Conflicting Missions?

Teachers Unions and Educational Reform

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Gaining Control of Professional Licensing and Advancement

The training and licensure of doctors, lawyers, and many other professionals is largely regulated by organizations of practitioners. To date the regulatory framework for elementary and secondary school teaching has been very different. In most states licensing requirements are set by state education agencies and state boards of education. State agencies also accredit teacher training institutions. While a private accrediting organization, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), has existed since the mid-1950s, fewer than a dozen states mandate NCATE accreditation and the majority of teacher training institutions are not NCATE-accredited.

In the last several years a campaign to put teacher training and licensing on the same professional footing as medicine has gained considerable momentum. Proponents of professionalization want practitioner associations put in charge of the accreditation of teacher education programs and the licensing of public school teachers. Organizations of educators would replace state departments of education and school boards in setting standards for how teachers will be trained, tested, hired, and promoted.

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Proponents claim that such measures will upgrade the quality of the work force. Evidence on this point will be examined below. One thing is clear, however. Professionalization would shift power away from elected officials to organizations in a position to promote private producer interests. Hence it is not surprising that professional organizations are often among the most vocal proponents of these forms of labor market regulation.

Teacher Professionalization: An Overview

Advocates of teacher professionalization want to transform teacher training and licensing from a decentralized system with regulatory power centered in state education agencies to a centralized, national system with regulatory power wielded by private education organizations. One of the early statements on this theme was the 1986 report of the Carnegie Task Force on Teaching as a Profession, *A Nation Prepared*. The task force, which included American Federation of Teachers (AFT) president Albert Shanker and National Education Association (NEA) president Mary Futrell, drew an explicit parallel between teaching and medicine.

In 1910, educator Abraham Flexner transformed medical practice in the United States by insisting on rigorous professional preparation of physicians. Flexner’s work, supported by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, laid the groundwork for the development of a medical delivery system second to none in the world. That historic Carnegie contribution has paid incalculable benefits to America and its people. We are confident that improvements in the preparation of teachers . . . will prove as significant to the country and its children.¹

Among the reforms advocated by the task force was the creation of a national organization to certify highly proficient “master” teachers. In the view of the task force, the influence of this national certification board would extend far beyond the relatively small number of nationally certified teachers. The standards developed by the board would play a central role in upgrading professional practice.

Long before the Board produces its first assessment, its standards will begin to be available as a resource to those shaping teacher education programs and setting standards for graduation. Institutions and those responsible for state program approval should take advantage of Board standards to raise the quality of teacher education.²

The Carnegie Foundation proceeded to invest several million dollars to launch the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) in 1986. This Carnegie investment acted as a magnet for other foundation contributions and eventual federal support.

At the same time the Carnegie task force was preparing its report, an organization of deans of leading schools of education, the Holmes Group, put out its own recommendations for the future of teacher training. Teacher education ought to be a postbaccalaureate program of study (as in the medical and legal professions); classroom study should be followed by an internship in a professional development school (analogous to a teaching hospital) where newly trained teachers would work under the supervision of expert mentor teachers. The recommendations of the Holmes Group were endorsed by other advocates of teacher professionalization, who argued that a large body of research had finally established what effective teachers needed to know and do. This claim was echoed by the accrediting agency, NCATE, which claimed that its newest standards were grounded in a body of scientific research like that supporting medical protocols—hence "knowledge based."

The latest phase of the debate on teacher training and licensing has been dominated by a second Carnegie commission, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF), established in 1995. Like the earlier Carnegie panel, the NCTAF includes the presidents of the NEA and AFT. Unlike the earlier panel, it also includes the president of NCATE and the president of the newly created NBPTS.

In its 1996 report entitled What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future, the commission charged that public schools employ large numbers of unqualified teachers, largely as a result of inadequate and poorly enforced standards for teacher training and licensing. The commission set out a detailed and ambitious policy agenda to professionalize teaching, transferring regulation of teacher training and licensing from public officials to

private professional organizations. Key components of this agenda included the following:

—Mandatory accreditation of all teacher training programs by the NCATE,

—Assessment of beginning teachers using instruments developed by the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) as a condition of licensing,

—Certification of 105,000 “master” teachers by the NBPTS, and

—Establishment of independent professional boards in all states to set policies regarding teacher education, testing, licensing, and continuing certification.

Although the commission left many of the details of reform to various councils and professional bodies, What Matters Most endorsed the vision of the Holmes Group. The commission applauded states that restructured teacher education as postgraduate or five-year programs and disparaged reforms reducing the amount of preservice training in order to streamline entry into the profession (as in many alternative certification programs). Through the activities of the independent professional boards, NCTAF would close loopholes in the licensing process that permit unlicensed teachers to be hired on waivers (“temporary” and “emergency” certificates) to fill vacancies in districts that have trouble attracting qualified teachers.

Teachers Unions and Professional Self-Regulation

Professional self-regulation concentrates power in organizations of practitioners. As the dominant teacher organizations, the NEA and the AFT have been strong advocates of professionalization. Indeed, their advocacy predates both Carnegie commissions.

NCATE

Before 1954 accreditation of teacher education programs was carried out by the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE). In that year this function was transferred to a newly created organization, the NCATE. From the beginning, the NEA has had a substantial presence within the NCATE, although the implications of its participation changed over time as the NEA developed from a professional association dominated
by administrators into a union that represented teachers in collective bar-
gaining and authorized strikes and other work actions.\(^3\)

NCATE accreditation has never played the central role that accredit-
tion plays in such professions as medicine and law. Currently only approx-
imately 500 of the 1300 teacher training programs are NCATE accredited. 
Advocates of teacher professionalization, including the NEA, would 
change this. Recent resolutions adopted by the union show how the NEA 
uses its influence within the education community to promote a central 
role for NCATE:

Individuals interested in teaching careers should attend institutions 
accredited by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher 
Education (NCATE). Counselors and advisors should inform stu-
dents of the advantages of attending NCATE-accredited institutions.

Another resolution on accreditation states that the “National Education 
Association believes that teacher education programs should be approved at 
two levels: at the state level through an agency such as a professional stan-
dards board and at the national level through the National Council for 
Accreditation of Teacher Education.”\(^4\) Another NEA publication (“The 
NEA-NCATE Connection”) calls on affiliates to promote NCATE accredit-
tion in a variety of ways, including “developing collective bargaining 
language requiring local school boards to hire only those professionals who 
have graduated from NCATE-approved institutions.\(^5\)

Although the AFT did not become involved until the late 1980s, both 
unions are now constituent members of NCATE, providing financial sup-
port and helping to shape the council’s policy. (The 1997–98 NEA con-
tribution was $366,600; AFT’s contribution has not been disclosed). The 
unions occupy a prominent position in the leadership of the council: the 
third-one-member NCATE executive board includes five persons

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3. Lieberman (1997). The passage of time has seen steady diminution in state and school board 
representation in NCATE. The Council of Chief State School officers, the National Association of 
State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification, and the National School Board Association 
originally held nine of twenty-one positions on NCATE’s governing board (Lieberman 1956). They 
now account for only one-quarter of these positions (and an even smaller share on the committee that 
actually makes accreditation decisions). The National School Board Association originally held three 
of twenty-one seats. It now accounts for just one of twenty-one members of NCATE’s executive board.


5. NEA (undated, p. 1).
appointed by the NEA and two by the AFT, including the president and vice president of each union. Eight individuals appointed by the AFT and the NEA serve on NCATE’s thirty-member unit-accrediting board. All on-site visitation teams include a teacher from NCATE’s Board of Examiners. The AFT and NEA nominate virtually all these teacher-examiners. In addition, NCATE’s procedures allow NEA and AFT state affiliates to appoint representatives as nonvoting members of examination teams.

**Independent Professional Boards**

Since the 1970s the NEA has lobbied for teacher-dominated professional boards to set policy with respect to teacher education, licensing, professional development, and advanced certification.

The National Education Association believes that the profession must govern itself. The Association believes that each state should have a professional standards board, composed of a majority of practicing public school teachers.

