

OUTCOMES AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN TEACHER EDUCATION: AN OPPORTUNE TIME FOR PROGRESS

Edward Crowe with Michael Allen and Charles Coble

Better-prepared teachers and greatly improved teacher preparation programs are the recipe to enhance academic outcomes for America's K-12 students. Efforts to accelerate the pace of improvement in teacher preparation have been underway since at least 1998 when Congress established the Title II teacher quality program and the federal "report card" on preparation program quality. Despite significant expenditures of public and private funds on teacher quality initiatives, however, few observers have detected more than modest overall gains in program or graduate quality.

Higher education in general does not appear to be moving with a sense of urgency to improve teacher preparation, and new alternative providers arrive on the scene almost every day – some promising and others not. In response, in a climate where public confidence in teacher education is quite low, policy makers are seeking to ratchet up accountability.

- States and others are working for the first time to place meaningful emphasis on preparation program outcomes as the best measures of program quality. This past December, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) called for a multi-state effort to develop "innovative licensure assessments" and for state program approval standards that include evidence about teacher impact on student achievement.
- The Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) – the new national accrediting body for teacher education programs – recently published draft accreditation standards proposing more rigorous standards from entry to exit, including several outcome measures discussed in this commentary
- A national review of preparation program quality by the National Council on Teacher Quality will be unveiled later this summer.
- And new federal rules for teacher education accountability are in the works from Secretary Duncan after negotiations with various professional organizations broke down last year over which performance measures should be used.

In the weeks and months to come, these efforts should be judged by whether improved K-12 student outcomes and more successful schools are their primary aims. Existing quality control efforts such as accreditation and current state oversight have protected weak programs and let too many underprepared teachers into the classroom. To improve the quality of preparation programs so that they reliably produce teachers who can achieve results in the classroom is an imperative for our nation. These policy initiatives should be seen as healthy pressure points that will contribute to the long-term survival of quality teacher preparation in higher education.

Effective accountability and quality control for the preparation of teachers must include measures of K-12 classroom performance by program graduates; indicators of academic achievement by K-12 students taught by program graduates; high quality assessments of teacher content and pedagogical knowledge; and indications that programs are meeting the staffing needs of schools in their state. In light of the Common Core State Standards and with increasing teacher mobility between states, it is past time for agreement among *all* states on the quality standards that teacher education will be judged on. With the renewed focus on teacher preparation across the country, this is an opportune time for CAEP and others to influence changes in the states.

To many people, *the most important preparation program outcome is teacher effectiveness—the extent to which program graduates help their K-12 students to learn*. High quality instruction is the main in-school driver for student achievement, yet only a few states assess teacher effectiveness in this way. Even so, at least 20 states are headed in this direction through Race to the Top and other initiatives. Whether or not university faculty and administrators support this direction, analyses and judgments will be made about their programs based on the performance of program graduates.

The classroom teaching performance of program graduates is a key outcome that programs, accreditors, and states ought to use as a quality measure. No single measure tells us everything about a program or its graduates, and so we think classroom teaching performance is a second key outcome measure. In fact there are two performance-related measures here: the teaching performance of candidates *during* the program and their teaching quality as graduates. As the Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) project has reported, a system of quality classroom observation must support fair judgments based on reliable and valid findings for

individual teachers and for groups of teachers. Currently, only a few classroom protocols used by teacher education programs or in schools meet standards of rigor.

Production of new teachers in high demand fields is highly relevant to the needs of schools and their students. For this reason program accountability and accreditation should judge how well each program contributes effective teachers for shortage fields and high need schools. Given chronic overproduction of new teachers by some programs, *states ought to enact policies that cap the number of new teacher licenses granted in low demand areas like elementary education and create more incentives that attract students into high demand fields like mathematics and the physical sciences.*

Preparation program accreditation and accountability must take account of the content knowledge and professional knowledge of teacher candidates and program graduates. Praxis and similar tests have been used by states for many years, but few outside (or inside) the profession see them as credible indicators of teacher knowledge or skills. According to the National Research Council, these tests are not designed to “predict the degree of teaching success a beginning teacher will demonstrate.” And the US Department of Education says that 97% of all test-takers in the United States get passing scores on current teacher tests.

CAEP’s draft standards document calls for 80% teacher test pass scores for all program graduates as a quality indicator. They also seek common passing cut-off scores in all states without saying where the cut-off should be. *We think these cut-off scores should be set so that candidates would have to score in the top third of all test-takers to enter the profession.* Common passing scores at this level can be accomplished now through state action even before new teacher tests are developed and put in place.

This reform should be the first step towards wholesale change in teacher testing. CAEP, the state chiefs, and Secretary Duncan ought to lean on the experience of other professions when it comes to tests of content knowledge and professional knowledge. *Nursing, accountancy, engineering, and medicine have uniform state accountability requirements for professional education programs and for their graduates.* Even with state-based licensing processes these policies have been implemented nationwide, without undermining professional autonomy, faculty academic freedom, or the principles of federalism—three of the red herrings raised against national policies by many teacher educators.

While outcomes and measures described in this piece would take some time to realize fully, effective policy and a solid teacher quality pipeline will be served best through a small set of outcomes measured transparently, reported openly, and employed for (and by) every program in every state. Given where teacher education now is as a field, this may strike many as a long-distant dream rather than a realistic scenario. Nonetheless, current opportunities and pressures for reform can be leveraged to improve preparation program quality, strengthen the ability of program graduates to be effective teachers, and continue the difficult work of raising the status of teaching and teacher preparation in the United States. Without ambitious goals and a sense of urgency, our children will wait another generation before they all have the teachers they need and deserve.

[Note on the authors: Michael Allen is a Washington-based education consultant; Charles Coble is senior adviser to the SMTI initiative of the Association of Public Land Grant Universities (APLU); Edward Crowe is senior adviser to the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation. The three authors are partners in Teacher Preparation Analytics LLC; they co-authored “Outcomes, Measures, and Data Systems: A Paper Prepared for the CAEP Commission on Standards and Performance Reporting” for the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation]