

ED422267 1998-08-00 The Education and Certification of History Teachers: Trends, Problems, and Recommendations. ERIC Digest.

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ERIC Identifier: ED422267

Publication Date: 1998-08-00

Author:

Source: National Council for History Education Inc. Westlake OH., ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education Bloomington IN.

The Education and Certification of History

Teachers: Trends, Problems, and Recommendations. ERIC Digest.

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History teachers who know their subject matter well are indispensable to schools striving to hold students to higher academic standards. This is a major concern for teacher education in history, according to a recent national conference of teacher educators, academic historians, K-12 classroom history teachers, and members of state and local governing boards.

The major theme of the conference was that if, according to the standards-based strategy for democratic school reform, all students in every school are to be offered an equally solid and engaging study of history, then all teachers need equally rigorous preparation to teach them. The problems treated at the conference were how to explore the conditions under which subject matter mastery can be nurtured among history teachers, and how to determine the changes needed to bring about and sustain those conditions.

Suggested solutions pertained to better connections between history and education college faculty and the university and local schools. A six-part action plan was developed that centered on action by and for:

- * teachers;
- * education school faculty members and deans;
- * university historians and department chairs;
- * local school administrators and school committees/board members;
- * representatives of state departments of education; and
- * members of state education and university governing boards.

TEACHERS

Conferees recommended that prospective teachers of history in middle and high school should have a college major organized around main topics and significant questions in United States history, the history of Western civilization and of the world, and related studies in civics, geography, philosophy, literature, and the arts.

A further recommendation went beyond undergraduate preparation to the sphere of

continuing education for practicing teachers; no matter how well prepared as undergraduates, teachers have a responsibility to themselves and to their students to continue their studies, both in state and local programs for professional development and on their own.

Moreover, the thousands of history and social studies teachers now in classrooms whose college preparation in history is weak must undertake intensive professional development, including summer institutes, to deepen their knowledge and pleasure in teaching history.

COLLEGES OF EDUCATION

Conferees recommended that college of education faculty be given the authority to reduce the required number of generic methods courses in order to offer more courses taught by teams of subject scholars and experienced teachers in the field. Furthermore, participants recommended that education faculties, together with colleagues from history departments, should redesign the undergraduate experience of prospective teachers to achieve a better balance between education courses and subject matter courses in history.

University administrators and trustees need to revise policies that make it difficult for education faculty members to mend the "jagged disconnect" between subject matter and pedagogy by joining colleagues in history departments in merged courses, doing student-teacher mentoring with historians and master teachers, and working with historians on professional development for teachers at neighboring schools, preferably at school sites.

UNIVERSITY HISTORIANS

These points were made by and to university historians and department chairs. Historians must press university administrators and trustees to establish sustainable personnel policies that end the disincentives for history faculty members to work with colleagues in other departments to educate and mentor prospective teachers. In addition, history faculties must review the character and requirements of their major and minor programs (with advice from graduates who have become classroom teachers). General education requirements for the freshman and sophomore years did not escape scrutiny; conferees recommended that historians must join their colleagues in the arts and sciences to refocus general education on basic core courses, including courses in United States history, Western civilization, and world history for all students. Teachers with bachelors' degrees, particularly those working in middle and high school, should not have last studied topics in world history as long ago as grade 9 or 10. Some specific recommendations were that history faculties must be authorized to:

- * reduce the number of highly specialized courses for undergraduates;

- * provide more upper-level, broad-based courses in major eras of United States history, the history of Western civilization, and of the world;
- * model the use of primary sources and student inquiry in their own courses; and
- * forge regular working relationships with history teachers in neighboring communities.

STATE DEPARTMENTS OF EDUCATION

Conferees urged state departments of education to redesign teacher licensure and recertification examinations to test subject mastery. The examinations should be formidable; that is, they should be comparable to exemplary final examinations at the university level and should include evaluation of writing and speaking ability. State departments of education must consistently devote their priorities, review of regulations, and technical assistance to support steady, long-term local implementation of the state academic standards, which pertain to the core subjects, including history, and how to teach them.

In regard to professional development in history, state departments need to collaborate with local school districts and institutions of higher education to set criteria for approval of professional development providers of state or locally funded programs for classroom teachers in academic subjects. Such criteria should include the providers' academic qualifications and experience and the relevance of proposed programs to the curricular goals of states and localities.

LOCAL SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS AND SCHOOL BOARDS

To the extent that state boards and departments of education establish common curricular requirements, content standards, and performance benchmarks for statewide assessment of student achievement, state support and technical assistance must be available to local districts for a) implementing new curricula and courses in history; b) refreshing and extending teacher content knowledge in history; and c) instructing and re-integrating teachers who are displaced by curricular changes.

School districts should establish regular procedures and criteria for evaluating teacher applicants who will be teaching history courses, including exploration of academic records and references for the history courses taken in undergraduate programs and interviews dealing with candidates' scholarly interests in the various areas of historical knowledge.

GOVERNING BOARDS

Members of state education and university governing boards must take responsibility for

insuring the implementation of the above changes, focusing on those that state and local officers and university presidents and deans for many reasons often cannot make on their own. Vital among these necessary changes are stricter college admissions requirements, specific core requirements for the general education of freshmen and sophomores, reformed department majors, broader doctoral programs to prepare college teachers, and revised incentives for faculties of education and arts and sciences.

Lay board members should engage and educate the media and inform the public and its elected officials on questions fundamental to the quality and equality of educational opportunities.

CONCLUSIONS

The primary goal of all six spheres that were identified as fundamental in the undergraduate and continuing education of teachers is competence, together with persistence in the face of a number of likely defeats. While each "sphere of influence" and action was identified separately, conference participants noted that the spheres overlapped and interacted at almost every turn; therefore, each group is urged to consider the recommendations for all of the groups, not only their own. While governing boards may be held accountable for the quality of their institutions, historians should recognize that the failure of any one sector is enough to cause the failure of all.

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This publication was prepared with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under contract RR93002014. The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of OERI or ED.

For further information, contact Elaine Wrisley Reed, Executive Director, National Council for History Education, at 26915 Westwood Road, Suite B-2, Westlake, Ohio 44145 or phone (440) 835-1776. The National Council for History Education convened the conference "Preparing Knowledgeable and Effective History Teachers" in partnership with the University of Wisconsin System Board of Regents with major funding from The Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation.

Title: The Education and Certification of History Teachers: Trends, Problems, and Recommendations. ERIC Digest.

Document Type: Information Analyses---ERIC Information Analysis Products (IAPs) (071); Information Analyses---ERIC Digests (Selected) in Full Text (073);

Available From: ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education, 2805 East Tenth Street, Suite 120, Bloomington, IN, 47408, phone: 812-855-3838; toll-free phone: 800-266-3815.

Descriptors: Academic Standards, College Faculty, College School Cooperation, Elementary Secondary Education, Higher Education, History Instruction, National Standards, Non Western Civilization, State Departments of Education, State Standards, Teacher Education Programs, Teacher Improvement, United States History, World History

Identifiers: ERIC Digests

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