of training. Meanwhile, teachers understand that professional development is a procedural obligation and that employers will little note whether it is productive.



## Reform Efforts

### *Alternative Certification and the National Board*

Policy makers have adopted a growing array of alternative certification programs and procedures in recent years, with 35 states and the District of Columbia having adopted active programs as of 1999.<sup>50</sup> These programs, which take a variety of forms, make it easier for aspirants to enter the schools without having had to slog through the full array of teacher preparation hoops. A number of states have also increased the use of emergency certification, especially for math and science and especially in urban areas. Emergency certification allows teachers to teach in places or subjects where the district cannot find certified teachers.

Alternative certification is a step in the right direction, but it yields many fewer benefits than will the full reform of certification. For instance, alternative certification programs are complex, poorly publicized, enroll limited numbers, require applicants to negotiate bureaucratic and procedural mazes, and can often prove quite costly in terms of both money and time. As a result, even cumulatively, these programs remain marginal. Consequently, schools continue to be dominated by certified teachers, shaping both school culture and public perception of these teachers. In turn, these factors make the profession less attractive to nontraditional teachers, perpetuating a vicious cycle. Rather than simply creating narrow alternative avenues for the sake of the exceptionally disgruntled or motivated mid-careerist or socially conscious Ivy Leaguer, it makes sense to open the profession to the vast sea of competent adults eager to work with children.

While alternative certification seeks to reduce the barriers blocking entry to teaching, other reformers have sought to raise certification standards. However, because these reformers have enjoyed little success clarifying essential skills or knowledge, their efforts reduce to asking teachers to generate more paper — presumably in

the belief that having the teacher submit enough documentation will eventually illuminate teacher competence. The results are exhausting, expensive processes that do little to concretely establish whether teachers are competent to be in the classroom.

The foremost example of this is the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), which has been widely praised by educators for providing a useful professional development experience and for conferring heightened status on teachers. In practice, the vague “standards” promulgated by the NBPTS have yielded a bureaucratic morass. Teachers who desire NBPTS certification pay a \$2,000 fee (districts generally pay for the teacher), and then enter a six-month process that entails assembling a package of lesson plans, student work, videotapes, essays, and so on in response to 400 pages of explicit instructions. Absent concrete performance criteria, NBPTS judges evaluate teachers by determining whether this mass of work conforms to NBPTS’s definition of good educational practice. There is substantial disagreement regarding the merits of NBPTS’s philosophy of good educational practice and as of yet no empirical evidence that the process produces better teachers.<sup>51</sup> NBPTS does illustrate the tendency among professional educators to look to additional certifications, regulations, and processes as the answer to concerns about professionalism and prestige, rather than examining other strategies to address this issue.

Critics of teacher certification have sometimes taken to calling for the abolition of schools of education or otherwise suggesting that there is no constructive role for teacher education. Defenders of the current approach to teacher certification, in turn, have conceded that the current system may require some refinement, but that its premises are sound and its value is real. What I am offering here is, in essence, common

### ***Tear Down These Walls***

ground. I am offering it in the form of two propositions. If proponents of teacher certification can clearly, concisely, and convincingly explain what it is that certified teachers need to master and how they will assess and ensure mastery, then a more narrowly tailored and more useful certification is entirely possible. If proponents cannot do this, then—while recognizing that many forms of teacher preparation probably have real value—preparation ought not be made a prerequisite for pursuing a teaching position.

When challenged to define concrete

expectations regarding knowledge or skills, certification proponents may enjoy more success doing so for some grade levels or content areas than for others. For instance, we know a fair bit about reading acquisition, and it would seem clear that at least K-3 teachers ought to demonstrate an understanding of this body of knowledge. If it turns out that we are able to develop concrete expectations (and certification requirements) for some teaching roles but not for all of them, this is not necessarily problematic—in fact it would have much to recommend it over current arrangements.

## Sketching an Alternative Approach

Should anyone who wishes be free to walk into a school and start teaching? No. But again, as we all know but seem to forget when it comes to discussions regarding the teacher workforce, being permitted to seek work does not equate to the right to hold a position. In fact, allowing more people to apply for a job deepens the talent pool and makes employment more competitive.

Proponents of the current approach present a false choice to the public. They argue that the alternative to the existing licensure structure is simply allowing anyone to teach. Few actually argue for such an approach, but the prospect rightly scares parents and hinders reform. Instead, there is a third way that combines the little we do know about effective teaching from reliable research with an approach that takes into account the problems raised in this paper.

That said, whether this approach constitutes “abolishing” conventional certification or merely reforming it through the comprehensive adoption of an ambitious program of “alternative certification”, is a semantic point of little import. Because teachers work with our children, and because education is an important public good, certain safeguards are reasonable and necessary. Therefore, there is a strong commonsense case to be made for three strong regulatory guidelines that must be met before a teaching candidate can be considered for employment. The competitive model of teacher certification is premised on these three requirements:

1. Aspirants should be required to have completed an undergraduate education. They ought to possess a B.A. or B.S. degree from a recognized college or university.
2. Aspirants should be required to pass a test that demonstrates competency in

knowledge or skills essential to what they seek to teach. The definition of “essential” knowledge or skills is obviously a loose one that can be interpreted in myriad ways and rightly should be different for those wishing to teach younger children or older students. But the key point is to demand that teachers at least have an appropriate academic knowledge of the material they will be teaching.

