Finding the Teachers We Need

by Frederick M. Hess, Andrew J. Rotherham, and Kate Walsh

In recent years, the debate over teacher quality and preparation has gained new urgency. Competing groups of partisans have dominated this debate: one seemingly eager to assail the nation's education schools and to suggest that there is an insufficiently defined body of professional teaching knowledge, the other committed to advancing professionalism by ensuring that all teachers are prepared and licensed through a prescribed and formal training program. Experts even disagree about what constitutes a qualified teacher, how well today's preparation programs are training teachers, whether we can best improve teaching through new regulations or by relaxing the old ones, and whether teaching leans heavily on innate skill or is primarily a matter of training and experience. The conflict is suffusing research, confusing policymakers, and stifling potentially promising reforms.

Yet while policymakers and reformers tend to focus on these and other disagreements, even those who approach the teacher quality challenge from very different directions agree widely on at least four fundamental points. First, the current system is simply not providing enough of the quality teachers we need. Second, current policies are particularly failing to provide the teachers we need in the troubled, high-poverty school districts that need them most. Third, there is concern that teacher preparation programs are not teaching important skills or effectively weeding out unsuitable candidates.

Finally, there is little prospect that, left to their own devices, either schools of education or school districts will be willing or able to correct these problems anytime soon. This practical challenge has been given a new urgency for public officials and practitioners who are also expected to find a way to comply with the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) "qualified teacher" mandate by 2006.

Rethinking the Status Quo

While these points of agreement don't necessarily provide a clear road map for reform, together they do suggest the need for an ambitious rethinking of the status quo. Governors and legislators will not meet the teacher quality challenge by fine-tuning current arrangements or by pushing more funding into teacher preparation or professional development. More creative and far-reaching solutions are required.

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A Qualified Teacher in Every Classroom? Appraising Old Answers and New Ideas, edited by Frederick M. Hess, Andrew J. Rotherham, and Kate Walsh and published by Harvard Education Press, expands on the ideas presented in this Policy Perspectives paper. *A Qualified Teacher in Every Classroom?* is available at booksellers nationwide and at http://gseweb.harvard.edu/%7Ehepg/qualifiedteacher.html

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Teachers are the key to making schools work. On this point there is agreement across the political spectrum — among educators, researchers, and policymakers. The teacher quality challenge is so daunting because not enough schools have the teachers they need. Though schools were once able to count on women as a captive labor pool, this is no longer the case with the result that the best and brightest are shunning the teaching profession; a female in the top decile of her high school class is less than one fifth as likely to enter teaching in 1992 versus 1964.[1] Given that 70 percent of all teachers are still women, this decline has real implications for the profession. Undergraduate education majors typically have lower SAT scores than other students who hold other kinds of majors and who consider teaching, and those who leave the profession in their first few years have higher scores than those who remain in teaching.[2]

Teacher quality is in particular a problem in terms of teachers' subject matter expertise. American schools commonly assign teachers to subjects lacking accepted academic credentials. Some estimates find that 44 percent of middle school students take at least one class with a teacher who doesn't have even a minor in the subject being taught.[3] Almost a quarter of secondary school students take at least one class with a teacher who doesn't have even a college minor in the subject, a figure that climbs to 32 percent in high-poverty schools. The problem is compounded because we need to hire about 200,000 new teachers a year just to fill the nation's classrooms, and new federal policies are raising the bar for teacher qualifications.[4]

In other words, a confluence of events means that policymakers must take bold steps to meet this challenge. The needs are simply too great to rely on boutique efforts or changes at the margins.

This paper summarizes the contents of our recently published book, *A Qualified Teacher in Every Classroom? Appraising Old Answers and New Ideas* (Harvard Education Press, 2004). The book offers a comprehensive look at the teacher quality debate. Its 10 chapters consider the history and politics of teacher licensure, examine the data on teacher licensure and hiring, present new data regarding the preparation and training in schools and colleges of education, and sketch four alternative models for meeting the teacher quality challenge. The book is intended as an introduction and overview to the debates over teacher preparation and licensure, providing practitioners, policymakers, and parents with the background they need to weigh competing calls for reform.