The professional standards boards should have the exclusive authority to license and to determine criteria for how a national certificate will be recognized for professional educators.

Other NEA policy documents recommend that these teachers be nominated by the “majority teachers’ organization” in the state and appointed by the governor. In most states, of course, this organization would be the state NEA affiliate. The union urges that these professional boards align their standards with those of NCATE:

The Association believes that these boards should apply National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) standards as a minimum for granting, denying, or withdrawing the approval of teacher preparation programs.

The AFT, on the other hand, has not taken a stand on state professional boards. It appears to be the union’s position that uniform standards for the profession should be set nationally rather than by fifty separate state bodies.

7. For both quotations see NEA (1997, p. 322).
The first independent professional boards were established in Oregon (1973) and Minnesota (1980). In both cases the local NEA affiliate was the major moving force behind the relevant legislation. After a lull during the 1980s, the pace of enactment has accelerated and there are now fifteen states with independent or semi-independent boards, ten of which have been established since 1990. Eleven states have given these boards full authority to set standards for licensure. In ten states, teachers and administrators constitute a majority of the board members. In six, teachers are in a majority; in one (Georgia), they occupy half the positions. Of the six states with teacher majorities, three have full legal authority for establishing licensure requirements, independent of their state boards of education (Minnesota, Nevada, North Dakota).8

There is a clear correlation between union influence and the establishment of a professional board. Of the thirty-four states that have enacted mandatory bargaining laws for teachers, nearly one-fourth (eight) have independent boards with teachers or administrators and teachers in the majority. Of the seven states that permit but do not require districts to bargain with unionized teachers, only one has such a board. Similarly, there is only one professionally controlled board in the nine remaining states that prohibit collective bargaining by teachers unions.

National Board Certification

Both the NEA and AFT have been strong supporters of certification of teachers by the NBPTS since the idea was first given national prominence by Albert Shanker.9 Union influence on the board is considerable. Board by-laws stipulate that two-thirds of the members will be teachers and that one-third of these teachers "shall be persons who hold, or within the past ten years have held, local, state, or national office in the two national teacher unions." This number is divided equally between the NEA and the AFT and two of the positions are automatically filled by the national


9. The history of this idea and how it led to the formation of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards is reviewed in Lieberman (1993).
presidents of the unions. The by-laws also require that another one-third of
the teachers on the board be office holders from “teacher disciplinary or
other specialty associations” (for example, the National Council of
Teachers of Mathematics). Finally, these two groups nominate the remain-
ing teachers on the board, who must be persons with “outstanding records
of accomplishment but who may not have held office with either a teacher
union or with a teachers’ disciplinary or other specialty association during
the last ten years.” Given the number of union members in disciplinary
and specialty associations, the NEA and AFT are probably in a position to
control, directly or indirectly, a majority of the positions on the board. The
board’s current president, Barbara Kelley, is an active NEA member.

NEA publications such as *NEA Today* regularly feature articles on
national board-certified teachers. Assistance is provided on how to prepare
portfolios and other materials required by the board. The unions have
pressed for districts to defray the $2,000 application fee charged by the
board. They have also obtained state and federal funds for this purpose.
They have lobbied and bargained for higher salaries for board-certified
teachers.

As its founders envisioned, the influence of the national board extends
beyond the certification of master teachers. It is intended that the standards
developed by the board be the basis of licensing and accreditation deci-
sions. Supporters of the board appear to believe that professional self-
regulation will help ensure that the board’s standards are widely adopted.

The existence of the National Board for Professional Teaching
Standards (NBPTS) should be a strong arguing point for indepen-
dent professional boards in the states. If teaching standards are to be
structured in ways that are similar to other professions’ standards
then having teacher standards boards in all states becomes more comp-
pelling. *NBPTS should be working with state teacher boards, not state
boards or departments of education.*

Union Interests

Teacher professionalization offers some clear benefits to unions. The activ-
ities over which the profession seeks control—accreditation of teacher edu-

cation programs and teacher licensing—are well-recognized means of restricting supply.

Whenever a new piece of licensing legislation is passed, it almost always involves the creation of a regulatory board made up of practitioners of the very occupation or profession in question. Thus they are left to 'regulate' themselves and their peers. Licensing boards have frequently had wide latitude in interpreting eligibility requirements, setting fee schedules, preparing examinations, and engaging in other activities that may serve to exclude would-be practitioners.¹¹

By limiting the number of practitioners, licensing boards restrict competition and put upward pressure on salaries. This is a strategy that has been followed successfully by many professions, the most notable (and widely emulated) example being physicians. In the first decades of this century the American Medical Association (AMA) pursued a successful campaign to raise licensing requirements for physicians. As state licensing boards began to withhold licenses from doctors who had not graduated from colleges accredited by the AMA, the number of medical schools fell by 45 percent in just ten years, from 155 in 1910 to 85 in 1920.¹² This led to a decline in the number of physicians, reducing what practitioners saw as "overcrowding" in the field. Not coincidentally, doctors' incomes also rose.

There can be no doubt that teachers unions see the professionalization movement as a means to increase salaries. NCTAF is quite explicit about the connection between higher standards for teacher preparation and higher salaries, as the following statements from its 1996 report attest.

Thousands of children are taught throughout their school careers by a parade of teachers without preparation in the fields they teach, inexperienced beginners with little training and no mentoring, and short-term substitutes trying to cope with constant staff disruptions. . . . Unequal resources and inadequate investments in teacher recruitment are the major problems. Other industrialized countries fund their schools equally and make sure there are qualified teachers for all of them by underwriting teacher preparation and salaries. However,

¹² Numbers (1988).
teachers in the United States must go into substantial debt to become prepared for a field that in most states pays less than any other occupation requiring a college degree. . . . In most European and Asian countries, teachers are highly respected, well compensated, and better prepared. . . . Rather than spend money on add-ons and band-aid programs to compensate for the failures of teaching, [these countries] spend their education resources on what matters most: well-trained teachers who work intensively with students and with other teachers to improve teaching and learning.\textsuperscript{13}

By raising standards for licensure and closing loopholes that permit districts to hire unlicensed teachers on an emergency basis or as long-term substitutes, professional regulatory bodies will create pressure for states to increase salaries in order to attract a sufficient supply of teachers with the requisite credentials.

By latest count there are 1,363 institutions that train teachers in the United States. If medicine and law are the models for professionalization, it is clear that there are "too many" teacher training institutions. While there are 5.3 teachers for every physician, the ratio of teacher training programs to medical schools is nearly twice as great, at 9.6. Similar discrepancies arise in comparison to dentistry and law. If teacher education programs are required to obtain accreditation from NCATE, we can expect that unions will use their influence within this organization to reduce the number of accredited programs. Recent history shows as much. In the mid-1970s the NEA obtained more power within NCATE's governing bodies and greater representation for teachers on examining teams. The proportion of programs denied accreditation subsequently doubled, from one in ten before 1973 to one in five throughout the rest of the decade.\textsuperscript{14}

In addition, the size of teacher education programs would likely shrink should independent professional boards follow the recommendations of the Holmes Group and the NCTAF. At present, teacher education is a lucrative business, bringing in more revenues than colleges spend to train prospective teachers. Classes are frequently taught by adjunct faculty hired at low salaries. In addition, students spend a substantial part of their time

\textsuperscript{13} NCATE (1996, pp. 16–19).

\textsuperscript{14} Bureau of Labor Statistics (1998); Tom (1996, p. 14). Whether this is a valid guide to future practice is less clear. In virtually all states NCATE accreditation remains optional. Often programs are not denied accreditation outright, but rather tire of investing the time and effort needed to get off probation. If NCATE accreditation were made mandatory, presumably more would persevere.
in the program off-campus doing student teaching while continuing to pay program fees. Much of this will change if institutions must meet the standards set by NCATE for education faculty and if a year-long internship in a professional development school becomes an essential part of the training prospective teachers receive. The NCTAF estimated in 1996 that the changes it recommended would increase the annual cost of training teachers to more than $7,000 per capita. Such costs will almost certainly reduce enrollments, particularly in programs now disparaged as diploma mills.