3. Aspiring educators should be subjected to a rigorous criminal background check. States conduct such checks now, but they tend to be compromised by the state’s need to simultaneously engage in related certification paperwork. Ensuring that teachers first do no harm is one role that state-level bureaucrats can usefully play and for which local educators clearly lack the resources.

Is anyone who meets these criteria ready to teach? Of course not. However, considering the dearth of evidence about what does constitute a good teacher, both humility in the face of an absence of information and common sense argue against erecting additional regulatory hurdles. That said, most if not all teachers will need training and preparation, in the beginning and throughout their career, like other professionals. The problem is not with preparation per se, but with the effort to prescribe or codify that training in the manner of existing state systems. That distinction is the crux of the competitive model of certification; it doesn’t diminish the importance of ongoing professional development but seeks to invigorate this process through greater competition and professionalism.

Thus, it would be a mistake to see the foregoing as doubting the value of high-quality teacher preparation or induction. Nothing could be fur-

ther from the truth. In fact, it is because the way in which teachers are readied for and introduced to the schools is so important that trying to ensure readiness with a crude, one-size-fits-all paper barrier is counterproductive. In a world without certification as we know it, districts and schools would have more flexibility to make appropriate arrangements to ensure that their new teachers are prepared, inducted, and supervised in a manner appropriate to the challenges at hand.

Now, one legitimate concern is that school districts or schools—under pressure to rapidly improve student performance and meet the community’s immediate concerns—may be tempted to under invest in new teacher preparation and induction. After

all, the benefits of such efforts are long-term and, given teacher mobility, may be captured by schools or districts other than those who offer training. This does pose a challenge but does not constitute a defense of the existing system. This situation is a common one in the world of human development and suggests a strong case for state and/or federal funding of teacher development and professional induction. Such funding ought to be targeted and weighted in such a way that it takes into account local need, including the rate of teacher turnover. When local governments have incentives to under invest in activity with long-term or diffuse effects, it is appropriate for state or federal officials to provide such support.

### **Teacher Preparation Programs in a System of Competitive Certification**

One of the most surprising elements of this discussion may be that leaders of some elite teacher education programs embrace the kind of reform discussed here. The reason? As one explained, “Under the current system, we’re constantly worried about state regulations and state requirements. If we weren’t in the certification business, we’d be free to design programs as we think best.”<sup>52</sup>

Because aspiring teachers would no longer have to attend formal teacher preparation programs in order to teach, the ranks of education school students would shrink significantly. Weaker teacher preparation programs would be likely to fall by the wayside, while schools of education would find their research and service arms facing new opportunities and new demands as the centrality of teacher preparation declined. More promisingly, the fact that schools of education could no longer rely upon a captive body of aspiring teachers would expose them to the

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cleansing winds of competition. Schools would have to contribute value—by providing teacher training, services, or research that created demand and

attracted support—or face significant cutbacks. Teacher preparation programs would find it in their own self-interest to ensure that their graduates were knowledgeable and skilled, as this would help graduates to win desirable jobs amidst increased competition and would thereby help make preparatory institutions more attractive.

In thinking about the changing role of schools of education and teacher education programs, the issue of research becomes central. In general, high-quality education research, and especially reliable practitioner-friendly research, is hard to come by. The problems associated with this are well documented. In schools of education where teacher preparation is a source of value, reputation, or intellectual energy, these programs will continue to shape the institutional mission and culture. However, in those cases where teacher preparation has dominated research and teaching on the basis of bureaucratic fiat rather than merit, an appropriate reallocation of resources and energy will be productive and desirable. Freed from the confines of the existing regime and their bureaucratic links to state departments of education, faculty at schools of education would have new opportunities and responsibilities to focus on crucial questions and on rigorous scholarship.

Thinning the ranks of teacher preparation



programs and schools of education would free up resources, create new opportunities for the best programs to expand, and reduce the need for heavy-handed regulation intended to account for the existence of an enormous number of marginal programs of questionable effectiveness. At the end of the day, we might anticipate a system of no more than a few hundred programs, as is the case in professional training for professions such as law, medicine, or engineering.

### **Teacher Hiring With Competitive Certification**

Under this proposed system, little is likely to change in many of our high-performing suburban districts. In the Fairfax (Va.) and Westchester (N.Y.) Counties of the United States, the school systems are flooded with teacher applicants and local officials will be hesitant to tamper with a formula that is “working.” In such districts, except where an aspiring teacher has sterling credentials, we would expect that the school administrators would continue to cherry-pick from the nation’s top teacher education graduates. It is in the less desirable and more troubled systems, the nation’s urban and rural school districts, where administrators currently have tremendous difficulty finding sufficient numbers of certified bodies. This is doubly true in the areas of math and science education. It is in these districts, where critics have fretted about the numbers of long-term substitutes, “burned out” veterans, and unqualified teachers, where the wave of new teachers will most likely be recruited and welcomed. While many of the resultant applicants will no doubt be deemed unprepared or unsuited for the jobs they pursue, there are few urban or rural principals who would not welcome the chance to pick and choose from their ranks.