Enter NCLB

The practical challenges of school staffing were codified into a statutory challenge by the sweeping federal NCLB legislation that was signed into law by President George W. Bush in January 2002. NCLB requires states to close the teacher quality gaps between high- and low-poverty schools and ensure that all teachers are "highly qualified" by 2005-06. However, while qualified teachers have long been identified based upon whether they had completed a program at one of the nation's 1,300-plus teacher preparation programs, NCLB was intentionally vague on this point. Instead, the law requires subject matter expertise for middle and high school

teachers and appropriate coursework for elementary school teachers. The law leaves it to states to decide what, beyond these core requirements, constitutes certification and, if the states wish, to choose to use a new metric for determining who is a qualified teacher.

NCLB forces states to confront the long-lamented fact that substantial numbers of their teachers, especially in urban schools, are neither licensed nor qualified to teach by almost any definition. Governors and state legislators are facing the question of how to find qualified teachers for these classrooms.

Our goal in producing *A Qualified Teacher in Every Classroom?* was to move beyond impassioned rhetoric by identifying fresh research on key elements of the teacher quality challenge and by posing "next-generation" models of reform. While the supply of quality teachers is certainly influenced by teacher salaries and school working environments, it is also shaped directly by state policies regarding teacher certification and by the quality of college and university teacher training programs. Yet despite the magnitude of this problem, promising innovations remain the exception, while traditional practices attract many heated critiques and defenses but little rigorous scrutiny.

The Teacher Quality Debate

From the early 20th century until the 1980s, the teacher quality debate was largely shaped by two factors, a captive labor market for teachers and the lack of consensus about what constituted good teaching and what characteristics teachers should have.[5]

The teaching profession was able to draw heavily upon a captive labor force of talented women and African Americans for whom there were few other professional avenues available. This situation ensured a reasonably steady supply of women and minorities enrolling in local teacher preparation programs and accepting jobs in schools reasonably close to where they were trained. In addition, these teachers tended to remain in those schools for their entire career.

At the same time there was little agreement about what teachers were supposed to teach and no systematic evaluation of student performance. Given an absence of clear standards, teachers often were expected to use their judgment about what to teach. Teachers working in such an environment likely benefited from a training program that exposed them to professional norms. Yet as long as schools did not collect and study data on student performance, it was not possible to systematically evaluate teacher performance once teachers were in the schools or to infer what characteristics made some teachers more effective than others.

In this environment, state policymakers focused heavily on specifying procedures and bureaucratic routines, relying on licensure to ensure that truly weak teachers did not enter the profession. Little attention was paid to rethinking how to train or license teachers and whether the existing system was adequate.

During the 1980s, the context of the teacher quality challenge changed. A series of high-profile state reform efforts were triggered by the 1983 *A Nation at Risk* report calling attention to problems in America's schools. Governors seeking to upgrade the teaching force confronted a grave challenge. By the mid-1970s, the captive labor pool of women and African Americans had dissipated as college graduates found that race or gender no longer prohibited them from entering medicine, law, engineering, or other professional fields. Meanwhile, rising enrollment and efforts to shrink class size had increased the size of the teacher workforce by about 25 percent between 1970 and the mid-1980s.

Other education reforms of the 1980s created opportunities to rethink the traditional approach to teacher quality. A "standards movement" took shape in which states developed and implemented clear guidelines regarding the content that students were expected to learn. In the early 1990s, an accompanying "accountability" movement got its start in states like Texas, Massachusetts, and Virginia, as states devised assessments intended to make sure that students were mastering the material in the standards.