Although professional self-regulation creates opportunities for practitioner organizations to reduce the supply of trained personnel, this is not the only way unions stand to benefit from professionalization. As educators, most union leaders and the rank-and-file share a genuine interest in improving public schools. In this respect they are no different from physicians who, as they benefit from the high accreditation and licensing standards promulgated by the AMA, also believe that the public has been well served by these policies. Support for higher standards may also derive from the public perception that unions have shielded incompetent teachers from disciplinary action, for the resulting damage to the unions’ image could be avoided if fewer ineffective teachers were hired in the first place. In addition, by taking steps to improve teacher quality, unions enhance the moral case for an increase in salaries. Teacher pay is only partly determined by market forces. To the extent that the public and its elected representatives are swayed by considerations of equity and fair treatment, unions have an easier time making the case that teachers deserve higher salaries when they can point to the high cost of meeting stricter licensure standards.

However, the analogy between teaching and medicine can be drawn too tightly. The AMA’s successful campaign to raise the standards for medical training and physician licensure occurred at a time when the organization did not pretend to speak for the entire medical profession of the day, which included homeopaths, mental healers, midwives, and so-called eclectics. On the contrary, the association was avowedly exclusive. By contrast, the NEA and AFT represent many thousands of members who do not meet high standards of intellectual or professional accomplishment, a circumstance that makes it difficult for these organization to promote reform from within the profession. For example, while both the NEA and the AFT endorse more rigorous standards for teacher licensure, the issue is a delicate one for the unions. The stronger the case for improving the quality of new teachers, the more questions it raises about the ability of current practitioners. The recent testing of teachers in Massachusetts illustrates the risk.
Political leaders have been quick to conclude that if a majority of prospective teachers cannot pass the state’s basic skills exam, then the current workforce is not likely to do much better. Public discussion has moved on to the issue of testing all teachers as a condition for recertification.\textsuperscript{15}

This is profoundly threatening to the unions’ current membership. The unions have responded with a two-faceted strategy: endorsing rigorous testing for new teachers, while at the same time opposing the testing of current teachers:

The National Education Association advocates rigorous state standards for entry into the teaching profession. These standards, as established by professional standards boards, shall include high academic performance, field training experience that includes student teaching, and passage of appropriate pedagogical and subject matter tests.

Yet later in the same section:

The Association urges the elimination of state statutes/regulations that require teachers to renew their licenses. Where such renewal continues to be required, standardized literacy and basic skills tests to determine competency should not be used.\textsuperscript{16}

The NEA’s position is not novel. It is standard practice for occupations to seek the exemption of current practitioners from changes in licensing requirements.\textsuperscript{17} If professional organizations assume control of licensing, we can expect the unions to use their influence within these organizations to shelter current members or at a minimum to ensure that the tests given for license renewal are not difficult. Thus the unions’ interest in professional self-regulation is double-edged: to restrict the flow of new entrants, thereby creating upward pressure on salaries, while at the same time protecting incumbents from more demanding relicensure requirements.

\textsuperscript{15} Some states have already ventured down this road. Texas, Georgia, and Arkansas tested veteran teachers in the 1980s and removed those with very low scores from the classroom. Toch (1991). California tests veteran teachers who seek a credential in a different field. New York has begun testing teachers as a condition of moving from probationary to full licenses. Arenson (1998). In North Carolina, recent legislation has authorized the state’s department of education to test veteran teachers in low-performing districts. Chaddock (1998).

\textsuperscript{16} NEA (1997, p. 323).

\textsuperscript{17} Rottenberg (1962).
Teacher education programs, many of which are quite nonselective in their admissions policies, can be expected to resist a tightening of standards that would discourage many would-be teachers and lower their enrollments.¹⁸ Since these programs are well represented in NCATE, state independent boards, and other professional organizations, prospects for significant strengthening of licensing standards are uncertain, particularly if the unions' interest in reducing the supply of teachers can be accommodated in other ways. Thus coalitions may form within NCATE that lead to a reduction in the number and size of accredited programs on grounds unrelated to academic strength. This is discussed below.

In addition, the NEA is strongly committed to the recruitment of teachers who are members of racial and ethnic minorities. This makes the adoption of rigorous licensure tests problematic, given the gap between scores of blacks and whites. Indeed, union policy on this question has been schizophrenic, with the national organization endorsing rigorous examinations while state affiliates file suits to block teacher examinations on the ground that they have a disparate impact on minorities. While affirmative action solutions may be found satisfying both objectives (for example, setting different standards for racial minorities, as in Allen v. Alabama), the prospects for such settlements are increasingly uncertain in the current legal climate.

Some of the reforms sought by proponents of teacher professionalization would actually increase teacher supply relative to demand. Both the Holmes Group and the NCTAF seek to reduce high levels of attrition during the early years of teachers' careers by offering new teachers better professional preparation before they are sent to "sink or swim" in the classroom. If successful, such reforms could have a significant impact on teacher labor markets. Studies of teachers' career patterns show that between 40 and 50 percent quit within the first five to seven years of service. Changing the year-to-year retention rate over this period by just 3 percent (say, from 70 percent to 72.1 percent) reduces the number of teaching vacancies by approximately 15 percent.¹⁹ However, because this makes it

¹⁸. It might be doubted that enrollments in teacher education would fall. After all, the unions' objective is not to create lasting shortages, but to see temporary shortages alleviated by an increase in salaries, drawing enough capable persons into teaching to satisfy demand. On this view the number of teachers would not change, only their level of ability. However, this scenario is unrealistic. There is a significant oversupply of teachers in the labor market today, as there has been for the past twenty years. See Feistritzer (1998). If shortages are to lead to a rise in teacher pay, this glut must be removed, implying a fall in teacher education enrollments.

easier for districts to fill their remaining vacancies, salaries are less likely to climb.

Again, it is difficult to foresee what would happen if professional organizations controlled teacher licensing. Such authorities could find other ways to raise the demand for teachers—for example, by requiring new teachers to work in tandem with experienced mentors as long they hold probationary licenses. This kind of featherbedding could more than offset the impact of declining turnover on teacher demand.20

Finally, if unions are to successfully follow the model of the AMA, they will need to ensure that school districts facing a shortage of qualified applicants have few options for dealing with the problem besides raising pay. Thus unions can be expected to exercise their influence to block such alternatives as larger classes and substitution of paraprofessionals for teachers. Since shortages will occur in some subject areas before others, stricter licensure standards may also threaten the single salary schedule, as districts seek the flexibility to award higher salaries to teachers of the subjects in shortage without increasing pay across the board.21 To the extent that unions give ground on this issue, salary increases will be localized and specific to teachers of certain subjects.

Teacher Professionalization and the Quality of Public Education

Advocates of teacher professionalization are unapologetic about the prospect of higher salaries. In their view, the nation has undervalued the services teachers provide and has not spent enough to recruit and retain good teachers. If high standards compel state and local governments to increase teacher salaries, that is only what they ought to have done anyway. In short, proponents of professional self-regulation argue that the reforms they advocate represent a “win-win” solution to some of the nation’s educational ills: good for teachers and good for the rest of the country.

20. This is not to deny that team-teaching can be valuable for brand-new teachers. However, by requiring it in all cases and prolonging it, professional boards could turn the policy into one that promotes private over public interests.

21. Approximately 9 percent of school districts now have this flexibility, which usually takes the form of advancing teachers of shortage subjects on the district salary schedule. However, this option does not appear to be widely used by administrators in these systems, and has had little or no impact on recruitment or salaries. Ballou (1998); Ballou and Podgursky (1997).
However, this is only one of the possible outcomes of professionalization. The consequences of reform depend on the answers to two questions: (1) Will reform along the professionalization model raise teacher quality; and (2) Will it lead to teacher shortages? Since neither of these questions entails the other, there are four possible outcomes, as depicted schematically in figure 3-1. In the upper left-hand cell of the diagram, the answer to both questions is yes. This is reform on the medical model, in which an improvement in the quality of practitioners is accompanied by a decline in their number and an increase in their incomes. If this should happen in education, it could be argued that both teachers and the public have gained. Whether this is correct will depend on the facts of the case: if the improvement in teacher quality is small, it may be that the money spent on higher salaries could be better spent on other educational innovations. Nonetheless, it is at least possible that this outcome would represent the win-win solution envisioned by reformers.