Critics point out that in many dysfunctional school districts long waits, poor screening, and inadequate information frequently characterize the application process for aspiring teachers. The design of this reform strategy does not inherently provide a remedy that would address these problems; however, it is easy to envision innovations in teacher placement and recruitment in a more decentralized environment.

Moreover, it should be understood that the changes envisioned offer significant benefits to members of the teaching profession. Allowing more individuals to apply for teaching jobs will increase the potential supply of teachers and create more competition for such positions. Such a dynamic is likely to boost the profession’s prestige, while also making clear to many unqualified applicants that winning entry to the profession is more demanding than it may appear. Allowing more accomplished individuals to try teaching may help them understand just how difficult the profession is, while making it easier to remove teachers may help eliminate some ineffective teachers whose performance hurts the cause of their colleagues.

### **Teacher Development With Competitive Certification**

Under this slimmed-down system, critics may fear that the elimination of certification requirements will mean the end of teacher training. Such concern is unfounded and is mistaken about the likely consequences of reform. First, allowing individuals to become teachers does not mean that they must be viewed as “completed” professionals. Such a mindset is one of the problematic vestiges of our current system, which is erected on a premise that all teachers are certified and competent professionals. Here, a better model might be medicine or law, where entering professionals begin their career with a trial period (serving as a hospital resident or as a junior partner in a law firm, for instance) during which their full panoply of skills is developed and monitored, or engineering or architecture, which encourage further advanced licensure. Beginning teachers might serve on a probationary basis, receiving substantial monitoring and counseling. However, legal and contractual language ought to make it much simpler to terminate ineffective teachers or to mandate that they engage in support activities designed to improve their performance.

Second, moving to competitive certification does not mean doing away with professional teacher education programs. Many applicants attend journalism school or business school, even though such training is not officially required,

because it may make graduates more effective and can help them find better employment more readily. Similarly, aspiring teachers would presumably continue to attend those teacher training programs thought to add value or enhance employability. However, this change would introduce some much-needed market pressure in this area as schools would be forced to compete for students based on the usefulness of their course offerings.

Third, moving away from the traditional certification model does not mean shortchanging professional development or teacher training. On the contrary, many of the current system's difficulties are rooted in its failure to provide such preparation in an effective fashion. Current preparation programs try to simultaneously serve teachers going into a wide variety of educational environments, rely on university personnel to teach practitioner issues, and cannot anticipate the particular programs or approaches that a teacher may be asked to utilize. Teachers entering a troubled urban school or a high-performing suburban school have very different challenges ahead. Why try to train them in the same program and divorced from the context in which they will actually teach? Why have practical courses like classroom discipline or lesson design taught by academics who may not have taught a k-12 class for decades? Why require aspiring teachers to spend a year learning about practical approaches to reading acquisition or science teaching that might be at odds with pedagogy or curriculum at the school where they will teach.

Instead of attempting to stuff knowledge into aspiring teachers and then declare them "certified" professionals, it makes more sense to recognize that many of the key skills teachers need are developed through professional practice and that new teachers should have time to observe and get feedback from colleagues, and receive training while practicing their work. This suggests the value of retaining elements of the current model of "practice teaching," without retaining the costs of mandatory certification. An appropriate compromise is to encourage schools and school systems to train new hires. Such a

model would be a rough approximation of the medical model, where residents learn the softer, more practical skills of medical practice by working under the supervision of veteran doctors. New hires would ideally receive some formal instruction in key areas prior to the beginning of the school year, teach about half the standard teaching load, receive mentoring, and be provided with some kind of support network that could approximate the cohort that supports aspiring teachers as they progress through teacher certification programs. In fact, the proposed

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**Changing to a competitive certification model would open up dramatic new opportunities to enhance the quality and relevance of professional development.**

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model would have some significant advantages over the current system, including that of training teachers in the environment where they will actually teach and creating support mechanisms that will still be present the following year. As with hospital residents, some programs or schools might deem it appropriate to pay these new teachers substantially less than their peers. While teacher advocates have reason to be initially wary of such a proposal, it is vital to recognize that the new teachers would be compensated with free professional development and training. Moreover, it will no longer be necessary for new teachers to pay the opportunity costs associated with certification.

It will be appropriate for states to encourage and to help fund professional development, but it is vital to recognize that some of the necessary resources could be recaptured from beginning teachers at no net loss to these teachers since they would no longer face the exorbitant monetary and opportunity costs of the current approach to certification.<sup>53</sup> Changing to a model along the lines of that just outlined would open up dramatic new opportunities to enhance the quality and relevance of professional development. Districts could contract with schools of education to provide training, could contract with state agencies, could provide it internally, or could hire consultants. Rather than hoping that a certified teacher's preparation would be adequate and locally appropriate, districts could tailor training to address local needs. Districts could pay talented veterans to work with new recruits and could contract with the best of the nation's teacher training pro-

grams—without regard to state boundaries. These changes could potentially create new rewards for effective teachers, deepen the impact of the best teacher educators and programs, create strong incentives for teacher educators to improve their services and demonstrate their effectiveness, permit the best programs to serve more teachers in more locales, and help shift teacher preparation away from its focus on requisite time spent on courses and toward an emphasis on the quality of preparation.

In essence this model merely changes the sequence and structure of induction and much “professional development” and introduces a much-needed competitive element. In no sense does it call for the abolition of these activities. This marks a significant departure from some previous calls to dismantle the existing teacher certification system, which have implicitly suggested that professional preparation has little or nothing to offer aspiring teachers. As was the case with “The Teachers We Need and How to Get More of Them: A Manifesto,” released by the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation in 1999, critiques of teacher certification often fail to address the appropriate role of professional development.<sup>54</sup> This omission can often be facily read as suggesting that any adult with the appropriate knowledge and aptitudes is ready to be an effective teacher—an assumption that disregards much of what we know about education and teaching.

Ironically, both defenders of the current approach and those who seek to dismantle it fall into the trap of viewing teachers as “completed” after they have met their preferred and prescribed barriers to entry. The current system undercuts professional growth by signaling licensed teachers that completion of a series of hoops and hurdles means they are adequately prepared, with little regard for whether there is evidence that they have learned or demonstrated important knowledge or skills. This may be one reason why so many professional development programs are weak and ineffective; the energy of educators is focused elsewhere on certification. However, critics of teacher certification can fall into the trap of suggesting that such professional preparation or development is unnecessary or useless. This is a mistake. To free professional development from licensing is not to doubt its potential usefulness, but to recognize that our

current system is poorly designed to provide the kind of contextual, applied, and nuanced preparation that is useful and appropriate. Eliminating traditional certification does not suggest that teacher preparation or growth is irrelevant; it instead argues that a certification-driven preparation system is unlikely to deliver effective preparation.

### **Teacher Termination in a System of Competitive Certification**

Giving districts more leeway to hire promising candidates does not mean they will always make good decisions. Some ineffective teachers will inevitably continue to be hired. However, because entry to the profession has been eased, it is appropriate that exit be eased. If administrators are to have more leeway to make hiring decisions, they also must be given more leeway to fire—and they must be held accountable for both sets of decisions. In this way, this new model for “certification” is in keeping with trends in school management toward more decentralized or “site-based” decision-making. In fact, one of the main hindrances to greater school autonomy and choice (for both parents and teachers) is archaic regulatory and bureaucratic practices, many of which are codified in collective bargaining agreements and work rules. This is a certification model for an environment of greater choice and school autonomy.

### **Interplay With Standards-Based Reform**

Does this call to dramatically reform our current model of licensure conflict with the increasing emphasis that policy makers are placing on standards at the state level? Is it inconsistent to be seeking to develop and raise clear, statewide standards for schools and students while questioning the need to certify teachers at the same governance level and with the same detail and specificity? In both cases, the answer is no. Rather than conflicting with state-level reforms, the case laid out above is entirely consistent with standards-driven reform. Our current approach to teacher licensure is—despite the protestations of teacher preparation organizations and the reform efforts of some legislatures—almost

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entirely based on inputs that may or may not help make licensees more effective in the classroom. Standards-based reform seeks to move school governance from that same industrial era assembly-line model and toward a less regulated model that focuses more on educational performance or outputs. Such a model implies two approaches to enhancing teacher quality, both of which are consistent with dismantling existing certification systems.

One approach is to evaluate teachers on “objective” measures of performance, most especially student gains on relevant assessments. Efforts to identify, assist, and in some cases remove ineffective teachers become much easier as states develop more systematic and more reliable evaluation systems. Demonstrated output offers officials at the system and state level a ready way to hold administrators and school leaders responsible for the results of their personnel decisions. Of course, critics of such reforms fear that such assessments will not reflect

many of the real contributions that teachers make and will tend to shortchange teachers who devote significant energy to mentoring students, counseling peers, and so on. Consequently, a second approach, one more suited to a conception of teaching as multidimensional and likely to produce value that will not necessarily translate into same-year test gains, is to permit supervisors (principals or even peers) to evaluate teacher performance by more holistic metrics. The same critics who assail the first approach also assail the second, arguing that administrators are either unwilling or unable to make educationally sound personnel decisions. In point of fact, both of these alternatives entail real costs, but—given our refusal to delineate a concrete basis for teacher certification and the significant costs of the current system—either is a significant improvement over the status quo. And, because both models have student achievement as a measure of school performance, both dovetail with emerging accountability efforts.

## Conclusion

Too often in the discussion over teacher certification, critics have either undermined their legitimate concerns by launching emotionally charged assaults on schools of education or have focused on statistical analyses examining the effects of teacher certification while leaving unchallenged the premises advanced by proponents. Neither approach is likely to do much to help policy makers improve schooling. The problem is not schools of education or teacher preparation programs per se, but a system of teacher certification and licensure that tolerates incompetence, permits mediocre teacher training programs to flourish, and provides little incentive for training programs to be selective or weed out unsuitable candidates. This undermines rather than enhances the professional status of teachers.