Concerns about teacher quality and the changing environment gave birth to two distinct approaches to improving teacher quality. The teacher educators and schools of education viewed concerns about teacher quality as reflecting a need to "professionalize" the profession. The clearest statement of this philosophy was provided by the National Council on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF) in its 1996 manifesto, *What Matters Most? Teaching for America's Future.* NCTAF called on states and schools of education to standardize their programs, extend the number of years teaching candidates studied, better integrate practice teaching with coursework, and take steps to provide more money and support for the teaching profession. An important institutional byproduct of this reform effort was the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), a body that would establish standards for teaching excellence and then create a process for determining whether veteran teachers met the standards. The National Board received strong federal support

with grants totaling $70 million over 12 years. Also during the 1990s, the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) emerged from its formerly sleepy profile to shape the nation's teacher preparation institutions. Within 10 years, NCATE persuaded nearly 600 schools of education and, even more significantly, the state departments of education that must approve their programs of the critical importance of the NCATE accreditation process.[6]

Alternative Certification

A much smaller group of reformers, though, worried that the time and cost of the preparation recommended in the NCTAF proposals would deter potentially effective teachers from entering the profession, particularly in urban communities, and would not appreciably improve the quality of teaching. Endorsing efforts to make it easier for nontraditional teachers to be considered for teaching positions, these reformers promoted "alternative certification" programs that would allow candidates to enter classrooms without completing the standard coursework and preparation programs. The first states to aggressively use such "alternative" preparation programs were New Jersey, California, and Texas, which did so in the mid-1980s.

Such efforts, however, did not start to receive significant national notice until a young Princeton graduate named Wendy Kopp launched Teach For America (TFA) in 1990. TFA sought to entice graduates from elite colleges to take teaching jobs in troubled urban school systems after completing only an intensive summer preparatory "boot camp." Though the program was met with skepticism and heated criticism from the teacher preparation community, it received enthusiastic acceptance from the business community and school districts desperate for teachers. Soon it was placing hundreds of teachers a year.

By 2003, both TFA and a spin-off program, The New Teacher Project (TNTP), were annually swamped with applicants. In 2003, TFA had about 18,000 applicants — the vast majority from students from top universities — for fewer than 2,000 spots. In fact, in 2002, 25 percent of the Yale graduating class applied to TFA.

During the 1990s the scope of alternative certification programs grew and the debate over their desirability intensified. By 2000, about one sixth of Texas teachers, one fifth of New Jersey teachers, and 10 percent of California teachers were entering the profession through alternate routes. Forty-five states had enacted alternative licensure routes, and the federal government had provided funds to develop, study, and support these efforts.[7] Still, alternative routes often existed only on paper, and teachers trained in alternative settings still constituted only a small minority of teachers entering the profession each year.

The debate gained more national attention in 1999 when the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation released a manifesto co-authored by Chester Finn, a noted education critic and former U.S. Assistant Secretary of Education.[8] The Fordham manifesto essentially called for the abolition of certification. The critique of the efficacy of current licensure schemes gained bipartisan traction in 2001 when the Progressive Policy Institute, a moderate Democratic think tank with strong ties to the administration of former president William J. Clinton, released a widely discussed critique of licensure. The Institute called for overhauling licensure so that it focused on expertise in the subjects teachers would teach while leaving most decisions about hiring and training up to local school districts and schools.[9]

Just as the push for enhanced licensure had earlier yielded the National Board, so the push for competitive certification led to the creation of the American Board for the Certification of Teaching Excellence (American Board). Seeking to give institutional form to the competitive certification philosophy, the American Board was launched in early 2001 to create a series of tests in content knowledge and professional teaching skills that could testify to a teacher's competence in lieu of traditional teacher preparation. With support from the U.S. Department of Education and $40 million in grants to date, the American Board worked to develop the necessary tests. In 2003, Pennsylvania became the first state to accept passage of the American Board exam as a permissible route to teacher licensure.

Still, major disagreements remained about how to design licensure policy and who should be able to seek a teaching job. This dispute was marked by an equally vigorous disagreement focusing on what the research showed about various teacher preparation alternatives.