The outlook is still more positive in the lower left-hand cell of figure 3-1: licensure standards rise, but there is no shortage of qualified teachers and therefore no need to raise salaries across the board. This scenario rests on several optimistic assumptions. First, higher standards improve the training that schools of education provide their students, who in turn graduate from these programs with significantly stronger skills. That is, reform upgrades the current applicant pool to meet the demand for better teachers. Second, declining turnover reduces the demand for teachers, offsetting any tendency for higher standards to lower the number of qualified applicants. Third, the status of the teaching profession rises, attracting better teachers. Fourth, the uniform salary schedule gives way to differentiated pay, which allows districts to target funds to the relatively small number of fields in which shortages appear. This is the best outcome from the standpoint of the public, but it also offers something to teachers unions, which benefit from improvements in teacher quality even when shortages do not appear, as explained above.

The worst outcome for the public is depicted in the upper right-hand cell: shortages without improvement in teacher quality. In this scenario, teacher training takes longer and becomes more costly, but teachers are no better. Despite the claims about the profession's "emerging knowledge base," schools of education either do not know how to prepare more effective teachers or endorse misguided theories of pedagogy for ideological reasons. At the same time, protracted training discourages many individuals of
### Figure 3-1. Outcomes of Reform

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Does reforming professional standards raise teacher quality?</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Medical model:</strong></td>
<td>Training is longer and more costly, but teachers are no better on average. Teacher tests are not rigorous; authentic assessments are an elastic yardstick. Education schools close for reasons unrelated to quality (for example, costs); enrollments decline.</td>
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<td>Shortages of qualified teachers drive up salaries.</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Does reform produce shortages?</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education schools improve training; teachers meet higher standards Turnover falls. Higher stature of profession attracts candidates. Uniform salary schedule gives way to differentiated pay. Teacher salaries may increase via the political process.</td>
<td>Political opposition blocks reforms: National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education fails to close programs. Cheaper, quicker routes to certification retain their market niche. Teacher tests are not rigorous. Alternative certification survives.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ability from pursuing teaching careers, offsetting whatever limited gains might be achieved by reforming the curricula of teacher education programs. Some schools of education, pressured to meet expensive accreditation standards that have little to do with teacher quality, reduce their enrollments or close outright. The result is a win-lose outcome. The decline in teacher supply puts upward pressure on salaries, benefiting
union members. But the public loses, paying more for teachers who are no better than at present.

The final scenario, in the lower right-hand corner, represents the failure of reform to take hold, largely as the result of political opposition. As a result, matters remain substantially as they are. This may well be the outcome of present reform efforts. While union rhetoric expresses strong support for stricter licensing standards for new teachers, it is questionable how far unions will go in this direction, given the risks to incumbent members, the opposition of teacher education programs, and the impact on minority recruitment. In addition, the available evidence on the professionalization of accreditation and teacher assessment (reviewed below) fails to demonstrate that either of these functions is performed better by professionally controlled boards than by public authorities.

Our greater concern, however, is that the outcome of reform will be the win-lose scenario depicted in the upper-right cell of figure 3-1. Professional self-regulation almost invariably poses the risk that practitioner-regulators will use their power to promote private interests at the public’s expense. This is a concern even when self-regulation has raised standards for practice, as in the case of medicine. It is still more likely in the case of education.

Most regulated professions are dominated by private practitioners selling their services to the public. For example, in the medical profession, doctors contract directly with patients or with hospitals and clinics that indirectly represent patients’ interests. As a result, market competition exerts considerable pressure to ensure that the standards for licensure and for the accreditation of professional schools are valid. If they are insufficient in this respect, other credentials will emerge under market pressure. Indeed, precisely these circumstances characterize the market for physicians’ services. In addition to state licensure, most physicians seek certification from medical specialty boards. Licensure is required to practice; certification is not. The latter arose because hospitals and clinics sought stronger evidence of professional competence in medical specialties than a license alone provided.22

22. This is not the only reason that the analogy between teaching and medical practice, so often drawn by proponents of professionalization, breaks down. The central argument for medical licensing is that there exists a deep and complex body of clinical knowledge that is well beyond the grasp of the typical consumer, thus making the latter vulnerable to incompetent practitioners. The existence of a vigorous, and largely unregulated, private market for schooling suggests that many consumers are capable of making informed choices. In addition, parents do not purchase directly the services of teachers. Rather, teachers are hired by professional administrators. The question then is whether self-regulation by the teaching profession represents the best possible method for disciplining wayward administrators, a dubious proposition. For further discussion of this issue see Ballou and Podgursky (1998a, b).
These pressures are much weaker in public education. The quasi-monopoly enjoyed by public schools means they are virtually assured of students no matter how poorly they perform. Deprived of the opportunity to express their preferences in the market, the public lacks the countervailing power to check producer interests through the political process, which is dominated by industry insiders. Unions, which are better organized than the public at large, often determine the outcome of school board elections. They are regularly rated among the most powerful lobbyists at the state level.23 Together with the schools of education, they exert a powerful influence on educational policy.

By conferring additional authority on practitioner organizations, teacher professionalization exacerbates this imbalance between private and public interests in public education. This power might be used to improve the performance of public schools, but a review of the evidence in several key areas of reform suggests that it probably will not.

**Accreditation**

While the immediate focus of accreditation is program quality, its ultimate value depends on the information it conveys about the graduates of accredited programs. Accreditation is meaningless if the graduates of accredited programs routinely lack the skills needed to function effectively in the classroom. Yet it is not apparent that NCATE, the private accreditation agency supported by the unions, is successful by this criterion.

Although NCATE stipulates that programs recruit candidates “who demonstrate potential for professional success,” it does not require any particular admissions test or specify a passing score. Criteria for successful completion are just as vague. NCATE standards require that institutions ensure the competency of their graduates before recommending them for licensure, but competency is left undefined. Instead, NCATE indicates that a program can meet this standard by assessing graduates “through the use of multiple sources of data such as a culminating experience, portfolios, interviews, videotaped and observed performance in schools, standardized tests, and course grades.”24 This is a requirement that program administrators use various methods of assessment, not that graduates be held to any particular standard of achievement.

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By available objective measures, there is virtually no relationship between NCATE accreditation and the quality of newly trained teachers.\textsuperscript{25} We begin by looking at state-level data on the results of teacher licensing examinations.\textsuperscript{26} Figure 3-2 depicts pass rates for graduates of teacher training institutions in Missouri.\textsuperscript{27} Each bar on the chart represents an institution. As figure 3-2 shows, NCATE schools are to be found at the top, middle, and bottom of the distribution. Indeed, the poorest performing institution in the state, as measured by licensing pass rates, is NCATE-accredited.

Figure 3-3 displays results for teacher licensing examinations recently administered in Massachusetts. (To improve comparability of results, the scores on the Communications and Literacy Skills test taken by all students in each program are used.) As in Missouri, NCATE-accredited programs

\textsuperscript{25} After this chapter was written, the Educational Testing Service released a study of scores on the Praxis II teacher licensing examination that appears to contradict this conclusion. ETS (1999). Ninety-one percent of the examinees from colleges with NCATE-accredited programs passed, compared to just 83 percent from nonaccredited institutions. Whether this actually demonstrates any superiority of NCATE-approved teacher education programs remains open to doubt, however. Fourteen percent of the Praxis II test takers never enrolled in a teacher training program. The ETS researchers assigned test takers to NCATE categories based on the college they attended, not whether they were actually in a teacher training program. The never-enrolled group has a lower pass rate (74 percent) as compared to candidates currently enrolled in a teacher training program (91 percent). Thus, both the NCATE and non-NCATE samples contain unreported proportions of individuals who were never enrolled in any type of teacher training program. However, it is likely that the non-NCATE population will have a proportionately larger share of the never enrolled group, since test takers who graduated from colleges without a teacher training program will always be classified as "non-NCATE."

