

TEACHERS WHO CAN:

How Informed Trustees Can Ensure Teacher Quality

- Trustees for Better Teachers

Teachers Who Can: How Informed Trustees Can Ensure Teacher Quality is the second publication of the **Trustees for Better Teachers project**, a multi-year initiative of the American Council of Trustees and Alumni aimed at improving teacher education in the United States. As stewards of their institutions, trustees are ideally placed to take a critical look at teacher training programs at their schools and press for reforms. This step-by-step guide outlines the principles and criteria for an excellent teacher preparation program, gives examples of real-life programs that work, provides models for boards to adapt to their own situation, and outlines an action plan for trustees. The first publication of the Trustees for Better Teachers project is *Educating Teachers: The Best Minds Speak Out* (2002).

The American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) is an educational nonprofit organization based in Washington, DC, dedicated to academic freedom, excellence and accountability. ACTA provides a broad array of services to college and university trustees ranging from independent information and publications to conferences and consultations on academic and governance matters. ACTA is currently working with the National Council on Teacher Quality on the Trustees for Better Teachers project to demonstrate the need for change in the way American teachers are trained. ACTA publications include: *Restoring America's Legacy: The Challenge of Historical Literacy in the 21st Century* (2002); *Can College Accreditation Live Up to Its Promise?* (2002); *Losing America's Memory: Historical Illiteracy in the 21st Century* (2000); *The Intelligent Donor's Guide to College Giving* (1998); and *The Shakespeare File: What English Majors Are Really Studying* (1996).

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● A publication of the Trustees for Better Teachers project

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National Council on Teacher Quality

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The National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) is a nonprofit organization devoted to the pursuit of teacher quality by bringing common sense to bear on this urgent national priority. NCTQ fosters innovation and experimentation with teacher quality policies by functioning as an information clearinghouse on teacher quality issues, raising public understanding of these issues, assisting states and school districts in crafting teacher quality strategies, and promoting needed research, experimentation, and evaluation.

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The Ongoing Crisis in Teacher Quality

In 1983, *A Nation at Risk* described critical weaknesses in our teaching force:

- Too many teachers drawn from the bottom quarter of graduating high school and college students.
- Teacher education programs weighed down with “educational methods” courses at the expense of real academic preparation.
- Severe shortages of mathematics, science, and foreign language teachers.
- Vast numbers of teachers not qualified to teach the classes to which they are assigned.

Twenty years later, the crisis continues—as many states find it increasingly difficult to find qualified teachers, particularly for urban and rural schools. There has never been a more urgent moment to address the problem. The status quo is unacceptable. Active and engaged trustees, however, have the capacity to effect the changes we need.

Trustees should reassert more forcefully their prerogative to stand apart from the many vested interests and factions on campuses and act as independent arbiters of their institutions' welfare. After all, trustees ultimately are accountable to the public and to the law, not to the disparate constituencies on campus.

Candace de Russy, Trustee, State University of New York, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 1996



Why Trustees Should Initiate Reform

Trustees are uniquely positioned to be agents of true teacher quality reform. They have the authority to mandate changes. They have the fiduciary responsibility to do so. And they have the independent judgment and competence to address a problem all of us can understand. There is no greater contribution trustees could make than to improve the quality of future teachers graduating from their institutions.

Trustees are in a position to assess the strengths and weaknesses of teacher preparation programs, and demand that their institutions award diplomas only to education students who are academically qualified to begin their classroom careers. They can provide the leadership to create high-quality, accessible, and cost-effective programs, and thereby help to alleviate teacher shortages.

As a trustee concerned about teacher quality, you will not be alone. Trustees across the country are working with the Trustees for Better Teachers project organized by the American Council of Trustees and Alumni in cooperation with the National Council on Teacher Quality. ACTA and NCTQ can provide advice, assistance, materials, and even on-site visits to help you and your fellow trustees address one of the most important challenges facing America. We can arrange for leading experts to present on-campus seminars to prepare trustees to be agents of teacher quality reform.



The Purpose of This Trustee's Guide

In order to assess the strengths and weaknesses of education programs, trustees need to be able to ask the right questions and to interpret the data presented to them. The simple fact that an education school has developed “performance” or “accountability” measures does not in and of itself ensure acceptable results or high standards. This guide will show you, as a trustee, what to ask, where to look, and how to understand what the data indicate. It will define the basic terminology so that you can penetrate the jargon that often obscures the performance indicators you need to see. It will equip you and your colleagues to understand and address the following key challenges:

- Getting the data you (and the public) need.
- Ensuring that the students your school prepares to be teachers know the subjects they will teach.
- Understanding state teacher certification exam results and knowing what they can and cannot tell us.
- Spotting grade inflation in teacher preparation.
- Collecting on-the-job information about teacher effectiveness.
- Watching the watchdogs: knowing the limitations of accrediting agencies.
- Distinguishing best practice from malpractice in education methods courses.

The pages that follow will provide you with a brief orientation to teacher quality reform and offer steps your board can take to help strengthen teacher preparation at your institution.



Becoming Informed

The first step is to gather information. You can do this as an individual trustee, but it is even better if your board agrees to assign the issue to a standing committee or set up a special task force. If that is not possible, two or three board members can take up this issue as an informal project and report their findings to the board.