Ambiguous Evidence

Proponents of prescribed teacher licensure, most notably Stanford University professor Linda Darling-Hammond, had long argued that a preponderance of evidence clearly showed that certified teachers were more effective than their non-certified peers. Citing an extensive list of studies — ranging from sophisticated analyses to unpublished dissertations and case studies of the practices of a few teachers — into the late 1990s, Darling-Hammond argued that the research definitively showed the benefits of conventional licensure.[10]

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The emergence of systematic student achievement data and the collection of more extensive data sets on student outcomes have made it possible for scholars to consider the evidence even more thoroughly. Economists Dale Ballou, Michael Podgursky, Andrew Wayne, Peter Youngs, Dan Goldhaber, and Dominic Brewer authored various analyses between 1995 and 2003 that found no evidence that teacher preparation coursework or a teaching license made a consistent difference in student performance.[11] In 2001, the Maryland-based Abell Foundation published an extensive analysis that challenged the value and credibility of the list of the studies that Darling-Hammond had long cited in support of traditional teacher preparation.[12] A new body of scholarship on teaching and teachers also emerged. Hoover Institution scholar Margaret Raymond conducted a study of Teach For America recruits in Houston that found that its new teachers appeared to perform at least as well as other teachers there in terms of student achievement outcomes, a study subsequently borne out by a randomized Mathematica study of TFA teachers and other teachers.[13] At the same time, University of Pennsylvania education professor Richard Ingersoll produced influential research suggesting that the teacher shortage was largely the result of the rate at which teachers left the profession early in their careers. The research suggested that teachers who had completed preparation programs were less likely to leave the profession than their peers, offering a new potential justification to proponents of traditional licensure.[14]

The continuing uncertainty over the value of teacher licensure or preparation was powerfully crystallized in 2003 when the Education Commission of the States (ECS), a nonpartisan partnership of governors and educators, released a report entitled, *What Does Research Say About How to Prepare Quality Teachers?* After originally considering more than 500 scholarly studies of teacher preparation conducted over 20 years, the ECS report found just 92 studies that met the basic standard of reaching their conclusions on the basis of "systematic observation rather than … opinion."[15]

After considering eight questions relating to licensure, the report concluded that the research evidence was nonexistent or inconclusive in regards to seven. Perhaps the most significant finding was that little evidence showed that pedagogical coursework improved teacher effectiveness. The report did, however, conclude that reliable evidence supported the intuitive notion that teachers with more content knowledge are more effective in the classroom.

In fact, the only teacher quality traits that all researchers seem to agree on are teachers' knowledge of the content they will teach and their verbal ability. The fact that honest scholars differ as to what we know, after decades of investment and research, is one of the great obstacles to policymakers and practitioners trying to meet the teacher quality challenge.

A Research Sampler

In compiling our volume, *A Qualified Teacher in Every Classroom?* we took our inspiration from the too many conversations we have had with frustrated state, local, and federal officials seeking effective strategies for addressing the teacher quality challenge. Amid the broader changes that have swept education in recent years, policymakers and practitioners have had their hands full trying to juggle practical and political challenges. They have had little time to reflect more deeply on the landscape, on new questions that need to be asked, or on broad models of structural reform.

Accordingly, we assembled a team of leading thinkers and scholars on teacher quality to provide a broad assessment of where we are and to pose a new agenda for research and reform. We did not attempt to tackle every facet of the quality teacher challenge. Rather, we focused on the question of getting qualified teachers into the schools — how we should decide who to hire and who to keep out. Other issues related to teacher performance and retention such as teacher pay, mentoring and induction, and contractual requirements are critical, but we focused on

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what seems to us a natural starting point and one where much policy activity has been concentrated.

The research we examined falls into three distinct categories. The first assesses the political, policy, and research landscape of teacher quality. The second poses new questions that can help extend the research beyond the long-running debate over the qualifications of licensed teachers and can help us think more systematically about teacher preparation and teacher hiring. Finally, we propose new models for how states might seek to ensure teacher quality.

What We Know

Some of our authors offer a careful assessment of where matters stand in the teacher quality debate. Andrew J. Rotherham and Sara Mead, both from the 21st Century Schools Project at the Progressive Policy Institute, for example, assess the history and status of teacher quality efforts in the states and the politics of policymaking in this area. Pointing to the entrenched interests in play, they conclude that "powerful teacher professionalism interest groups, institutions of higher education, and teachers unions influence state-level policy actors to thwart change, as does an institutional structure that is not conducive to changes outside the existing policy and political framework." Reform will be difficult because "those seeking reform outside the existing framework are a disparate group organizationally and ideologically…. Not surprisingly, when a disorganized and fractured movement seeks changes resisted by an organized and focused movement, those changes face long odds."