Differences in pass rates are affected by the mix of tests taken by graduates as well as the state in which the tests are taken. For example, a student in North Carolina, where NCATE accreditation is mandatory, can pass the Praxis II elementary exam with a score of 153, whereas the minimum passing score is 164 in Pennsylvania, where roughly 40 percent graduate from NCATE programs. The pass rates also depend on the exam taken, ranging from 91 percent on elementary education down to 76 percent on math and 75 percent on social studies. Although the ETS researchers could have clarified this matter by reporting mean NCATE/non-NCATE test scores for the major Praxis II exams or by disaggregating the results by state, they elected not to do so.

26. The list of NCATE-accredited colleges suggests that politics are more important than educational quality in determining whether a school is accredited. Where governors have lent their support to the professionalization movement, teacher education programs have sought and obtained accreditation. In North Carolina, whose governor, James Hunt, chaired both the NCTAF and National Board, every college offering teacher education has obtained NCATE accreditation. In Arkansas, all but two have it. By contrast, New York has 103 state-accredited programs but in 1997 only three had been approved by NCATE.

27. We eliminated a small number of records with out-of-state institutions or for which the institutional code was missing. When a test taker repeated the same test more than once, only the first test score is used in the analysis. The classification of institutions was based on the May 1997 list of accredited programs obtained from NCATE.
are not concentrated at the upper end of the distribution (although one rate is second highest), and performance at four of the seven accredited institutions was distinctly mediocre.

Further evidence on NCATE standards comes from Pennsylvania, where there are large numbers of both accredited and nonaccredited programs. Since the state would not release test scores by institution, the (smoothed) distribution of test scores for all teachers seeking elementary certification between 1994 and 1997 is plotted in figure 3-4. There is no substantial difference between the two distributions. Figure 3-5 presents the same information for Missouri. In this case scores from NCATE-accredited programs are distinctly inferior. Compared to the non-NCATE
distribution, there are fewer programs in the center of the distribution and more in the left-hand tail, creating a bulge of NCATE test takers among the lowest scores.

In summary, NCATE regularly accredits institutions with very low admissions standards, a signal failing given the widespread recognition that academic ability among education majors is alarmingly low. Nor is it apparent that graduates of NCATE-accredited institutions are superior by other indicators. For example, the NCTAF has claimed that NCATE accreditation helps ensure that teachers receive instruction in state-of-the-art pedagogical methods. According to the NCTAF, graduates of NCATE-accredited programs will be better prepared for the challenges of the classroom and suffer less attrition during the early years of their careers. They will exhibit a higher degree of professionalism in their relations with students and colleagues.
Figure 3-4. Distribution of National Teacher Exam Elementary Education Test Scores: Pennsylvania

Frequency

National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education

Non-National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education

Test score

Source: Pennsylvania Department of Education.

These claims can be tested using data from two surveys conducted by the Department of Education. By most measures there is little difference between graduates of accredited and nonaccredited programs.28 Virtually identical percentages sought teaching jobs after graduating (table 3-1). Of those who obtained a job, a substantial majority (80 percent in both groups) expressed no regret at having chosen teaching as a career, saying they would make the same choice again. More than 50 percent of both groups intended to spend their entire careers as teachers. Fewer than 25 percent (and more NCATE than non-NCATE graduates) indicated that they sometimes felt it was a waste of time to do their best in the class-

28. Because NCATE accreditation procedures changed in 1987, the sample was restricted to individuals who graduated in 1990 or later and who began teaching no earlier than 1992.
room. NCATE teachers spent somewhat more time during the week preceding the survey on instruction-related activities outside school (preparing lessons, grading papers, and so on). However, the difference between the two groups was not significant at conventional levels. A slightly larger proportion of NCATE teachers moonlighted during the school year, but again the difference was not statistically significant.

In short, there is little evidence that teachers trained in NCATE-accredited schools conduct themselves more professionally, are more likely to continue teaching, or experience more satisfaction with their career choice. Perhaps more revealing, there is no evidence that those hiring new teachers think so either. The percentage of non-NCATE applicants who found a teaching job was as high as among NCATE applicants. The jobs they obtained paid as well.
Table 3-1. *Comparison between Teachers Accredited and Not Accredited by the New National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE)*

Percent unless otherwise noted

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Accredited by NCATE</th>
<th>Not accredited by NCATE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Applied for a teaching job&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>92.0</td>
<td>90.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Certainly” or “probably” would become a teacher, if given the chance to start over again&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>80.2</td>
<td>79.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan to spend full career as teacher&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>58.6</td>
<td>58.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes feel it is a waste of time to do a good job&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>18.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time spent after school on lesson preparation, grading, parent conferences (hours in the most recent week)&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moonlight in a nonteaching job during the school year&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received an offer, conditional on having applied&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>82.0</td>
<td>84.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean teaching salary&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>$19,843</td>
<td>$20,076</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: (a) Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study, First Follow-Up, 1993–94 (sample restricted to certified teachers); (b) Schools and Staffing Survey, 1993–94 (sample restricted to persons who earned their bachelor’s degrees in 1990 or later and who started teaching no earlier than 1992).

**Teacher Assessment**

Proponents of professionalization call for teachers to pass tests of basic skills, subject matter, and pedagogical knowledge before they are licensed. The first two are fairly straightforward. The third has proven problematic, and it is here that professionalization is said to offer the greatest benefit.

Standardized tests of pedagogical knowledge have come under a great deal of criticism. Because so many teaching decisions are highly context-specific, test items regularly fail to assess examinees’ knowledge in a meaningful way. Either the situation is so simplified that context is relatively unimportant—but then the answer is obvious—or important contextual facts are omitted and the correct answer is unclear. Proponents of teacher
professionalization, concerned about the triviality and irrelevance of these examinations, have argued the need for "authentic assessments" based more directly on classroom conditions. With this goal in mind, the NBPTS has issued standards on what effective teachers know and do. The work of translating these standards, which are very general, into performance-based assessments has been taken up by the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC). These assessments take the form of portfolios, videotaped simulations and other exercises in laboratory settings, and classroom observations.

It is naive to suppose that performance-based assessments have become popular solely because they correct defects in traditional standardized tests. Assessment instruments like portfolios answer to a host of other fashionable concerns, such as the desire for prospective teachers to become "active discoverers and producers of their own knowledge base."29 Such assessments are also significantly less threatening to examinees. Standards are fuzzy; there is the comforting thought that there is no one "right answer"; allowances can be made for different cultural perspectives (an implicit form of race-norming); and teachers are likely to be given the opportunity to portray themselves in the best possible light by choosing the materials for their portfolios or the lessons they will be observed teaching. Finally, proponents see performance-based assessments as the essence of professional self-regulation. The relationship between interns and doctors furnishes the model: expert practitioners judge the performance of novices in light of standards that reflect professional consensus on best practices. Authentic assessment of teachers is, by its very nature, something that only teachers are (allegedly) competent to carry out.

Authentic assessment is not without problems, however. It is time-consuming and expensive. There are doubts about the objectivity of evaluators and the reliability of their ratings. Little is known about the predictive validity of these types of assessments and whether they are superior in this regard to more traditional ways of testing teachers.30

In addition, the language of the national board standards is extremely general, as the following examples show:

—Teachers use a variety of methods and materials to promote individual development, meaningful learning and social cooperation.


30. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, which has promulgated standards for the purpose of conducting performance-based assessments, has undertaken no studies of predictive validity.
Teachers use their knowledge of child development and their relationships with children and families to understand children as individuals and to plan in response to their unique needs and potentials. Accomplished teachers create a caring, inclusive and challenging environment in which students actively learn.  

One reason for this level of generality is the lack of agreement among professionals on many pedagogical issues. The board's standards were developed by committees through a consensus-building process. This was facilitated by rising above controversial questions to a statement of general principles from which few would dissent. However, another reason for the lack of specificity is surely the very problem that confronts the makers of standardized teacher tests: good teaching decisions depend greatly on context. More specific standards might be overly prescriptive.