Key Information Trustees Need

Whether individually or in a group, ask the education program director (this might be the Dean of the College of Education or a department head) to meet with you to discuss the teacher education program, its curriculum, quality indicators, and strategic plan. Invite an official from your state teacher certification authority (usually the State Board of Education or the State Department of Education) to explain the state's criteria for awarding certification and for approving and monitoring teacher education programs.

Don't just hear reports from others. Do your own fact-gathering. Ask state agencies for their measures of teacher performance—broken down by the institution from which teachers graduated. Look at course syllabi and textbooks. You may even visit classrooms, but that is a delicate matter. Tell the head of the teacher preparation program that you would like to visit some education classes and ask him or her to arrange those visits for you. Express that you would like an opportunity to have an informal discussion with students or recent graduates. Although there is a national crisis in teacher quality, do not approach these visits as a

critic and certainly not as a censor. Academic freedom is vital, and it is important that trustees not become involved in telling professors what they can or cannot teach. The purpose of the visits is not to evaluate individuals but to get a feel for the program, for what students are learning and how they are learning it. Feel free to talk to professors and ask them, for example, what approach they take to reading instruction and why.

Trustees' high level of interest in teacher preparation should not be seen as an intrusion into faculty or departmental prerogatives. Effective teacher preparation requires an unusually high level of cooperation and resource sharing. Trustees are uniquely positioned to promote and to facilitate the crucial connections between academic departments and the education program—but to do it properly, the board needs proper information. ACTA and NCTQ are at your service to facilitate discussions with stakeholders and to explore national priorities and trends in teacher preparation.

The Basics of Teacher Certification (Licensure)

Teachers, administrators, and other school staff who wish to work in the public school system need state certification—more accurately called licensure—to teach in public schools. (In high-need situations, some states allow a school to employ a teacher with a state-issued “waiver” of certification requirements, a practice that will end with the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act.) Some parochial schools—especially the Catholic school system—also require certification. A telling fact is that most private schools, including the most prestigious, do not require it. They hire well-educated teachers with communication skills irrespective of whether they have taken education courses. But public school districts that employ teachers without a certificate or permit, no matter how qualified these teachers may be, face sanctions from their respective states. Teacher certification is, in general, an intricately regulated process that imposes

requirements on both the prospective teachers and the colleges and universities that train them. Teachers and other school personnel must have certificates or permits for the specific subjects or areas in which they serve. In most states, there are dozens of different certification areas. Most states also require that teachers who have an initial teaching certificate, sometimes called a probationary certificate, do further coursework over a fixed period of years, achieve satisfactory evaluations from their supervisors, and gain a professional (or “permanent”) certificate, if they wish to continue their teaching careers. The professional certificate becomes inactive and invalid if the teacher fails to meet professional development requirements.

The overwhelming majority of public school teachers prepare for their careers in teacher education programs. As of 1999, 1,354 institutions prepared teachers. Over 100,000 students graduated with undergraduate education degrees, and nearly the same number with Master’s Degrees in education. Some universities have separate “colleges of education”; other universities and most liberal arts colleges have “education programs” or “education majors”; many universities offer not only undergraduate teacher preparation, but also graduate degrees in education. The college or university that offers teacher education must have state authorization for each certification area it wishes to offer. Once state approval is granted, each certification program is subject to ongoing state authority and evaluation. State guidelines prescribe in greater or less detail what the teacher certification programs must include. The requirements (which vary from state to state) may include some or all of the following:

- A minimum number of required semester hours of general education (liberal arts) coursework.
- An academic major in the subject area to be taught or a minimum number of semester hours in the teaching area.
- A minimum number of semester hours of pedagogy or education methods coursework.

- A minimum grade point average to enter the teacher education program.
- A qualifying score on a basic skills exam to enter the teacher education program.
- A criminal background check.
- A minimum grade point average to graduate from the teacher education program.
- Some amount of supervised student teaching.

Some states also require that teacher education programs be accredited, usually by the National Council on Teacher Education (NCATE), and a few states accept the accreditor's decision as fulfillment of the state's own statutory approval requirements with little further scrutiny.

A number of states have developed *alternative certification* programs designed to attract mid-career professionals and bright college graduates who did not complete a teacher education program but want to become public school teachers. The most effective of these programs significantly reduce the role of teacher education programs in preparing candidates for the classroom. On the other hand, they often give the teacher education programs the opportunity (among other providers) to design and offer important in-service training programs for the new teachers to help them meet the challenges that a beginning teacher faces. In New Jersey, nearly 25% of the new teachers come through alternative routes; Texas, California, Colorado, Georgia, and Connecticut also have highly effective and streamlined alternative certification programs.

The final hurdle before the aspiring teacher can enter the classroom in nearly all states is passing the teacher certification exams. Usually these exams include a core of general academic and professional skills tests and a test in the candidate's specific teaching field. Passing the certification exams is obligatory whether the candidate seeks to become a teacher through a teacher education program or an alternative certification route.

...[C]ertification 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. ... Whether or not most teacher training graduates are able, certification currently provides no protection against incompetent students who manage to complete the prescribed regimen.