Heidi Ramirez, a U.S. Department of Education official in the Clinton administration, shifts the focus to the federal role, explaining the minimal role that the federal government traditionally played in the issue of teacher quality. This role began to change in the 1950s with the National Defense Education Act (1958) and continued with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, the Higher Education Act of 1965, and the Education Professions Development Act of 1967. Ramirez assesses the radically enhanced role it is playing as a result of the Higher Education Act of 1998 and of NCLB. She notes that "the effectiveness of these new teacher-quality laws will rely on the honesty and commitment of states, districts, and IHEs [institutions of higher education], and the willingness of the U.S. Department of Education to hold feet to the fire when parties fail to comply with the laws and provide necessary supports when they struggle to meet federal standards." Congress, she points out, "will need to fight the urge to lower standards and pressures for accountability to placate dissatisfied constituent institutions." In other words, real reform will occur only when the forces of inertia are overcome.

Researcher Dan Goldhaber of the University of Washington and the Urban Institute tells us about the benefits of teacher licensure, the track record of alternatively certified candidates, and what principles ought to guide researchers now able to use newly available data on student performance to analyze teacher performance in more systematic and sophisticated ways than were previously possible. Goldhaber frames the debate by asking a number of fundamental questions: "1) What essential preparation and skills should individuals have before entering the classroom, and how are these skills acquired? 2) Do school systems make good hiring decisions when given more freedom to make them? 3) How do licensure requirements, and in particular the existence of alternative licensure, affect the teacher applicant pool?" Essentially, Goldhaber outlines a research agenda because, he concludes, "Studying the ramifications of traditional and alternative licensure policies is difficult because few existing datasets can support methodologically rigorous research on this issue." Put simply, we don't yet know the answers to these questions, but the impending wave of teacher retirements makes it crucial that we ask them — and begin searching for answers.

New Questions

The second section of *A Qualified Teacher in Every Classroom?* moves beyond the traditional debates about teacher licensure, pro or con, and asks more nuanced questions about what teacher preparation does and how prepared teachers wind up taking jobs in schools. The traditional approach to teacher licensure rests on the four assumptions noted earlier about how we can ensure a qualified teacher workforce: that preparation programs provide teachers with essential knowledge and skills, keep unsuitable individuals from entering the profession, do not deter too many quality candidates from entering the profession, and provide an effective pipeline for getting teachers into schools.

David Leal of the University of Texas at Austin undertakes the first systematic attempt to determine how effectively teacher preparation programs are preventing unsuitable candidates from entering training or are weeding them out in the course of preparation. Leal's data are derived from surveys mailed to 275 undergraduate and 275 graduate departments of education. In these surveys, respondents answered questions about standards for admission to their programs, characteristics of students, and student teaching experiences. He notes, for example, that among the respondents, 95 percent of undergraduate students who begin their student teaching experience complete it successfully — that is, they are not "weeded out" on the basis of ineffective teaching; only one school reported a pass rate below 90 percent. The figure for graduate schools of education was 96 percent, with only six reporting a pass rate below 95 percent. These figures lead to one of two conclusions: Either schools of education are doing an effective job of admitting and preparing students so that by the time they begin student teaching, few if any need to be weeded out; or schools of education are simply deferring the task of weeding out ineffective teachers to principals and school systems.

David Steiner, former chair of the Education Policy Department at Boston University's School of Education, conducts the first systematic inquiry into the materials being taught in teacher preparation courses in order to assess how focused these programs are on teaching professional skills and knowledge and in doing so in an intellectually balanced fashion. He examines course syllabi from colleges of education, and he reaches a conclusion that is almost chilling in its implications: "Based on our sampling of the coursework requirements in some of the country's most highly regarded schools of education, we are not convinced that elite education schools are doing an adequate job of conveying fundamental, broad-based knowledge and skills to prospective teachers." Steiner goes on to assert that "faculty at most of these schools are often trying to teach a particular ideology — that traditional knowledge is repressive by its very nature — without directing their students to any substantial readings that question the educational implications of this view."