The central dilemma is that professional educators want licensure without concrete standards. The result is a collection of frail but frustrating paper barriers that deter many potentially talented professionals from entering the profession. The widely hailed and broadly supported effort to develop and promote NBPTS certification is hobbled by this same problem; any close examination reveals that the NBPTS's "meaningful" and "clear" standards are vague and subjective. Thus far, the simple truth is that professional educators have not constructed a canon of essential knowledge or skills analogous to that which exists in law or medicine. However, this is not to suggest that the NBPTS cannot still play a constructive role. On the contrary, so long as NBPTS certification does not play a gatekeeping function and so long as NBPTS-licensed teachers are not privileged by heavy-handed state policies, the NBPTS can play a valuable role by signaling potential employers about a teacher's preparation, ability, and pedagogical orientation.

The kinds of changes discussed here are primarily an issue for state policy makers who directly control the levers of reform. However, federal officials can help, too, by pushing to lower or eliminate the barriers posed by certification through seeding innovative programs, offering fiscal incentives, and encouraging state officials to take action. Of course, striking down the certification barrier alone will not "turn around" the nation's troubled schools. Problems posed by our existing systems of school management and governance, teacher compensation, and school accountability, to name just three, will still be with us. However, tearing down the wall posed by teacher certification offers a useful step toward providing our children with the schools they deserve.

At the end of the day, the individuals best equipped to carefully assess the qualifications of prospective teachers are the principals who will be responsible for them. It is these same principals who ought to have the strongest incentive to see that teachers are effective. If we believe that the administrators charged with managing and supervising schools are either unequipped to evaluate prospective teachers or are unwilling to do so, teacher certification will not suffice to protect our children from such profound systemic dysfunction. If we trust administrators, then certification is unnecessary and entails significant costs. If we don't trust them, let us address that issue directly and not rely on the hollow promise of a problematic system of flimsy parchment barriers. Regardless, it is past time that we fully acknowledge the nuanced, multifaceted, and professional nature of teaching and move beyond a system that trains and licenses teachers in the same manner as dog groomers, equine sports massagers, or pesticide applicators. Overhauling our approach to teacher certification is a crucial first step.

## Endnotes

1. For one of the most recent summaries on the number of teachers the nation will need in the coming decade, see Cheryl C. Sullivan, "Into the Classroom: Teacher Preparation, Licensure and Recruitment," Alexandria, VA: National School Board Association, 2001, 1-2.
2. See Sanders, William L., and June C. Rivers. "Cumulative and Residual Effects of Teachers on Further Student Academic Achievement." University of Tennessee Value-Added Research and Assessment Center. 1996.
3. An excellent overview of the Tennessee study as well as of research from Boston and Dallas is the Education Trust Report, *Good Teaching Matters: How Well Qualified Teachers Can Close the Gap*, The Education Trust, 1998. Available online at <http://www.edtrust.org>.
4. For example, Sanders reports that "black students were over-represented in the least effective teachers' classrooms by about 10 percent and were under-represented in the most effective teachers' classrooms by a similar amount." William L. Sanders, "Value-Added Assessment," *The School Administrator* (December 1998). A recent study by the RAND Corporation found that teachers in California are more likely to transfer out of schools with a higher percentage of minority students than those with a low percentage of minorities, making it harder for school districts to fill vacancies in those schools and lowering the quality of teachers for minority students. Stephen J. Carroll et al., *The Distribution of Teachers Among California's School District's and Schools*, RAND Corporation, 2000. Also, collective bargaining arrangements, seniority provisions, and budget procedures in many school districts exacerbate these problems by limiting the ability of administrators to assign or manage teachers. For example see Paul Hill, "A Conspiracy of Silence," Hoover Institution, February 12, 2001.
5. "Condition of Education" U.S. Department of Education, 2001, 69.
6. According to statistics from the National Center for Education Statistics and the nongovernmental National Center for Education Information, about 12 percent of teachers certified in 1998-99 came by alternative routes.
7. Although something constituting an "alternative path" into the teaching profession exists, at least on paper, in many states there is tremendous variance in the quality of these programs and even cumulatively they serve a small percentage of prospective teachers. In practice, for most teachers like the fictitious Janet, the traditional route is the most ready route at hand.
8. In fact, as we would expect, research suggests that principals who do not have to abide by certification requirements are especially likely to hire and reward teachers who attended high-quality colleges, who possess strong math or science training (areas where schools face persistent shortages), or who put in more instructional hours. See Caroline Hoxby, "Changing the Profession," *Education Matters* 1, no. 1, 57-63, Spring 2001.
9. For instance, in February 2001, D.C. School Board Chair Peggy Cooper Cafritz charged, "It's a large percentage—it's probably around 50 percent. ...We have a lot of teachers who are good teachers in terms of performance before a class but they're not masters of their content. And so no matter how good you are at getting your point across, if you don't own the point, it doesn't matter." See Justin Blum, "Half of District Teachers Weak, Board Chief Says," *Washington Post*, February 22, 2001, A1. D.C. Superintendent Paul Vance would not confirm Cafritz's numbers but was quoted in the same article: "'In the District, historically, you haven't had A-tier teachers,' as there are in Montgomery [a Maryland county bordering Washington] and other places, Vance said. 'You have what we would call in other school systems B-and C-tier teachers. When you've got a C-tier teacher, they are teachers who could not get jobs anyplace else, so they hired them here.'"