Frederick M. Hess, *Tear Down This Wall: The Case for a Radical Overhaul of Teacher Certification* (2001), Progressive Policy Institute, 21st Century Schools Project

Beyond the Basics of Certification

There is general agreement that certification has not provided the quality protection we need. Some states have been setting higher and higher certification requirements. These quality initiatives often include raising the qualifying scores on both the basic skills entrance exams and the teacher certification exams, demanding a full academic major rather than an education major, and setting a high grade point average requirement. But trustees everywhere have an essential role in assuring quality programs. Key elements of the trustees' role are:

- *Ensuring that their schools meet or exceed the state requirements for academic quality measures.*
- *Ensuring efficiency in preparing teachers.* By working with faculty and administration, trustees can limit duplicative professional education courses and get qualified teachers into public school classrooms without unnecessary burdens and delays. Trustees could require, for example, as Pennsylvania state regulations now mandate, that it be possible to complete teacher preparation programs within four years.

- *Advocating alternative certification programs.* Trustees can support state efforts to develop streamlined teacher preparation programs that will allow well-educated adults, such as former military personnel and mothers whose children are grown, to enter teaching as a second career and help meet the growing demand for qualified teachers.
- *Raising curricular quality.* Trustees are responsible for the academic, as well as fiscal, well-being of their institutions. Faculty have primary responsibility for the curriculum, but it is up to the board to make sure that faculty are living up to their responsibilities. It is neither micromanaging nor a violation of academic freedom for boards to demand a rigorous, content-based course of study for future teachers.

The claim that there is a body of research proving the value of teacher certification, estimated to consist of 100 to 200 studies, is specious.

Kate M. Walsh, *Teacher Certification Reconsidered: Stumbling for Quality* (2001), The Abell Foundation

Working Toward High Quality Teacher Education Programs

The Goal: Student Learning

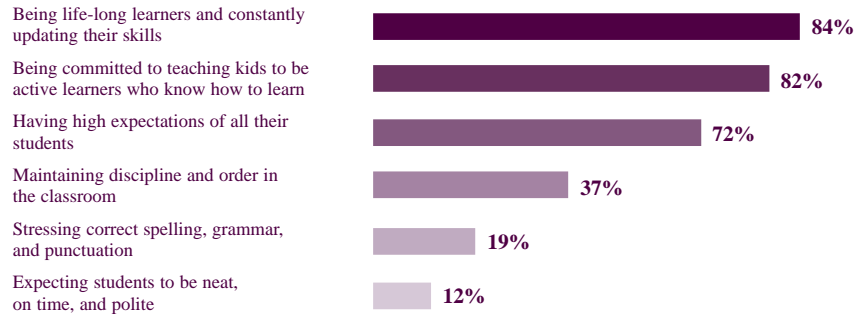
The American Council of Trustees and Alumni has consistently advocated higher education's return to the academic and intellectual focus that is its birthright and its future. Aspiring teachers must demonstrate academic excellence themselves, so that they will model for their students a commitment to learning and achievement. They must also acquire sound and proven methods of instruction, so that they can impart knowledge as well as skills to their students.

Individual professors have the academic freedom to research and discuss ideas and issues without interference. But the institution, including the board of trustees, is responsible for the quality and hence design of the teacher preparation program. While the goals of education professors are important, the teacher education programs must answer to the public's need for proven student academic achievement.

Goals of Education Professors

CHART 1.

Qualities that are "absolutely essential" to impart to prospective teachers:



Source: *Different Drummers: How Teachers of Teachers View Public Education* (1997), Public Agenda

Trustees must therefore educate themselves to look knowledgeably at the curriculum to ensure that it is designed to produce teachers whose success will be evident in the learning gains of their students. Trustees can benefit from the recent analysis of education school curricula published by the Pacific Research Institute.

The retreat from a focus on student learning gains is a very real and present danger in teacher education. One text used to train teachers in mathematics instruction offers, “There is no place for requiring students to practice tedious calculations that are more efficiently and accurately done by using calculators.” Trustees with experience in the world of business and industry are likely to think differently. Those who would train the next generation of teachers will benefit from the advice of trustees with real-world experience with workforce needs.

A text used to educate teachers in multiculturalism avers, “We cannot afford to become so bogged down in grammar and spelling that we forget the whole story.” This story, according to the text, includes, “racism, sexism, and the greed of money and human labor that disguises itself as ‘globalization.’”

**Excerpts from the School of Education,
California State University-Dominguez Hills
Conceptual Framework**

Knowledge Base

After a continuing dialogue among the faculty, the knowledge base was defined as commonly agreed-upon-principles and practices which address diverse ways of knowing and theoretical and empirical approaches to the education process which inform our theory and practice. **This knowledge base pervades our curricula and is built upon commitments to ...**

- Attention to the effects of diversity, including gender, socio-economic status, culture, ethnicity, linguistic socialization, and disability (Banks; Gay; Gilligan; Gollnick & Chinn; Nieto; Ogbu; Sue); language acquisition (Cummins; Krashen; Hakuta; Heath; Wong-Fillmore) and critical theory that addresses the effects of oppression and power upon children (Freire; Giroux; Kozol; McLaren).
- Constructivist-cognitive approaches to teaching, learning, and other essential constructs of good teaching that inform our practice (Ausubel; Bruner; Piaget; Vygotsky).

Source: <http://www.csudh.edu/soe//conframe.htm>, 2002

These assumptions could provide the subject for interesting political arguments, but they will not help children achieve in the way that learning to read, write, and speak correct English will. Nor will they give new teachers the practical skills they need to create orderly classrooms where learning can take place.