Susanna Loeb, James Wyckoff, and colleagues use new data on New York teachers to examine how teacher preparation graduates actually wind up making their way into the schools and what it means for efforts to promote teacher quality. They conclude with three recommendations for policymakers: 1) In looking to solve specific problems such as shortages of math teachers, across-the-board salary increases are not the answer because they're expensive and don't solve the problem at hand; 2) salary is not the sole factor in recruitment and hiring; other factors can help school districts recruit and retain high-quality teachers; and 3) caution is warranted in imposing new teacher-preparation and teacher-qualification requirements because not enough is known about "what works and what doesn't," posing the danger that new requirements will exclude or discourage potentially capable teachers.

New Directions

In the final section of *A Qualified Teacher in Every Classroom?*, four influential education thinkers provide policymakers with four purposefully different models for addressing the teacher quality challenge. Working from the presumption that states can choose to regulate teacher preparation programs with a lighter or heavier hand and can establish credentialing requirements that are more or less restrictive for individual teachers, the authors explain how states can use various combinations of candidate and program regulation to promote teacher quality.

Gary Sykes, a frequent coauthor with Linda Darling-Hammond, explains the merits of a "professionalism" model in which states aggressively regulate both which programs may train teachers and who may apply for a teaching position. Using the experience of Connecticut as a case study and arguing that we cannot just look to the "marketplace" to solve issues of teacher quality, he argues "the case for a strong state role in regulating the teaching profession, including a staged system of licensure that extends into the early years of teaching, together with accreditation standards for the programs that prepare teachers."

Bryan Hassel, president of Public Impact, and Michele Sherburne, executive director of DonorsChoose NC, explain the merits of a "portfolio-of-providers" strategy in which

states cultivate and monitor a diverse portfolio of preparation programs. These would include not only "traditional purveyors of teacher education" but also "other entities such as nonprofit organizations and school districts." This means taking an output accountability rather than regulatory approach to ensure the quality of preparation programs but without substantially regulating teacher candidates themselves. The effect of such an approach would be "dynamic systems that can change over time in response to changing needs and to improvements in our knowledge about what works." Acknowledging that a pure "market approach" to teacher quality is unlikely to gain traction, they argue that the portfolio approach can provide the "dynamism" of markets, with their mechanisms for customer feedback and supply response.

Kate Walsh, president of the National Council on Teacher Quality, makes the case for a "candidate-centered" model, in which the state holds individual prospective teachers accountable to demonstrate certain skills and knowledge, via a series of well-timed assessments. The state would no longer regulate teacher preparation programs nor would teaching candidates be required to complete such a program. Walsh bases her proposal on the fact that a significant number of teachers enter the profession "having demonstrated minimal academic competence in higher education environment that is rife with open admissions policies, undemanding coursework, and facile licensure exams"; that these candidates "are nevertheless granted a state license to teach and do not appear to have much difficulty finding teaching positions"; and that "districts most in need of talented teachers mistakenly view licensure as an adequate measure of quality." At the core of her proposal is that "states, institutions of higher education, and aspiring teachers would share the responsibility of implementing a strategy, programs of study, and a system of assessments targeted at improving teachers' general knowledge."

Finally, Michael Podgursky, a labor economist at the University of Missouri, Columbia, explains the merits of a fully "deregulated" model in which the state permits schools and districts to hire as they see fit and does not regulate either teacher preparation programs or who may teach. Taking a "labor-market" approach to issues of teacher quality, Podgursky concludes that while policy debates tend to focus on teacher training and licensure, "there is little research indicating that the types of licenses that teachers hold or the type of pedagogical training program they have passed through has a significant relationship to student performance." Raising the bar in teacher licensing is only likely to make matters worse by reducing the size of the applicant pool. A strategy to improve teacher quality needs to be focused on performance incentives for existing teachers, not on the credentials of the relatively small number of teachers who enter the profession each year. Accordingly, the focus should be on eliminating rigid salary schedules and tenure while linking pay to student performance.