The question is what happens when evaluators attempt to judge particular teachers in light of standards like these. A pilot project undertaken in Maine to develop a new system for licensure of beginning teachers serves as a good example. The goal was to replace transcript-based licensing (ascertaining whether the student completed the right courses) with one based on demonstrated competency. Following the lead of the NBPTS and INTASC, teacher educators participating in the pilot project established standards for what a beginning K–12 teacher should know and be able to do.

Supervisors of student teachers were then asked to write observations that would indicate whether these standards had been met. Several of these assessments were published in a report to the state board of education. As the following excerpts show, supervisors found it difficult to fit their observations into the framework of the standards. Often the connection between the standard and the teacher's actions was slight. Fairly trivial actions were accepted as evidence that the standard was met. Supervisors tended to write about things they liked even if the behavior was unrelated to the standard in question. In some cases they grasped for something that seemed to apply, however tangentially.

32. "A number of states have redesigned teaching standards and created partnerships with universities and schools to incorporate the new standards into preparation and professional development programs. . . . Maine also developed new standards for teacher licensing that are based on the INTASC standards and tied to Maine's Learning Results for Children. Eight colleges are developing and piloting performance-based assessments of the standards." Darling-Hammond (1997, p. 41, emphasis in original).
For example, the following report was submitted to show a student teacher had met Standard VIII: Understands and uses a variety of formal and informal assessment strategies to evaluate and support the development of the learner.33

The setting for this description is an art classroom in an urban high school in southern Maine. At the beginning of class, "Janice," an Art Education intern . . . hands out a media literacy "pop quiz" consisting of a magazine advertisement and a blank sheet of paper to pairs of students as they settle in at their tables. She directs their attention to questions written on the board: "Before you get started on your masks, work with your partner to answer these questions. They relate to the lesson on advertising. Put the finished papers here on my desk." This quiz is a test of knowledge gained in a previous media literacy lesson.

All this teacher has done is administer a pop quiz on material covered earlier. There is only one assessment strategy in evidence here, not a variety, and nothing to indicate that the quiz was particularly well-constructed or contributed to student learning, as stipulated by the standard. Students were allowed to prepare answers in pairs, suggesting this teacher was trained to use cooperative learning, a pedagogical method currently in fashion. But if the pop quiz was intended as an assessment rather than merely a learning experience, her judgment is questionable. Even staunch proponents of cooperative learning stress the importance of maintaining individual student accountability.

The following report was offered to show a student teacher met Standard I: Demonstrates a knowledge of the central concepts, tools of inquiry, and structures of the discipline(s) she or he teaches.

Student teacher, J.N., taught science, specifically five microorganisms (sic), to a heterogeneous grade 5/6. She included in her instruction guidelines: "scientific" journaling (sic), (emphasis on precision, accuracy of drawing and writing), how to share materials in a manner that respects both the things themselves and the people using them, and several opportunities to work with five self-selected and interested first grade partners (emphasis in original). J.N. developed an

33. All excerpts are from State of Maine Advisory Committee on Results-Based Initial Certification of Teachers (1997).
equitable and innovative rubric including clear guidelines for group work, clearly defined outcomes for the two and one-half hour laboratory which used microscopes, slides, live one celled organisms, and an electron microscope that J.N. had obtained from her own home school district through a successful co-authored grant application. Using a previously developed learning style profile of the class, J.N. made sure that every student had an opportunity to succeed based on lesson objectives that she developed from a wide variety of assessed student strengths.

The writer is clearly impressed with the performance of this student teacher and, indeed, this may have been an excellent lesson. But the things that have impressed the supervisor have little to do with the standard, which concerns mastery of subject matter. Instead, the supervisor focuses on teaching methods (how clear the instructions were, how the students worked cooperatively in groups, how all students had a chance to succeed) and the materials used in the lesson. The only part of this description that relates to the standard is the second sentence, where the supervisor remarks that J.N. instructed the students on the importance of keeping precise, accurate records in scientific work.

The following submission pertains to Standard II: Demonstrates the ability to integrate other disciplines, their concepts, tools of inquiry, and structures of other disciplines with the discipline she or he teaches.

Student teacher, G.H., taught social studies to an eighth grade class, developed in concert with his mentor teacher, a unit on immigration. G.H. asked students to design and illustrate family shields . . . of the countries from which the students were traveling to the U.S. Students researched their countries of origin, presented oral reports on their reasons for leaving, wove together fact and fiction into powerful stories of courage and pride in who they were. G.H. feels that eighth graders, particularly, grow from imagining themselves to be what they may not yet be in reality; for example, one day students were creating their visas. A boy barely 5'2" described himself as a 6'4" 229 lb Russian from the Ukraine. G.H. also has begun an inventory of what motivates these students and which of the multiple intelligences (proposed and described by Howard Gardner and his team) best fits their emerging intellectual and social strengths. Linked to those multiple intelligences inventories G.H. has produced a list of
choice opportunities for each student to use in developing and presenting knowledge of their (sic) "native" culture.

In addition, immigrants/students kept a journal of the events of their journey. In the journal they answered teacher-generated questions about conditions of passage, problems and dilemmas encountered, and joys and sorrows witnessed and lived through.

Apparently the writer believes the student teacher has met Standard II because he has integrated art (designing shields) and fiction writing (stories, journals) into the teaching of social studies. These may have been sound teaching devices, but their relation to the standard is not clear, as neither appears to be a concept or "tool of inquiry" from another discipline. For example, were any literary concepts introduced? Did the teacher even check student journals for grammar, punctuation, and style? Successful integration of methods from other disciplines also requires that they not be overused. But this question slips between the cracks in this report: we cannot tell if the teacher relied too much on student-produced art and fiction at the expense of more conventional materials.

Some of the supervisor's remarks hint at priorities that other educators might question. The supervisor is evidently impressed with the teacher's sensitivity to student self-esteem. Many psychologists and psychometrists have not found Gardner's thesis on multiple intelligences plausible.34 That it is even mentioned in this report suggests the supervisor does not appreciate the distinction between integrating the study of different disciplines and turning to another discipline (educational psychology) for suggestions on pedagogy.

The comments on these reports are not meant to disparage the performance of these new teachers or the conscientious effort of supervisors to carry out the task they were given. Rather, this discussion is intended to bring out two things: how hard it is to make standards like those of the NBPTS the basis for meaningful performance assessments, and how difficult it is for outsiders reading these reports to ascertain whether teachers had truly demonstrated the desired competency. Supervisors had trouble determining the kind of teaching behavior to which each standard applied. There was no yardstick to measure whether a standard had been met. If the supervisor could identify something that seemed to fall under the right

heading, that was good enough. Ultimately, supervisors used the standards as a very loose framework for describing things the student teachers did that the supervisors liked. As a result, procedures of this kind are only too likely to reproduce the flaws of the present educational system. Teachers who use trendy pedagogical techniques will be applauded. Ideological biases will enter supervisors’ assessments and influence licensing decisions.

There is no reason to think that this is an isolated example, somehow atypical of performance-based assessments under professional self-regulation. Standards were patterned on those of INTASC and the NBPTS; evaluations were carried out by experienced teachers. Given the generality of the standards, much depends on how these guidelines are interpreted, the perceptiveness and professional judgment brought to the supervisory task, and the ability to convey in writing a full picture of the candidate’s strengths and weaknesses. Authentic assessments therefore tend to reproduce the strengths and weaknesses of one generation of teachers in the next. It is not evident that the information they provide is any better than that obtained from more traditional forms of evaluation, including observations conducted in schools by administrators and department chairs and the feedback, formal and informal, that supervisors of student teachers have always provided.

To summarize, there is little credible evidence that professional self-regulation significantly improves program accreditation or teacher assessment. Professional control has not stopped NCATE from accrediting weak programs of teacher education. Both NCATE and the NBPTS have issued vague standards that afford little basis for improving accountability. This is not the end of the matter, however. If policymakers cannot improve the nation’s schools, they should at least take as their motto: first do no harm. Unfortunately, teacher professionalization would turn over to educators regulatory powers that can be used in ways that will impede efforts to improve the nation’s schools.  