While meticulously respecting the academic freedom of professors to design and offer courses, trustees are nevertheless obligated to review carefully the priorities that underlie the choice of required courses for programs leading to state licensure. If they find programs that compromise the training that teachers need to increase their students' academic gains, they need to direct the president and deans to reorient the program to its purpose: training classroom teachers who bring about student learning gains.

Trustees should become familiar with the results of education research on critical topics. For example, decades of research on how children learn to read has consistently demonstrated the success of systematic phonics instruction, which teaches the relationship between letters and sounds. Phonics instruction helps all children, but it is particularly crucial for children who come to school without the pre-reading skills that come from literacy-rich home environments. “Whole language” methods, on the other hand, which were popular in the 1980s, attempt to sidestep systematic instruction in phonics and teach sight recognition of whole words and sentences at the earliest stage of reading instruction. Many colleges of education still

Early Childhood and Elementary Education (ELE)

ELE 540 Whole Language: Theory and Practice 3(3-0) D
Emphasizes whole language philosophy, components, classroom management and organization, literature-based reading, authentic writing contexts, skill integration, thematic teaching, at risk populations and evaluation.
Prerequisites: ELE 330.

Source: 2001-2002 *Bulletin*, Central Michigan University

teach and advocate whole language instruction, but systematic phonics instruction is at the heart of the recommendations of the National Reading Panel, a Congressionally-mandated group of experts that has studied the effectiveness of different approaches used to teach reading. Similarly, most education programs inculcate

“constructivism,” the theory that children construct knowledge and meaning for themselves, discovering the topics and content that have meaning for them. The constructivist teacher is not a source of knowledge and direction; in constructivist parlance, the teacher is a “guide on the side,” not a “sage on the stage.” Extensive research, however, has shown, not surprisingly, that such practices are less effective than traditional teacher-directed instruction, especially for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Trustees must ensure that their institutions take to heart methods of instruction backed by sound research.

American Federation of Teachers Calls for Better Teacher Training in Reading

What a teacher candidate learns depends on the professor he or she selects. What the professor teaches is determined solely by what the professor may know or believe. Courses in reading, which are typically limited to three credit hours, are often taught by adjunct faculty who are accountable to no one. Thus, preparation for teaching reading often is more grounded in ideology than evidence. While the academic freedom that professors often invoke has a place in teacher education, its claim is not as absolute as it may be in the humanities. Professional preparation programs have a responsibility to teach a defined body of knowledge, skills, and abilities that are based on the best research in the field. This is no less important in reading than it is in medicine or the law.

American Federation of Teachers Firm on Phonics

For example, in the recent past, one of the most common misconceptions has been that knowledge of the phonic system can be finessed with awareness of sentence structure and meaning. Textbooks for teachers must attain a much higher standard of accuracy, currency, depth, clarity, and relevance if teachers are to be well-prepared to teach reading.

Source: *Teaching Reading Is Rocket Science: What Expert Teachers of Reading Should Know and Be Able To Do* (1999), American Federation of Teachers

Key Questions Trustees Should Ask

In reviewing their teacher education programs, here are some key questions for trustees to ask:

- Do prospective teachers truly learn the subjects they teach or just “how” to teach subjects they themselves have not mastered?
- Do aspiring teachers learn methods of classroom management and student discipline that promote effective environments for learning? Is there an identifiable course in the teacher education program that focuses on these core pedagogical skills?
- Do prospective teachers learn to use methods of phonics instruction that are crucial for the development of children’s reading skills or does the teacher education program still attempt to inculcate the failed “whole language” methods condemned by the National Reading Panel?
- To what extent does the teacher education program require studies of “critical pedagogies,” designed to train the teacher to be an agent of social change rather than to increase students’ cognitive skills?
- Are the textbooks used in the program fair, balanced, and factual, or do they seem to be promoting a particular social, political, or ideological agenda?
- What is the evidence that aspiring teachers have gained the skills and knowledge they need to be effective teachers?

Ensuring a Quality Program

Both research and common sense tell us that teachers with excellent verbal skills and strong preparation in

the subjects they teach are generally highly effective in helping students learn. Many states quite properly require teachers to major in the subjects they aspire to teach.

But not every major is really a major.

Not infrequently, teacher education programs tamper with the subject area major, eliminating the senior thesis or senior laboratory project, reducing the number of courses that the B.A. major requires, or substituting less demanding courses for the ones required of other students who major in the same subject. This practice is especially prevalent in teacher certification programs for future high school teachers of mathematics and science. A related practice is to create separate sections of required core courses, like introductory mathematics, where education majors are segregated and sheltered from competition with their peers from other programs. Teachers prepared with a watered down academic curriculum are unlikely to be able to understand their subjects well enough to help students with different learning styles achieve, and they certainly will not be able to teach college preparatory or advanced placement courses adequately. The remedy:

- Require the teacher education program to present to the trustees a catalogue analysis that lists the requirements for its certification programs side-by-side with the equivalent arts and sciences majors.
- If arts and sciences departments offer courses specially designed for education majors, demand that they be eliminated. Future teachers should take math, science, and all other courses, side-by-side with their peers who are majoring in academic subjects.