10. Nationally, about 12 percent of teachers who have taught for three years or less do not have full certification. See National Center for Education Statistics, "Teacher Quality: A Report on the Preparation and Qualifications of Public School Teachers," Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 1999. A 1996 study by the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF) charged that 50,000 teachers a year were entering teaching on emergency certification or substandard licensure and that more than half of the nation's high school science students, and more than a quarter of math students, were being taught by "out-of-field" teachers. NCTAF, "What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future," New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1996.
11. For recent research questioning the benefits of certification, see Dan D. Goldhaber and Dominic J. Brewer, "Does Teacher Certification Matter? High School Teacher Certification Status and Student Achievement," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 22, no. 2 (2000), 129-145; Dan D. Goldhaber and Dominic J. Brewer, "Evaluating the Evidence on Teacher Certification: A Rejoinder," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 23, no. 1 (2001), 79-86; Margaret Raymond, Stephen H. Fletcher, and Javier Luque, "Teach for America: An Evaluation of Teacher Differences and Student Outcomes in Houston, Texas," Palo Alto, CA: CREDO, 2001; Kate Walsh, "Teacher Certification Reconsidered: Stumbling for Quality," The Abell Foundation, 2001. For research that challenges such critiques and makes the case for the benefits of certification, see Linda Darling-Hammond, "Teacher Quality and Student Achievement: A Review of State Policy Evidence," Seattle, WA: University of Washington, 1999; Linda Darling-Hammond, Barnett Berry, and Amy Thorenson, "Does Teacher Certification Matter? Evaluating the Evidence," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 23, no. 1 (2001), 57-77; Jianping Shen, "Has the Alternative Certification Policy Materialized Its Promise? A Comparison Between Traditionally and Alternatively Certified Teachers in Public Schools," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 19, no. 3 (1997), 276-283. For discussions of the difficulties in assessing the benefits of certification, see Dale Ballou, "Alternative Certification: A Comment," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 20, no. 4 (1998), 313-315; Jianping Shen, "Alternative Certification: A Complicated Research Topic," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 20, no. 4 (1998), 316-319; Suzanne M. Wilson, Robert E. Floden, and Joan Ferrini-Mundy, "Teacher Preparation Research: Current Knowledge, Gaps, and Recommendations," Seattle, WA: University of Washington, 2001.
12. For the most impressive efforts, see Dale Ballou and Michael Podgursky, "The Case Against Teacher Certification," *The Public Interest*, no. 132 (Summer 1998), 17-29; and Unsigned Manifesto, "The Teachers We Need and How to Get More of Them: A Manifesto," in *Better Teachers, Better Schools*, ed. Marci Kanstoroom and Chester E. Finn, Washington, DC: Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, 1999.
13. See James B. Conant, *The Education of American Teachers* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963), 54.
14. For the best concise history of teacher licensure and certification, see David L. Angus and Jeffrey Mirel, *Professionalism and the Public Good: A Brief History of Teacher Certification* (Washington, DC: Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, 2001).
15. Conant, *The Education of American Teachers*, McGraw-Hill: New York, p. 23.
16. For a thorough overview of the issues involved in teacher licensure, see Dale Ballou and Michael Podgursky, "Teacher Training and Licensure: A Layman's Guide," in Marci Kanstoroom and Chester E. Finn (eds.), *Better Teachers, Better Schools*, Washington DC: Thomas B. Fordham Foundation.
17. For a discussion of just how lax the expectations for teachers actually are, see Naomi Schaefer, "Traditional and Alternative Certification: A View from the Trenches," in *Better Teachers, Better Schools*.
18. See Mitchell, Ruth and Patte Barth., *Not Good Enough: A Content Analysis of Teacher Licensing Examinations*, Washington DC: Education Trust, 1999, 3.
19. For national data on the number of teacher training programs and their characteristics, see C. Emily Feistritzer, *The Making of a Teacher: A Report on Teacher Preparation in the U.S.* (Washington, DC: Center for Education Information, 1999).
20. For the estimate of 200,000 new teacher graduates a year, see Feistritzer, *The Making of a Teacher*, 5. It is hard to estimate the precise number of teachers educated by the top 25 programs with precision, because a number of teacher education programs decline to publicly release the necessary information. However, an estimate based

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upon information published by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) in its 2001 Directory of Members strongly suggests that the top 25 programs (as ranked by *U.S. News and World Report*) produce less than 10,000 graduates a year.

21. For an extensive description of the nation's teacher preparation programs, see Feistritzer, *The Making of a Teacher*.