35. As a result, it would be better simply to pay teachers more than to put teachers and teacher educators in a position to use the regulatory process to achieve the same end; it would cost no more, and it would spare the public the collateral damage. This is, of course, the conventional economic conclusion about the inefficiency of occupational licensing. In the usual case, however, there is no obvious way for practitioners to effect a transfer of wealth from the public (except, perhaps, for farmers). Thus occupations seek regulatory powers to accomplish what they could not by simply asking for the money.

This is not, however, the situation in public education. Teachers are public employees. They are not only free to ask for more money, it is expected that they will do so, offering whatever arguments and data they can muster showing that higher salaries will be in the public interest. In short, this is a sector of the economy where for once the more efficient solution, a simple income transfer, is readily available.
Resource-Based Accreditation

If NCATE accreditation were required of all teacher education programs, the costs of compliance could drive small programs in liberal arts colleges from the market. These costs are of two kinds: the direct costs of the accreditation process and the indirect costs of correcting "weaknesses" identified by NCATE. Both can be considerable. Complaints about the amount of paperwork and the lengthy and time-consuming process of preparing documentation for NCATE are common. However, it is probably the second category that is more threatening to liberal arts colleges that train small numbers of teachers. In such institutions, educational methods courses are often taught by adjunct faculty with no responsibilities for research. There may be no department of education, only a set of courses staffed by faculty from other departments (for example, psychology). Such programs may well have difficulty meeting NCATE standards for the qualifications and responsibilities of a professional education faculty.

In the past, faced with the opposition of liberal arts colleges and other smaller institutions, NCATE has backed off proposals to require minimum faculty-student ratios or expenditures per student of accredited programs. Whether it would continue to accommodate these programs if accreditation became mandatory is unknown. In any case, the absence of hard and fast standards does not prevent resources from being a factor in an accreditation decision. Organizations like the Holmes Group and the NCTAF have called for substantially higher per-pupil expenditures in teacher preparation. If examining teams from NCATE come to share the outlook of these organizations, programs that are not prepared to spend heavily on teacher education will be in jeopardy.

One issue that has received little attention concerns the conflict of interest when unions participate in NCATE while at the same time representing faculty in the institutions applying for accreditation. The NEA has 78,000 members in higher education. The AFT has roughly 90,000 members in higher education, with 32,000 in New York state alone. These unionized faculty are concentrated in states with the most permissive bargaining laws and in state colleges with large education programs. In California, for example, all twenty-three of the state colleges are organized by the California Faculty Association, an NEA-affiliate. These unionized campuses

account for twelve of the thirteen NCATE-accredited teacher training pro-
grams in the state.

This creates a conflict of interest for union representatives who serve on
NCATE’s governance bodies and examining teams, particularly if accred-
tiation becomes mandatory and programs that are not approved by
NCATE are forced to close down. NEA and AFT members may use their
influence within NCATE to protect the jobs of faculty in colleges with
union contracts. Of course, this bias need not be explicit. It might take the
form of union support for accreditation criteria that favor large public-
sector affiliates (which are already unionized or more readily organized)
over nonunion competitors (for example, private sector liberal arts col-
leges). Accreditation criteria that require large, fixed investments will be
met more easily by large programs in state universities and colleges, as will
NCATE standards that limit the use of nonregular or adjunct faculty in
teacher education. 38

Prolonged Preservice Training

When colleges lose (or drop) their teacher education programs, students
find it more difficult to become teachers. This is particularly true of grad-
uates of liberal arts programs, who do not know when they begin college
that they will decide to teach and who therefore do not choose a college
with this goal in mind. However, this may be the least of the barriers that
teacher professionalization places in the way of prospective teachers. Much
more significant may be the impact on career decisions if proponents of
professionalization have their way and teacher education becomes a pro-
tracted multiyear program. Such changes will deter some individuals from
pursuing teaching careers. Of course, if those deterred should not have
become teachers in the first place, this will be of little concern. But there is
no reason to expect such a happy outcome.

Protracted preservice training will deter individuals already in the work
force who are contemplating career changes. The practical experience and
maturity of many of these individuals make them attractive candidates for
teaching. Precisely for these reasons many states have adopted alternative
certification routes that waive standard requirements for certification, facil-

38. This highlights one more important difference between teaching and other professions.
Professional associations such as the AMA or ABA, which accredit training programs, do not engage
in collective bargaining in higher education.
ilitating the entry of such persons into the profession. Proponents of teacher professionalization (including the unions) oppose such programs, and professional self-regulation would almost surely mean their demise or transformation into something that would no longer serve the original purpose. For example, the model of alternative certification supported by the NCTAFT would have career-changers spend a year in a master’s program before they begin to teach. There is no question that this would deter many if not most of the individuals who now enter through alternate routes. Prospective teachers working outside education have cited traditional licensing requirements more often than any other explanation for not seeking a teaching position. Time and expense are the usual reasons given for why they do not apply to traditional teacher education programs. 39

Career-changers are not the only prospective teachers who will be deterred if professionalization raises the cost of acquiring a license. Undergraduates in some majors (for example, the sciences) find it difficult to fit additional education courses into demanding course schedules. More generally, raising the requirements for teacher education will deter students who are wavering between teaching and other careers, since any increase in the requirements for a teaching license will have an obvious opportunity cost: less time for courses that make them more marketable should they pursue other options. These reforms would therefore tend to screen out (by their own choice) prospective teachers with the interest and ability to pursue other careers, leaving the applicant pool to those who never thought of themselves as anything but teachers. This would have precisely the opposite effect of other policies that are intended to improve the quality of the teaching pool (for example, raising teacher salaries). Higher pay is intended to attract capable persons who are wavering between two careers by tipping the balance in favor of education. By contrast, raising entry barriers discourages those who have attractive options.

Prolonged preservice training also discourages individuals who want to try teaching before making a lifelong commitment to it or who enter in the

39. Feistritzer (1992). More than 1,000 persons in the work force who had expressed an interest in alternative certification were surveyed. Of those who had not become teachers, 34 percent “did not want to go back to college to take requisite courses to meet requirements for teaching credentials.” To this should be added the 27 percent who said they “could not find/get into an alternative teacher certification program.” Since survey participants could give more than one answer, the total must be reduced by the percentage of overlapping responses (not reported). Licensing requirements were probably also responsible for deterring some of the additional 12 percent who said that it was “too much trouble to find out what was required to become a teacher,” and the 15 percent who selected “too much red tape,” though these responses may also show that initial interest was not very strong.
expectation that after several years they will be ready to move on. Since attrition from teaching rises with academic ability, more capable students will, on average, anticipate having fewer years in which to amortize their investment in a credential that has no value outside the teaching profession. The result is that promising students turn elsewhere.

In a society with abundant opportunities for talented college graduates and a tradition of labor market mobility, it will never be possible to persuade two million of them to teach their whole lives. Public rhetoric that implies personal failure when a teacher leaves the classroom after successfully teaching for a number of years may deter many of them from ever setting foot in a classroom.  

According to a consortium of teacher educators from sixteen of the most prestigious colleges and universities in the northeast, terminating undergraduate programs in education and replacing them with postbaccalaureate programs would significantly reduce the number of students entering teaching from selective liberal arts colleges. The consortium therefore opposed the recommendations of the Holmes Group, stating that “we must maintain certification options for students desiring to teach directly upon graduation.”

Proponents of teacher professionalization respond to such concerns by pointing to the example of doctors, who spend far more years in study and internships than would teachers under the proposed reforms. Yet high entry requirements do not deter interested and qualified persons from pursuing careers in medicine. Why should this be feared in education?

The foregoing discussion has discussed some of the reasons. Attrition from teaching (unlike medicine) is high and is highest among those who were the most capable in college and who are likely to have the most attractive options outside education. The testimony of numerous beginning teachers reminds us that teaching is what economists call an “experience good”—it is hard to know whether one will like it without trying it. High entry barriers will discourage many persons from finding out whether teaching is for them.