Grades are the currency of education. The grade point average (GPA) is used in college admissions. If we want teachers who value academic excellence, then admission to a teacher education program must also be based on demonstration of strong academic performance. Trustees can help this happen:

- Require a minimum GPA of 3.0 *in arts and sciences courses* for a minimum of four semesters of full-time college study prior to admission to the teacher education program.

The culture of a teacher education program should be one of serious academic commitment and the pursuit of excellence. Easy grading standards threaten the quality of the program, and we know from the federal National Center for Education Statistics data that education programs show the greatest level of grade inflation in higher education.

National Data on Grade Inflation in Education Programs

	Advanced math or calculus			Science or engineering		
	Percent earned credit	Average number of credits ³	GPA ³	Percent earned credit	Average number of credits ³	GPA ³
Total	31.0	7.3	2.68	75.5	18.3	2.67

	Humanities			Social Science			Education		
	Percent earned credit	Average number of credits ³	GPA ³	Percent earned credit	Average number of credits ³	GPA ³	Percent earned credit	Average number of credits ³	GPA ³
Total	87.9	18.1	3.06	89.0	23.4	2.96	26.4	18.0	3.41

Source: *Out of the Lecture Hall and Into the Classroom: 1992-93 College Graduates and Elementary/Secondary School Teaching* (1996), National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education

Trustees can raise standards by:

- Requiring that candidates for teacher certification maintain a minimum 3.0 GPA in both their education courses and in the subject area coursework corresponding to their intended teaching fields.
- Asking for a study of grade distribution at your institution. Compare the percentages of “A” and “B” grades awarded in education courses with grades awarded in other majors and programs.
- If there is evidence of grade inflation in the teacher education program, require the president and deans to take steps to ensure a return to honest and rigorous grading.

Holding the Program Accountable

Your college or university should prepare an annual Data Book—many institutions do this through an office of institutional planning. That Data Book can be your institution’s single most important document for transparent accountability—it should report data over a five-year period so that trustees and the public can monitor changes in key institutional quality measures.

Among other information, you will want to have in the Data Book:

1. SAT or ACT scores for students enrolled in the teacher education program.
2. Average grade awarded in education courses (on a 4.0 scale).
3. Percentage of “A” and “B” grades awarded in education courses.
4. Results of teacher licensure tests (see below).

Since the Data Book should give this information for all academic programs and departments, you should compare and monitor admissions standards and grade inflation for the teacher education program with other majors and programs at your institution.

Your school's office of institutional research should collect and accurately report passing rates on teacher certification exams for all candidates who take these tests. Ever since the Higher Education Act reauthorization of 1998, which requires public disclosure of each teacher education program's passing rates, many institutions have developed methods of concealing failures. One widely used method is a deceptive reckoning of the number of test takers, which excludes those who fail—on the grounds that only after they pass the test are they considered “program completers.”

**Excerpt from State Reports 2001,
Title II of the Higher Education Act,
Regarding Teacher Assessment**

Institutions Requiring Tests

Provides a list of institutions with teacher preparation programs that require an assessment for either entry or exiting a program. In a number of states and institutions, passing required assessments has been made a condition of teacher preparation program entry or completion. As a result, every completer in these settings will have passed all required assessments by definition, and the institution will have a 100 percent pass rate. This information is important for putting the 100 percent pass rates into context.

Source: <http://www.title2.org>

Vermont Teacher Pass Rates from State Reports 2001, Title II of the Higher Education Act

Performance Assessments				
Institution	Number Tested	Number Passing	Pass Rate	Quartile Rank
Bennington College	*	*	*	*
Castleton State College	48	48	100	I
Champlain College	11	11	100	I
College of St. Joseph	18	18	100	I
Goddard College	19	19	100	I
Green Mountain College	12	12	100	I
Johnson State College	55	55	100	I
Lyndon State College	29	29	100	I
Middlebury College	21	21	100	I
Norwich University	14	14	100	I
Saint Michael's College	80	80	100	I
School for International Training	20	20	100	I
Trinity College	33	33	100	I
University of Vermont	156	156	100	I
State of Vermont	522	522	100	I
QJ -- Range, Mean	100 - 100, 100			

* An asterisk indicates less than 10 test takers.
 ** Two asterisks indicate less than 10 test takers or no test takers.

Source: <http://www.title2.org>

This shabby evasion of accountability is unfortunately quite common. Therefore, trustees need to see passing rates that include the results each time the test is administered for every candidate who attempted the teacher certification exams. Only when results are reported this way can trustees assess the strength of each cohort of students. Since teacher certification exams are generally constructed as minimal skills competency tests, trustees need to track carefully for high failure rates among test takers and seek thorough explanations when they find signs of academic incompetence. (And, as explained in the next section, trustees should press for the creation of more rigorous teacher licensure examinations.)

In addition to the passing rate, the Data Book should give the average score of your institution's teaching candidates in each cer-

tification area, along with the state average. In this way, trustees can see how the academic skills of the teachers they are training compare with those around the state.

The State Department of Education can give you copies of the information sent to candidates for teaching certification when they register for the teacher certification exams. This information should include sample questions from the tests. Are they sufficiently challenging for a graduate of your college or university who aspires to be a teacher?