Next Steps for Informing Policy

It seems to us that the broader body of emerging research and some of the new analyses presented in *A Qualified Teacher in Every Classroom?* call the four assumptions we alluded to earlier — that preparation programs are providing teachers with essential knowledge and skills, are keeping unsuitable individuals from entering the profession, are not deterring too many quality candidates from entering the profession, and are providing an effective pipeline for conveying teachers to schools — into doubt. In light of that fact, we recommend four courses of action for federal, state, and local officials.

Collecting Data on Preparation Programs

The groundbreaking research by Leal and Steiner finds little evidence that teacher preparation programs are screening out unsuitable teachers or teaching essential knowledge and skills. However, the analyses presented in their essay represent exploratory efforts and should therefore be interpreted with caution. As Leal and Steiner themselves are careful to note, it is imperative that future research examine these questions more systematically and for a more complete sample of institutions. In light of these limitations, there is an obvious role for more extensive reporting on the practices and teaching in these schools.

What kinds of measures would be appropriate? As discussed by Ramirez, the 1998 reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA) requires both teacher preparation institutions and states to report teacher candidates' pass rates on state teacher licensure exams. However, this reporting has been subject to manipulation at both the state and institutional level, does not support meaningful comparison across states, and provides at best a crude gauge of institutional quality. For instance, when federal law required teacher preparation programs to report data, including pass rates on state teacher licensure exams, for "program completers," institutions simply began requiring candidates to pass these assessments as a precondition for completing their program. Thus, they were able to report 100 percent pass rates. The federal government should amend HEA to

improve transparency and uniformity and also to call for broader reporting on quality control and professional preparation at the institutional level. As a condition for federal aid, teacher preparation programs should be required to complete a standardized form that collects the information assembled by Leal and Steiner relating to program acceptance rates, student performance, the rate of program completion, required courses of study, and to post these data on the Internet and other public formats, along with syllabi of required teacher preparation courses. Such reporting would not be an onerous burden for those programs already collecting such data. For programs that don't track these essential data, such a measure would be a firm wake-up call.

The critical role for the U.S. Department of Education would merely be to use its leverage and coordinating role to collect this information in a consistent, reliable, and timely fashion. The analyses of these data can be left to others, available for researchers of all stripes to systematically assess the performance of preparation programs. A number of entities spend tens of millions of dollars annually to support research and analysis in the area of teacher quality and teacher preparation. We can be confident that such information, once collected, would indeed be used. The information will be particularly helpful because, as author Dan Goldhaber explains, it can now be combined with rich new data on student learning and teacher effectiveness being generated by state accountability systems.

Linking Teacher Quality to Accountability Systems

New state accountability systems also offer tremendous new opportunities to assess and regulate the quality of teachers and teacher preparation programs in new ways. Where we once had to rely upon formal training to gauge the quality of a teacher, we now have data such as annual student assessments at most grade levels that can be used to determine just how well different students are progressing. As states take the step of identifying individual teachers when collecting data on student performance, they gain the ability to monitor how teachers fare in the classroom and need no longer depend so heavily on the signals provided by a teacher's credentials or training. Moreover, if districts include a teacher's preparation institution as part of their routine data collection, it becomes possible to track the student performance of all the teachers who graduated from particular preparation programs. Information of this kind has the possibility to bring a clarity to discussions of teacher quality and teacher preparation that were never previously possible.

Are We Keeping People Out?

The evidence from programs like Teach For America and The New Teacher Project and some public opinion research makes, as Michael Podgursky notes, a strong circumstantial case that teacher certification is dissuading potentially qualified teachers from considering the profession. Of particular concern is the evidence from alternative certification programs suggesting that traditional barriers may especially deter prospective teachers seeking to work in the inner cities, the places where the teacher quality challenge is greatest. However, there is little reliable evidence on any of these questions that stretches beyond the anecdotal or theoretical.

This is a call for systematic efforts on the parts of researchers, philanthropists, and education departments to understand more fully the ways in which certification requirements or state licensing processes are deterring potentially effective teachers from the schools. While we can study the benefit of an extra requirement, it is too easy to overlook the cost of an otherwise qualified teacher who turns away in the face of procedural barriers or red tape.