22. See the 2001 AACTE Directory of Members.

23. Dale Ballou and Michael Podgursky have made this point, explaining, "The case for licensing in medicine rests partly on the premise that consumers cannot make well-informed decisions concerning the quality of medical services. There is a complex body of specialized medical knowledge that medical consumers cannot be expected to know." The same is not true in the case of schooling, since, as we shall shortly see, even professional educators are not sure what teachers need to know or be able to do. See Dale Ballou and Michael Podgursky, "The Case Against Teacher Certification," *The Public Interest* no. 132 (1998), 17-29.

24. To read about the NBPTS and its standards, visit the Board's home page at [www.nbpts.org](http://www.nbpts.org).

25. For instance, see James Nehring, "Certifiably Strange," *Teacher Magazine* 13, no. 1 (August 2001), 49-51. The article tells the story of a Massachusetts social studies teacher who was denied NBPTS certification primarily because he failed to meet the "Collaboration in Professional Community" standards, even though the teacher had authored four books on teaching and schooling and had helped to launch two successful public schools. For a more systematic and scholarly indictment of the NBPTS's standards and the manner in which they are implemented, see Danielle Dunne Wilcox, "The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards: Can It Live Up to Its Promise?" in *Better Teachers, Better Schools*, ed. Marci Kanstoroom and Chester E. Finn (Washington, DC: Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, 1999).

26. See Michael Podgursky, "Defrocking the National Board," *Education Matters* 1, no. 2, 79-82, Summer 2001.

27. See E.C. Wragg, G.S. Haynes, C.M. Wragg, and R.P. Chamberlin, *Failing Teachers?* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

28. They note, "Few would [argue]...that teachers should be unenthusiastic, boring, unfair, ignorant, and not care about their pupils. However, once the scrutiny of teaching is translated into the more precise terms demanded by the tenets of rigorous systematic inquiry, the easy agreement...evaporates." Wragg et al., *Failing Teachers?*, 5.

29. The authors are careful to qualify the degree to which teaching skill can ever be taught, however, explaining that teaching is largely a "sacred" and "intuitive" art. See Gerald Grant and Christine E. Murray, *Teaching in America: The Slow Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

30. The volume itself was issued by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) for the express purpose of debunking concerns about the rigor, quality, or value of schools of education. See Mary E. Diez, "Teacher Education Programs Are All the Same," in *Dispelling Myths About Teacher Education*, ed. Greta Morine-Dershimer and Gail Huffman-Joley (Washington, DC: AACTE, 2000).

31. See Diez, especially 34-35.

32. We do of course worry that both employers and the public may be biased against some employees for reasons that have nothing to do with ability, as in the case of racial discrimination. However, that issue is irrelevant here. Teacher licensure has no impact on laws or regulations governing fair employment practices.

33. See Dan D. Goldhaber and Dominic J. Brewer, "Teacher Licensing and Student Achievement," in *Better Teachers, Better Schools*; David H. Monk and Jennifer A. King, "Multilevel Teacher Resource Effects on Pupil Performance in Secondary Mathematics and Science: The Case of Teacher Subject-Matter Preparation," in *Choices and Consequences: Contemporary Policy Issues in Education*, ed. Ronald Ehrenberg (Ithaca, NY: ILR Press, 1994); and Harold Wenglinsky, "How Teaching Matters: Bringing the Classroom Back into Discussions of Teacher Quality," Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service, 2000.



34. For instance, do we think media coverage of national affairs would improve if the White House and Congress only issued press passes to journalists who had completed a federally approved training program? Even the media's harshest critics have never called for such a move, though journalists covering national affairs clearly have a public responsibility analogous to that of teachers.

35. See Ruth Mitchell and Patte Barth, "Not Good Enough: A Content Analysis of Teacher Licensing Examinations," *Thinking K-12*, Education Trust Inc: Washington D.C., 3, no. 1 (Spring 1999).

36. See Cheryl C. Sullivan, "Into the Classroom: Teacher Preparation, Licensure and Recruitment," Alexandria, VA: National School Board Association, 2001, 10.

37. In one of the more widely noted examples, in the spring of 1998 Massachusetts first administered a new test that it had developed for aspiring teachers. The test emphasizes skills like punctuation and spelling, and the 1,800 test takers were asked to do tasks such as define "abolish," explain what a preposition is, correct grammatical mistakes, and summarize simple passages. In that first round, 59 percent of teachers failed the test. The results made clear that many of these graduates from teacher training programs could not write a complete sentence and had a weak command of spelling, with aspiring teachers providing spellings such as "horibal." In July 1998, 47 percent of 2,100 test takers failed, with 94 percent of the 1,000 re-takers failing a second time. The results were similar to those from the 1980s when, after the release of *A Nation at Risk*, the states moved to adopt minimum competency exams for teachers.

38. See Eugene W. Hickock and Michael B. Poliakoff, "Raising the Bar for Pennsylvania's Teachers," in *Better Teachers, Better Schools*.