Sample Teacher Licensure Test Questions, Basic Skills (Math)

7. Which of the following is largest?

- A. $\frac{1}{4}$
- B. $\frac{3}{5}$
- C. $\frac{1}{2}$
- D. $\frac{9}{20}$

8. A town planning committee must decide how to use a 115-acre piece of land. The committee sets aside 20 acres of the land for watershed protection and an additional 37.4 acres for recreation. How much of the land is set aside for watershed protection and recreation?

- A. 43.15 acres
- B. 54.6 acres
- C. 57.4 acres
- D. 60.4 acres

9. Use the graph below to answer the question that follows.



Which of the following is true at time T ?

- A. Both racer A and racer B are running.
- B. Racer A is running and racer B is resting.
- C. Racer B is running and racer A is resting.
- D. Both racer A and racer B are resting.

Source: Michigan Test for Teacher Certification, 2001-2002 Registration Bulletin

Ask a representative from the State Department of Education to convert the passing score on the different teacher certification exams into an approximate number of correct and incorrect answers. You may wish to ask a faculty committee drawn from both the teacher education program and the College of Arts and Sciences to comment on the state teacher certification exams.



Achieving the Goal

Become an Advocate for Teacher Quality

Lax state certification requirements go hand-in-hand with weak teacher education programs at colleges and universities. It will be easier to raise the bar for academic quality measures at your institution if there is a similar initiative statewide. At the same time, when you refocus teacher preparation away from seat-time inputs, repetitive pedagogical courses, and irrelevant “critical pedagogy” requirements and back to clear measures of academic excellence, you create a model for state reformers.

Here are some essential building blocks that need to be in your teacher education program:

- A required major in an arts and sciences academic area.
- Two semesters (6 credit hours) of English composition and English literature. Remedial courses must not be used to satisfy this requirement, since they do not properly belong in the course offerings of four-year institutions.
- Two semesters (6 credit hours) of college-level mathematics. Remedial courses must not be used to satisfy this requirement.
- Two semesters (6 credit hours) of natural science with required laboratory exercises.
- One semester (3 credit hours) of American history, including but not limited to study of the documents of the American Founding.

- One semester (3 credit hours) of the study of Western civilization.
- One semester (3 credit hours) of the study of a major non-Western civilization.
- One semester training in classroom management, safe schools, and student discipline.
- Live classroom teaching experience early in the teacher’s training.
- For future elementary education majors, one semester of training in phonics instruction and scientifically supported reading instruction.
- One semester (3 credit hours) of practical, non-repetitious training in key classroom skills—lesson planning, application of technology to teaching, student assessment.
- One full semester (12 semester hours) of supervised student teaching.

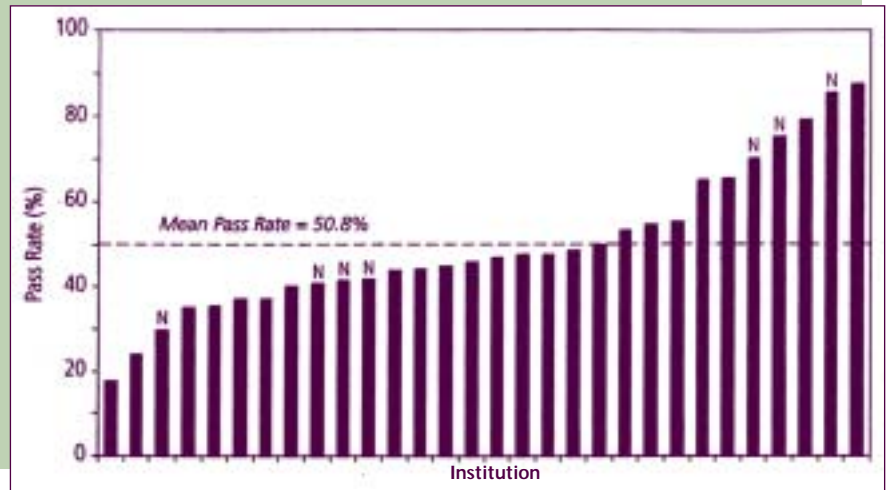
If teacher certification exams are too easy (and they are in many states), trustees have the opportunity to make this point known to the State Board of Education and the State Department of Education. Testing companies enjoy lucrative contracts with states to administer teacher certification exams, and it is in their interest to respond forthrightly to the needs of the state. Encourage your state to give the test builders clear instructions to create instruments that genuinely ensure that new teachers are proficient in the subjects they teach. The new American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence, a federally-funded project of the National Council on Teacher Quality and the Education Leaders Council, is designing new examinations. These assessments will test for college-level mastery of the candidates’ teaching fields and will give scaled scores much like the SAT exams that distinguish between good, bad, and indifferent performance.

Beware of the terms “authentic assessment” or “performance based assessment” which describe a popular initiative to replace objective tests with portfolios (compilations of miscellaneous teaching materials and student work) and peer reviews (the judgment of colleagues). “Authentic assessment” is often anything but reli-

able, and will allow the candidate multiple ways of compensating for weak academic performance. The unique role of certification tests is to ensure academic readiness and subject area competence, not particular pedagogical styles or behaviors. Trustees must help raise the bar for academic quality measures, rather than allow them to be replaced by subjective assessments.