How Do We Get Teachers Into the Schools?

Loeb and her colleagues present the surprising fact that the vast majority of teachers wind up teaching less than 50 miles from their home, even those who went to college far from home. Policymakers will no doubt want to know the degree to which this localized market is the product of state-by-state licensing systems and localized teacher preparation and to what extent it is a characteristic of teaching more generally. Such an inquiry will require consideration of teachers in alternative licensing programs such as Teach For America, The New Teacher Project, and the American Board, as well as new efforts to understand how teachers are recruited and choose jobs.

For instance, in 2003, The New Teacher Project produced an alarming study that showed that 40 percent of applicants to four urban school systems wound up going elsewhere because of delays and frustration with the hiring process. It is not enough to get qualified candidates into the profession; we must also get them into schools, particularly schools where they are most needed. Understanding why teachers take the positions they do is a critical first step toward any comprehensive solution to getting good teachers into the worst-served schools.

New Directions for Policy

The analyses presented here are arrayed along a continuum framed by two very different approaches of how to address the teacher quality challenge. One approach is the "professionalization" model endorsed by Gary Sykes, which seeks to emulate the model of professions such as accounting or medicine. At the opposite extreme is Michael Podgursky's call to eliminate barriers to professional entry and to end the state oversight of teacher preparation. Where Sykes has his eye on highly regulated professions, Podgursky would have teaching look more like journalism or consulting. Between the Podgursky and Sykes models are two distinct visions of reform offered by Walsh and Hassel that provide for more state regulation than Podgursky but less than Sykes would endorse.

One of the profound lessons for policymakers is that even these diametrically opposed analyses find common ground in agreeing that there is a need to do something radically different than what we're currently doing. We don't find the evidence to clearly dictate that any of these courses is necessarily the "right" one, either nationally or for any given state. We would caution that there is no benefit to mandating any national solution to the teacher quality challenge. There is no cookie-cutter model that all states would be wise to embrace. Rather, there are probably multiple ways to address the challenge, and the best policy answer depends on the resources, needs, and the popular preferences of a given state.

We believe that three principles should guide policymakers as they weigh the merits of the various reforms. First, any certification requirements should be crafted with an eye to the possibility that they will dissuade some portion of otherwise qualified candidates. That fact calls for tailoring them to be as flexible as possible. Second, if preparation programs are to be a required part of a licensure regime, it is essential that they provide quality control and teach candidates professional skills and knowledge. In theory, there should be no argument about the superior effectiveness of a graduate from a traditional program. Third, the case for licensing teachers or regulating teacher training programs rests on the notion that there is a professional body of knowledge and skills that these programs teach and that the trained teachers have mastered. Today, that body of knowledge and skills is too often amorphous, vague, and unsupported by clear research. While clarifying and developing that body of skills and knowledge must be a central goal for those in the worlds of policy and education in the years ahead, today's policies should reflect only what we can reasonably ascertain today, not what we might hope to know tomorrow.

Toward a New Debate

It seems to us that much of the old debate about teacher licensure has been settled. Whatever the theoretical merits of licensure, the system as it is conceived has not worked to provide either the supply or the quality of teachers that we need. Confronted with a real, immediate challenge, neither parents nor policymakers have much use for continued partisan sparring over the merits of teacher licensure. What we need are new research and new approaches to the problem that can inform our efforts and provide workable solutions. We hope *A Qualified Teacher in Every Classroom?* can help us start down that course.

It is clear that the old system isn't working, but it is not yet apparent what the best course of change will necessarily be. As state officials weigh the three principles above and await continued efforts to cultivate and systematize the professional knowledge base of teaching, the appropriate course is one of responsible innovation and experimentation. As editors, each of us has an opinion as to what may be the wisest course of reform, but none of us has any pat answers. *A Qualified Teacher in Every Classroom?* is intended not as a road map, but as a series of guideposts. We urge new efforts to collect the information that can help states to make wise choices, encourage the asking of tough questions relating to how we ought to prepare teachers and how they are prepared, and advise policymakers to be bold in rethinking teacher preparation to meet the teacher quality challenge.

Endnotes

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