39. See Margaret Raymond, Stephen H. Fletcher, and Javier Luque, "Teach for America: An Evaluation of Teacher Differences and Student Outcomes in Houston, Texas," Palo Alto, CA: CREDO, 2001, 18-19; Richard J. Murnane, Judith D. Singer, John B. Willet, James J. Kemple, and Randall J. Olsen, "Who Will Teach? Policies That Matter," Cambridge, MA: Harvard University. 1991.

40. Especially for those individuals who did not complete a teacher training program as an undergraduate, the costs can be significant. It is not unusual for postgraduate teacher training programs to require a full-time commitment of 16 or even 24 months, or a part-time commitment that can stretch to three years or more. See American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, *Alternative Paths to Teaching: A Directory of Post baccalaureate Programs*, Washington, DC: 2000.

41. For instance, a 2000 study by Public Agenda found that one of the two main reasons that college graduates opted for a field other than teaching was that they didn't want to have to return to school to take education courses. See Steve Farkas, Jean Johnson, and Anthony Foleno, *A Sense of Calling: Who Teaches and Why* (New York: Public Agenda, 2000).

42. Teachers who enter the profession through alternative certification programs are more racially diverse than those who enter through traditional certification. Moreover, alternatively certified minority teachers have higher levels of educational attainment than both white and minority teachers with traditional certification. See Jianping Shen, "The Impact of Alternative Certification on the Elementary and Secondary Public Teaching Force," *Journal of Research and Development in Education* 32, no. 1 (1998), 9-16, and Jianping Shen, "Alternative Certification, Minority Teachers, and Urban Education," *Education and Urban Society* 31, no. 1 (1998), 30-41.

43. See Jay Matthews, "Is This Any Way to Hire Teachers?," *Washington Post*, July 22, 2001, B1.

44. Richard W. Riley, "New Challenges, A New Resolve: Moving American Education into the 21st Century," Sixth Annual State of American Education Speech, Long Beach, CA, February 16, 1999.

45. For instance, the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE)—which is the national organization and voice of teacher education programs—makes clear its members' views in these matters. Of the 15 "Special Study Groups" sponsored by AACTE, none focus on teacher performance, while seven focus on issues of race, gender, sexuality, or multiculturalism. Similarly, in 1990, 1995, and 2000, the AACTE officially

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adopted resolutions endorsing the equal rights amendment to the Constitution, terming the bill a “legislative priorit[y],” and calling for AACTE members to “incorporat[e] multicultural education in all aspects of their programs.” In 1990, 1995, and 2000, terming “the educator’s affirmation of the worth of cultural diversity essential” to effectively educating all students, AACTE promised to continue providing a “national forum” in the “areas of human rights...and multicultural and global education.” In 1990 and 1995, AACTE took the relatively radical step of resolving that “no program of selection be devised by schools, colleges, and departments of education or state education agencies that eliminates disproportionate numbers of minority candidates from the teaching profession.” AACTE called upon schools of education to “establish multiple admissions requirements to increase the number of under-represented minority students.”

46. Ten states require no ongoing professional development to maintain certification. The rest use a variety of approaches, though the credit hour approach is the most common, as it is the predominant option in about half of the states, according to the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education & Certification. *The NASDTEC Manual 2000: Manual on the Preparation and Certification of Educational Personnel*, 5th ed. (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/ Hunt Publishing, 2000), table E-2.

47. Practicing teachers themselves voice concerns about the quality of their coursework in pedagogy and education. For instance, in the best-known effort to see what teachers think about this issue, researchers found that 73 percent of teachers rated courses they had taken in their subject area as “very valuable,” but only 37 percent rated their education courses and in-service activities in the same fashion. See Emily Feistritzer and David Chester, “Alternative Teacher Certification,” Washington, DC: National Center for Education Information, 1996; “Public School Teacher Survey on Education Reform,” National Center for Education Statistics Fast Response Survey System, FRSS 55, National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, 1996; Laurie Lewis, Basmat Parsad, Nancy Carey, Nicole Bartfai, Elizabeth Farris, and Becky Smerdon, *Teacher Quality: A Report on the Preparation and Qualifications of Public School Teachers*, NCES 1999-080, Bernard Green, project officer, Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, 1999, 47-57.

48. Basmat Parsad, Laurie Lewis and Elizabeth Farris, *Teacher Preparation and Professional Development: 2000*, NCES 2001-088 Bernard Green, project officer, Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, 2001, 4-5.

49. *Ibid.*, 37.

50. C. Emily Feistritzer and David Chester, “Alternative Teacher Certification: A State-by-State Analysis 2000,” Washington DC: National Center for Education Information, 2000.

51. For example, see Michael Poliakoff, “Mastering the Basics,” *Philanthropy*, October 2001, 22-25.

52. Interview with author.

53. This is directly analogous to the way that hospitals pay residents much less than they do doctors, largely because it is understood that part of a resident’s compensation is the training and mentoring she receives.

54. See “The Teachers We Need and How to Get More of Them: A Manifesto,” in *Better Teachers, Better Schools*, ed. Marci Kanstoroom and Chester E. Finn (Washington, DC: Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, 1999).

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