Your state may require accreditation, but it is no substitute for trustees' quality assurance and may even be a hindrance to teacher quality reform. The largest accreditor, the National Council on Teacher Accreditation (NCATE), has been in existence since 1954, advancing a claim that it safeguards teacher excellence by ensuring that teacher education programs incorporate the best practices of pedagogical science. The reality of NCATE membership is that its schools are often advocates of constructivist pedagogies and, in some cases, even whole language rather than phonics instruction. Many have very low passing rates on their state certification exams, indicative of very weak institutional preparation in academic areas.

**National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE):
Deficient Quality Control**



Source: Massachusetts State Department of Education. Pass rates for Communications and Literacy Skills Test. All programs with at least 15 test takers.

"N" denotes NCATE accreditation.

Chart prepared by Dale Ballou and Michael Podgursky for *Better Teachers, Better Schools* (1999), Thomas B. Fordham Foundation.

Recently, NCATE dropped even the modest 2.5 GPA requirement that it previously set for admission to teacher education programs. NCATE accreditation is very expensive for its member institutions, requiring high initial compliance costs and the regular hosting of large visiting teams.

A newcomer on the teacher education accreditation scene, the Teacher Education Accrediting Council (TEAC), has a promising approach that is based on the institution's ability to show valid documentation of fulfillment of educational goals "through the audit of evidence of student achievement." TEAC, moreover, demands that a teacher show commitment to a life of intellectual engagement and study and requires "evidence that the candidates know and understand subject matters that they may never be called upon to teach, but which are still associated with, and expected of, educated persons and professional educators in particular." Trustees who are committed to the results of student learning and the development of teachers with strong academic backgrounds will opt for TEAC over NCATE. Make sure that it is the board, and not the education program, that chooses the accreditor.

A number of states and school districts are implementing value-added assessment of student learning gains in K-12 education. Using the results of annual, standardized testing of students, the positive or negative impact of each teacher on student learning becomes evident. Studies in Tennessee, which has used this system for almost a decade, show that there is no factor that we can control with greater impact on student achievement than the teacher, and that the effect of a particular teacher can be seen in a student's progress for three years. Ultimately, evaluating teachers on their effectiveness in increasing student learning is the only fair and objective system for evaluating merit. Such data can also be aggregated to show the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs in preparing successful teachers. Trustees should actively encourage their states to embrace this cutting-edge accountability measure, and ensure that their campuses are ready to use such information to evaluate and improve their teacher education program.

Models of Excellence

Great teacher preparation can be done, and it is being done. Hillsdale College, a small liberal arts college in south-central Michigan, cuts no corners in the demands it makes on future teachers. The following excerpt from its website speaks volumes about a commitment to teaching excellence.

Requirements for Admission to Hillsdale College's Teacher Education Program:

- A.
 1. Education 297 and 299
 2. English 101 and 102
 3. Classical Studies 301, 302, or 310 (or English 251, 252, 255, or 256)
 4. History 104 and 105
 5. Psychology 101
 6. IDS 100 (or equivalent computer course)
 7. Biology 102, 200, or 300
 8. Art 203 or 204; or Music 204; or Theatre 200
 9. English 307 or Speech 255
 10. Science 101; or Chemistry 101 or 303; or Physics 101 or 201
 11. Sociology 101; or Economics 105 or 202; or Political Science 100
 12. Philosophy 105 or Religion 105
 13. Mathematics 101 or higher
- B. A minimum cumulative grade point average of 3.000, or 2.700 and approval by the Education Advisory Committee. ...

Source: <http://www.hillsdale.edu/academics/TeacherEducation/certification.htm>, 2002

Observe the implications of these requirements. Aspiring teachers must have a highly-respectable academic average, largely based on liberal arts courses, before they are admitted to the teacher preparation program. They take a minimum of two semesters of English, with emphasis on Great Books and English composition, and a minimum of two semesters of college-level science, including laboratory work. They must take coursework in the fine arts, mathematics, philosophy or religion, and the social sciences. A two-semester sequence on “The Western Heritage” and “The American Heritage” is also required.

Grove City College in Pennsylvania requires an eighteen-hour Humanities Core, eight semester hours of laboratory science and six of mathematics or statistics. Its students are distinguished by high college entrance exam scores and high performance on the state’s Praxis II licensure exams.

Teacher education at liberal arts colleges has generally focused on ensuring that future teachers receive a balanced and thorough education in the arts and sciences. To that indispensable foundation for teaching effectiveness, the best programs add an educational core—courses in teaching methods plus field experience—thus creating a curriculum that most students complete in four years.

At Middlebury College, for example, the teacher education program forthrightly states that its foundation “rests on the excellence of the College’s liberal arts curriculum.” During the aspiring teacher’s student teaching semester, he or she is assigned not only a student teaching supervisor, but also a liberal arts mentor to monitor the student’s academic strength.

In order to qualify for student teaching, Middlebury College students must have a “B” or better average in their major field. That requirement ensures that only students with a strong academic background will be able to enter the teaching profession. It is very important that, for example, history teachers have a good

knowledge of history, math teachers have a good knowledge of math, and science teachers have a good knowledge of science.

Those are promising practices, but they are not enough by themselves. At any college or university, the trustees need to be vigilant to make certain that the general education requirements are rigorous and that the pedagogical requirements focus sharply on what really matters in teaching competence: scientifically-based reading methods, strong classroom management, and key classroom skills.

