

NCTQ Review of Teacher Preparation Program Fails the Test

July 2, 2013 – On June 18, the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) released a review (http://www.nctq.org/dmsView/Teacher_Prep_Review_2013_Report) of teacher preparation programs, including ratings of 99 special education preparation programs. This review fails to provide accurate information to inform the public about the quality and impact of the preparation of special education teachers in higher education. Our organizations are committed to ensuring that our nation's teacher preparation programs are of the highest quality and lead to improved outcomes for children with disabilities (birth through age 21). Unfortunately, this review does not contribute to meeting those goals. We have grave concerns about the manner in which data for the June 2013 report were gathered, analyzed, interpreted and reported to the public. The report does more to distort the teacher preparation picture than to illuminate it.

The methodology of the NCTQ report serves to undermine its conclusions. First, only 10% of the 1,130 institutions pursued by NCTQ agreed to fully participate -- hardly a participation rate that warrants sweeping conclusions about an industry or a set of programs. In fact, many programs and institutions were evaluated despite their declining to participate, resulting in conclusions that are based on incomplete and/or inaccurate data. The design of the review is extremely limited: it is a document review only and does not address what actually happens during a candidate's preparation, what candidates learn, and how they apply their knowledge in the classroom. The report purports to guide parents and prospective teachers in selecting programs, as well as school districts in determining the quality of graduates, yet no visits were made to programs and no input was obtained from previous candidates or the schools that hired them. A tool measuring paper inputs alone cannot capture the complex nature of teacher preparation or produce results that are reliable across institutions. In short, NCTQ's evaluation process is not useful in assessing program quality and/or developing program improvement strategies.

The methods NCTQ used to analyze their data are confusing and do not meet minimal standards for scientific rigor. The four-point rating metric may resonate with the general public, but NCTQ does not provide sufficient explanation as to how ratings were derived. The report acknowledges that elementary program ratings were based on five key "standards," and secondary program ratings were based on three key "areas"; however, NCTQ does not explain how these standards or areas were selected, how ratings contributed to final scores, or how ratings relate to the rubrics that NCTQ refuses to release to the general public or institutions of higher education. Teacher preparation programs are already held to professionally accepted standards through professional accrediting organizations.

In spite of the review's limited design and small participation rate, NCTQ asserts broad interpretations and generalizations about the quality of teacher preparation programs throughout the nation. Parents, prospective teachers, and school districts are likely to react strongly to the many negative comments made about the quality of teacher preparation in our country, but they will be reacting to a public relations statement rather than a credible research study. It is noteworthy that NCTQ has actively advocated for the Growing Education Achievement Training Academies for Teachers and Principals (GREAT) Act, a bill that would in fact lower standards for teacher preparation programs. Such an advocacy record shows that NCTQ can hardly claim to be an objective third party; they clearly had an agenda before commencing with their study.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, HECSE and TED regret that the report will not further the important conversations and research already underway in the field with respect to ensuring high quality teacher preparation programs and evaluating their effectiveness in the context of preK – 12 educational outcomes. Many reforms are underway that are authentically transforming teacher preparation to ensure that each and every graduate is ready for the classroom on day one. One example is edTPA, (<http://edtpa.aacte.org>), a rigorous performance measure previously known as the Teacher Performance Assessment, whereby candidates, future employers, and the public can be sure that when teacher education graduates move into the classroom they are fully equipped for the job. The improvement and evaluation of teacher preparation programs is a critical and complex task that needs to be approached collaboratively and objectively. Our future teachers, their parents, and the preK – 12 students they will teach deserve no less.

The Higher Education Consortium for Special Education (HECSE) is comprised of 67 universities with doctoral programs in special education. Our member institutions are at the forefront of teacher education, leadership development, and research in special education. We work extensively with local and state education agencies to ensure that teachers, school leaders, and other professionals have the skills they need to provide a free appropriate public education to all students with disabilities.

The Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children focuses on supporting children, youth, and families of individuals with exceptionalities by preparing special educators. Our membership of over 2000 individuals canvases the United States and is the largest professional organization in the nation representing those who prepare special education teachers and teacher educators.

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