Further evidence on this point comes from Teach for America (TFA), an alternate route program that places liberal arts graduates without education course work in public school systems that face a shortage of conventionally prepared applicants. One of the attractions of this program for new graduates is the prospect of teaching without first spending a year or two taking professional education courses. When asked what they would have done had they not joined TFA, only 22 percent of participants who arrived for summer training in 1997 indicated that they would have entered teaching through traditional teacher education.\(^{42}\) No doubt this percentage would have been still lower if teacher education were the longer and more costly program of study envisioned by the Holmes Group.

Although Teach for America members initially enlist for only two years, many remain in teaching after the enlistment period ends. Of the 784 former members who responded to a 1998 alumni survey, 53 percent were employed in education, the great majority as classroom teachers.\(^{43}\) These data should not be taken to imply that half of all TFA volunteers make their careers as teachers. There is almost certainly some sampling bias in these responses: alumni who have remained active in education are probably more likely to respond to mail from TFA than those who have lost interest in teaching and gone on to other careers. Nonetheless, it is clearly wrong to assume that volunteers’ involvement in teaching is invariably of short duration. Rather, this evidence shows the importance of giving talented persons an opportunity to experience teaching without putting high barriers to entry in their way.

Even so, the medical analogy might apply if there were persuasive evidence that prolonged preservice training is essential to teaching performance. But the evidence is not strong.

Significant additions to what teacher candidates should know and be able to do before embarking on a career in education not only [have] large economic costs, but there is reason to question whether students can learn and effectively transfer to practice all or even much of the pedagogical knowledge and skills that would be taught in

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42. Personal communication from Rebecca Berreras of Teach for America, January 28, 1998.
43. Personal communication from John Darby, director of research and development for Teach for America.
extended programs. Considerable evidence exists that experienced
teachers think differently about their work than do novices. . . .
Teachers may learn some things best, such as cooperative learning
strategies, once they have an experiential base upon which to build.44

Instead, there is convincing evidence that the nation needs teachers with
greater intellectual capacity, even if this means they have not completed a
prescribed sequence of education courses. The response of administrators
who have hired TFA members has been extremely positive. Three-quarters
of the principals responding to a 1997 survey rated TFA instructors supe-
rior to other beginning teachers.45 Almost two-thirds rated them above
average in comparison to all faculty, including veteran teachers. Almost
nine of ten indicated they would hire a TFA instructor again. Responses on
parent and student surveys were also very positive.

The example of private schools is also instructive. These schools operate
in a competitive marketplace and have a clear incentive to hire the best
teachers available. Many employ unlicensed instructors with no prior edu-
cation course work. Although most Catholic school teachers are certified,
barely half the teachers in other private schools are.46 The proportion of
unlicensed teachers is particularly high among nonsectarian schools, which
cannot depend on religious instruction to attract customers but must com-
pete primarily on the basis of educational quality. By hiring unlicensed
teachers, these schools have increased the proportion of faculty who grad-
uated from selective colleges and universities.

**Credentialism**

School districts are able to stretch the size of their work forces by giving
teachers classes outside their main assignment areas. This practice has been
severely criticized by advocates of teacher professionalization, in some cases
justly so. Unions have also resisted this practice, recognizing that flexible
assignment policies give districts an option for dealing with shortages that,
in the absence of this alternative, might force them to raise salaries.

Unfortunately, this can easily lead to a situation in which the credential
becomes more important than the teacher’s actual skills. For example, the

44. Evertson, Hawley, and Zlotnik (1985, p. 7).
45. Kane, Parsons and Associates (1997).
NCTAF recommends that all secondary school mathematics teachers have at least a college minor in mathematics. The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, which belongs to NCATE and is responsible for approving the mathematics curriculum of teacher educator programs, goes further, recommending the "equivalent of a college major" for all math teachers in grades 9–12. If these recommendations became requirements and the requirements were strictly enforced, a good deal of administrative flexibility would be lost. Fifty-five percent of the students taking general math in grades 7–12 are taught by instructors who have less than a minor in the subject. This does not mean they are poor teachers; a background in college mathematics is not needed to teach general math, which requires no mathematical skills above arithmetic. In fact, the same could be said for most of the high school mathematics curriculum. The study of mathematics at the collegiate level encompasses topics that an instructor would never be called on to teach to high school students. Mathematics majors are often frustrated teaching subjects like elementary algebra to students far less adept in mathematics than themselves. Teachers with backgrounds in the humanities or social sciences might well be superior teachers of these subjects, provided they know the mathematics content. This could be ascertained by a subject matter exam, a simpler and more cost-effective screening mechanism than the requirement that anyone teaching a mathematics course have completed six or seven college courses in the subject.

Ironically, professional self-regulation will promote a credentialism that runs counter to the larger goals proponents of professionalization have set. In 1986 the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy articulated a vision of a profession marked by deep intellectual curiosity and ambition.

Teachers should have a good grasp of the ways in which all kinds of physical and social systems work; a feeling for what data are and the uses to which they can be put, an ability to help students see patterns of meaning where others see only confusion. . . . They must be able to learn all the time, as the knowledge required to do their work twists and turns with new challenges and the progress of science and technology. . . . We are describing people of substantial intellectual accomplishment.47

The irony, of course, is that people of substantial intellectual accomplishment can teach many school subjects if they have the interest to do so. When public education succeeds in attracting the kinds of teachers described in this passage, the last thing it ought to do is stifle their curiosity and creativity. If an English teacher develops over the years a love of history and has the other attributes mentioned by the Carnegie forum, there is reason to expect he or she would make an excellent history instructor. Yet these will be the kinds of choices that professionalization will take away, replacing them with a numbing emphasis on credentials.

Conclusion

A campaign is underway to professionalize teaching—to give private organizations of educators the same control over professional training and credentials exercised by practitioners in occupations like medicine and law. Functions now performed by state agencies, such as the accreditation of teacher education programs and establishing the requirements for licensure to teach in public schools, would be taken over by the NCATE and independent boards made up of teachers, teacher educators, and school administrators.

The major teachers unions, the NEA and the AFT, have a leading role in NCATE. The NEA has also been a strong advocate of the formation of independent professional boards, anticipating that such boards will be more responsive to their members' needs than the state agencies that have performed these regulatory functions until now. The activities of NCATE and the independent boards—accreditation of teacher education programs and control of teacher licensing—are well-recognized means of restricting the supply of would-be teachers and creating pressures for states and districts to raise salaries in order to recruit enough qualified applicants. Indeed, supporters of teacher professionalization are unapologetic about this prospect, arguing that the nation needs to pay more to obtain better teachers.

On closer analysis, however, there is little reason to expect that professional self-regulation will improve teacher quality. NCATE standards focus on process rather than outcomes. They do not ensure that the graduates of accredited institutions meet minimum standards of competency; indeed, NCATE has accredited programs with extremely low admissions standards.
Professional self-regulation would also bring with it greater reliance on authentic or performance-based assessments to determine who should be licensed. These assessments are unproven; as our examination of one pilot program based on standards developed by INTASC shows, there are scant grounds for supposing they would be superior to traditional ways of evaluating teachers.

In addition, there are signs that professional self-regulation will be used to restrict teacher supply in ways that impede efforts to recruit better teachers. Among them are costly accreditation standards that make it prohibitively expensive for small liberal arts colleges to continue to train teachers, prolonged preservice training that deters too many capable students and mature career-changers from entering teaching, and an excessive credentialism that restricts administrative flexibility as well as teachers’ opportunities for professional growth.

Public education in the United States is a regulated monopoly. The vast majority of parents have their children enrolled in public schools. In most school districts, parents have little or no choice of schools or teachers within schools. While it is possible to exercise choice via private schooling or residential relocation, these are costly options. Unlike medicine or other professional service markets, consumers also lack the protection provided by antitrust law or malpractice lawsuits. The monopolistic structure of this product market, combined with the fact that well-organized state affiliates of the NEA and AFT bargain with thousands of fragmented local school districts, confers a great deal of economic power on the teachers unions. Professional self-regulation would increase significantly this bargaining power, giving unions market power not enjoyed by producers or unions in any major industry in our economy.

References


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