Large university programs have also emerged that offer outstanding academic preparation for future teachers. When Dr. Edwin J. Delattre arrived as Dean of Boston University's College of Education, he did not hesitate to establish rigorous academic requirements, even at the cost of lowering enrollments by a staggering 50%. Today, the average SAT score for teachers in training at Boston University is 1240. Dr. Delattre also chose to withdraw the College of Education from NCATE membership, deeming NCATE's policies antithetical to the program's goals. At Boston University, all students preparing to teach in K-5 classrooms must take a two-semester Great Books sequence. Discussions of educational theory develop from close reading of classic philosophical works. Candidates for the Doctorate in Education at Boston University read Plato's *Republic* and Rousseau's *Emile* in their Foundations of Education seminar. All undergraduates take a course on current education policies and read the seminal works of E.D. Hirsch on cultural literacy. And the program is deeply committed to improving urban education: it administers the nearby Chelsea School District, where many of its student teachers gain classroom experience.

The Core Knowledge Foundation, under the direction of E.D. Hirsch, Jr., provides superb tools for teacher education. The Foundation has recently developed a teacher-education blueprint consisting of a set of

detailed course outlines for 18 courses on subjects that are at the heart of the K-8 curriculum, including math, biology, history, composition and grammar, music, geography, and the teaching of reading.

Proactive trustees can advocate the adoption of this teacher education curriculum at their institutions, or use it as a standard against which to measure their existing programs.

The Core Knowledge outlines have been drawn up by experts and are designed to be both academically challenging and useful for aspiring teachers. The art history outline, for example, was written by current National Endowment for the Humanities chairman Bruce Cole and introduces students to great works of art from the prehistoric era to the modern day. The course on the teaching of reading was laid out by the noted reading expert Louisa Moats and is based on the latest research findings in this all-important field. The math course was prepared by Professor David Klein to help future teachers develop a deep understanding of number sense, basic geometry, and other topics essential for K-8 math education.

The Core Knowledge materials are available, free of cost, on the foundation's website, www.coreknowledge.org, under "Resources." They are also on a CD-ROM entitled *What Elementary Teachers Need to Know: College Course Outlines for Teacher Preparation* (2002). The Core Knowledge Foundation is actively seeking colleges and universities that would be interested in implementing a teacher education program based at least partly on these materials. This is a particularly favorable time for trustees to become involved in curricular review and reform.

Trustees have the opportunity to widen the dialogue concerning effective teacher preparation. The "way it is done" is not the same as the "way it should be done."

A Brief Action Plan

- *Make teacher preparation a front-burner issue.* Be certain that the board of trustees has an academic affairs committee or a special task force to ensure periodic trustee review of your teacher education program.
- *Consult experts* who can define the questions you need to ask and the documents you will need for your review. The American Council of Trustees and Alumni in collaboration with the National Council on Teacher Quality can provide this service or refer you to specialists from around the country.
- *Become informed.* Acquaint yourself with the world of teacher education. Review the bibliography at the end of this guide. Invite experts on teacher quality reform to meet with the board. Talk to teachers and principals at public, private, and charter schools. Invite representatives from the education program to address the trustees and visit teacher preparation classes.
- *Read the course descriptions for the teacher education program* at your institution. Read the catalogue descriptions as well as course syllabi, which are often posted on the web. Note the number and nature of the required courses.
- *Obtain the data.* Ask the board to pass a resolution to authorize and implement an annual Data Book with key indicators of academic quality and test results from every administration of teacher licensure examinations included in the reporting requirements.
- *Ask experts for a program review.* Establish a visiting committee that includes noted education reformers to review your teacher education program and make suggestions. For a modest fee, ACTA will have experts review the quality of the teacher education curriculum.

- *Keep a checklist.* The sample checklist that follows will facilitate a quick review of your institution's teacher education program.

Trustee's Checklist for Better Teacher Preparation

- Arts and Sciences Major (not Education Major) in subject to be taught.
- Same course requirements in subject-area major for teaching candidates as for Baccalaureate Degree candidates.
- Termination of General Education courses that are designed or reserved for Education students.
- High (3.0 or above) GPA requirement for entrance to teacher education program—based on a minimum of four semesters of college level work.
- High (3.0 or above) GPA requirement in subject area to be taught to maintain enrollment in the teacher education program.
- High first-time passing rate on state certification examinations.
- Minimum 12 weeks of supervised student teaching.
- Degree program can be fully completed within four-year Baccalaureate Degree (subject to applicable state laws).
- Master's Degree programs for teachers only in specific academic subject areas (mathematics, English, biology, etc.) or special pedagogical skills (reading disorders, special education, education technology, etc.).
- Teacher education program cooperates fully with state and federal alternative certification initiatives.
- Standing trustee teacher education oversight committee.



In Summary: Trustees and the Teacher Quality Challenge

Trustees have the clear power to challenge the culture of low expectations. Trustees bring the aspirations of a wider community to the governance of higher education. They bring the common sense of professions that need competent and reliable staff, they bring the experience of industries that cannot and do not tolerate excuses, and they represent the right of every citizen to expect results from every school in America. Trustees can be the most effective of all reformers.

Within this nation's immediate grasp is a public school system staffed by qualified teachers who model in their lives and work the intellect and character we wish for our children. Teacher quality is the foundation for educational excellence without which every school funding increase, every new textbook, and every new building is in vain. It is the worthiest of tasks for trustees.

Some Further Reading

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For Additional Information

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