Response of the National Council on Teacher Quality to

Measuring Up: The National Council on Teacher Quality’s Ratings of Teacher Preparation Programs and Measures of Teacher Performance

May 14, 2015

In NCTQ’s decade-long evaluation of the nation’s teacher preparation programs, our primary goal has been to provide the public with meaningful, reliable information about the quality of these programs, which we then publish in the biennial Teacher Prep Review. We are firmly committed to continually improving and refining this work, especially the standards that gird our evaluation. With this new contribution from Dr. Gary Henry and Dr. Kevin Bastian, we can also now begin to examine the most important question of all, the connection between the NCTQ standards and actual teacher performance. We hope this research will be the first of many such efforts in a field largely starved of such investigations.

When Dr. Henry and Dr. Bastian approached us with a proposal to research the relationships between our program ratings and the performance of program graduates in North Carolina classrooms, we enthusiastically embraced the opportunity. From the start, this has been a collaborative effort, characterized by candor and openness. The desire to give the public the best information possible about program quality is mutual. So, too, do we seek more transparency at every level of teacher preparation, a massive and all too chaotic endeavor involving more than 1,400 institutions overseen by 50 states and producing well over 200,000 new teachers each year.

We are heartened by the finding here that graduates of teacher preparation programs with higher ratings from NCTQ’s standards are, on average, more effective than graduates of programs with lower ratings, no matter if the measure of effectiveness is student test scores or teacher evaluations.

As the authors state in the introduction of the report, “NCTQ standards are grounded in available research and completely transparent.” While not wanting to overreact to the results of a single study, Dr. Henry and Dr. Bastian’s findings serve as a great contribution to a process that’s been ongoing from the start of our work in 2004, revising our standards as we learn more, as well as adding some and eliminating others.

At the broadest level, we’re taking to heart the report’s suggestion to give greater emphasis to the quality of elements that NCTQ believes make for strong design of teacher preparation over the quantity of those elements, a point that’s akin to previous criticism that the Review has focused on inputs at the expense of outcomes.

To this end, in the next Review to be released in 2016, we will begin to look at not just the content that programs deliver but what teacher candidates are asked to do in order to successfully complete a program. Increased cooperation from programs will help make that possible. We are increasingly interested in the nature of assignments required of teacher candidates. We also will be expanding our
analysis of program rigor (really just another way of looking at what programs require candidates to be able to do) and move beyond evaluating programs' formal expressions of intent to also assess the quality of what they teach.

In addition, we will use this report's findings to reconsider the weightings used to calculate scores for individual standards and programs' overall scores. In particular, findings related to our standard in which we assess the systematic collection by programs of their graduates' outcomes suggest that the program's appetite for data is not simply a bureaucratic impulse and should count for more in a program's overall score.

This study serves as great impetus for other changes:

-- Raising the bar for our first standard, in which we assess the selectivity of programs in their admissions practices. Evidence from this study confirms what we suspected to be the case: that crediting programs as "sufficiently selective" when their minimum GPA is 3.0 (a GPA likely to be below the campus average) is a misleading measure about whether applicants have the academic aptitude to be effective teachers.

-- Eliminating the standard defining the content that middle school teachers should take, not only because of its negative relationship found here, but because ratings simply reflect the almost universal adoption by states of content tests for middle school licensing. We doubt that the tests, or at least the minimum scores set by states needed to pass these tests, are up to the task of assuring content proficiency.

-- Improving the standard defining the content that high school teachers should take so that we capture differences in preparation that are now masked in our evaluation of the preparation of both single-subject and multiple-subject certifications in the sciences and social sciences; and revisions for the standard defining the knowledge teachers need to know about how to help struggling readers to ensure that there is better alignment between the evaluations of this standard and the standard on the general foundations of early reading.

-- Giving much more weight to what teachers must learn about assessment and interpreting data -- a change that will please the many superintendents who pushed so hard for this standard.

We remain steadfast to the original motivation for launching this work in 2004: the public deserves the facts regarding how well teachers are being prepared to lead 21st century classrooms. Our appetite for more information has only been whetted by this report, and we actively seek other opportunities to build on the foundation laid here. Above all, we are eager for teacher preparation programs to assist us in getting the facts and judgments right.