



# EDUVENTURES

Schools of Education Learning Collaborative

## *Review & Critique of NCTQ & Advance Illinois Study on Illinois Teacher Preparation Programs*

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### **Goals and Rationale for this Critique**

Presently, NCTQ is completing a study with the goal of ranking the quality of 56 teacher preparation programs in Illinois against a set of standards developed by NCTQ.<sup>1</sup> NCTQ has been commissioned to conduct this study by Advance Illinois, an independent organization seeking to support and improve public education in the state. The goal of this study is to review the quality of select teacher preparation programs in the state, based on NCTQ's standards for teacher education.

*Schools of education, including the 56 schools of education included in NCTQ's ongoing study in Illinois, welcome program review.* Schools of education seek to continually build strong, effective programs that meet the needs of the school districts that they serve; program review is an important process to ensure that schools of education continually revisit, revise, and update programs to meet this important goal.

Schools of education continually undergo a review process at the state level and in most cases, at the national level through such highly recognized organizations as the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) or the Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC). Schools of education use the findings from program reviews to revise programs to ensure that they are training and producing high quality educators. Thus, it is integral that the methodology for program reviews be rigorous, research-based, and proven to produce usable and dependable results. The methodology of program reviews should be sound in order to ensure that any reform that occurs as a result of recommendations ultimately benefits educators and P-12 students, rather than creating programs that may be relatively weaker. The goal of this critique is to provide insight to the public and press regarding the inherent weaknesses of the NCTQ methodology used to rank the quality of teacher education programs in Illinois.

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### **Methodology Overview**

The goal of the Illinois NCTQ study is to determine the quality of the teacher training programs located within the state. In order to accomplish this, NCTQ asked schools of education (SOEs) in Illinois to submit syllabi from the teacher training courses that students at their respective institutions must complete in order to receive a degree. The syllabi, along with all required course materials, were then compared

<sup>1</sup> Descriptions of NCTQ's standards can be found in the Appendix

against a set of common standards developed by NCTQ in order to make determinations with regards to the level of quality of each of these teacher preparation programs.

The study was conducted in several phases. First, SOEs were asked to submit syllabi to NCTQ. NCTQ then produced a preliminary report of their findings that was mailed to each individual SOE. Each participating SOE addressed the findings in part I of the report and then mailed NCTQ its response. NCTQ then mailed part II of the preliminary report to each individual SOE. The SOE addressed the findings in part II and then mailed NCTQ its response. Finally, based on all of the data gathered during parts I and II of the process; including the additional information provided by SOEs in their responses; NCTQ produced a rating of each individual SOE.

#### **Timeline of the Illinois NCTQ Study:**

22 December 2009:	NCTQ requested syllabi from teacher programs.
29 January 2010:	Date by which requested syllabi were received by NCTQ.
1 June 2010:	NCTQ mailed and emailed part 1 of the preliminary report to teacher preparation programs.
22 June 2010:	Date by which materials relevant to part 1 were received by NCTQ. NCTQ mailed and emailed part 2 to teacher preparation programs.
12 July 2010:	Date by which materials relevant to part 2 were received by NCTQ.
30 July 2010:	Date by which materials relevant to the preliminary report were submitted to NCTQ.
7 September 2010:	NCTQ mails and emails draft ratings to teacher preparation programs.
21 September 2010:	Date by which final corrections and comments should be received by NCTQ

#### **Methodology Critique**

*While SOEs were able to respond to NCTQ's findings, NCTQ's program review methodology may still not accurately reflect the quality of educators produced by each teacher education program. There are several major weaknesses with the methodology that NCTQ employed in the study of Illinois teacher preparation programs. They are listed and explained below:*



***NCTQ has evaluated inputs in order to draw conclusions regarding the quality of teacher preparation program outputs.***

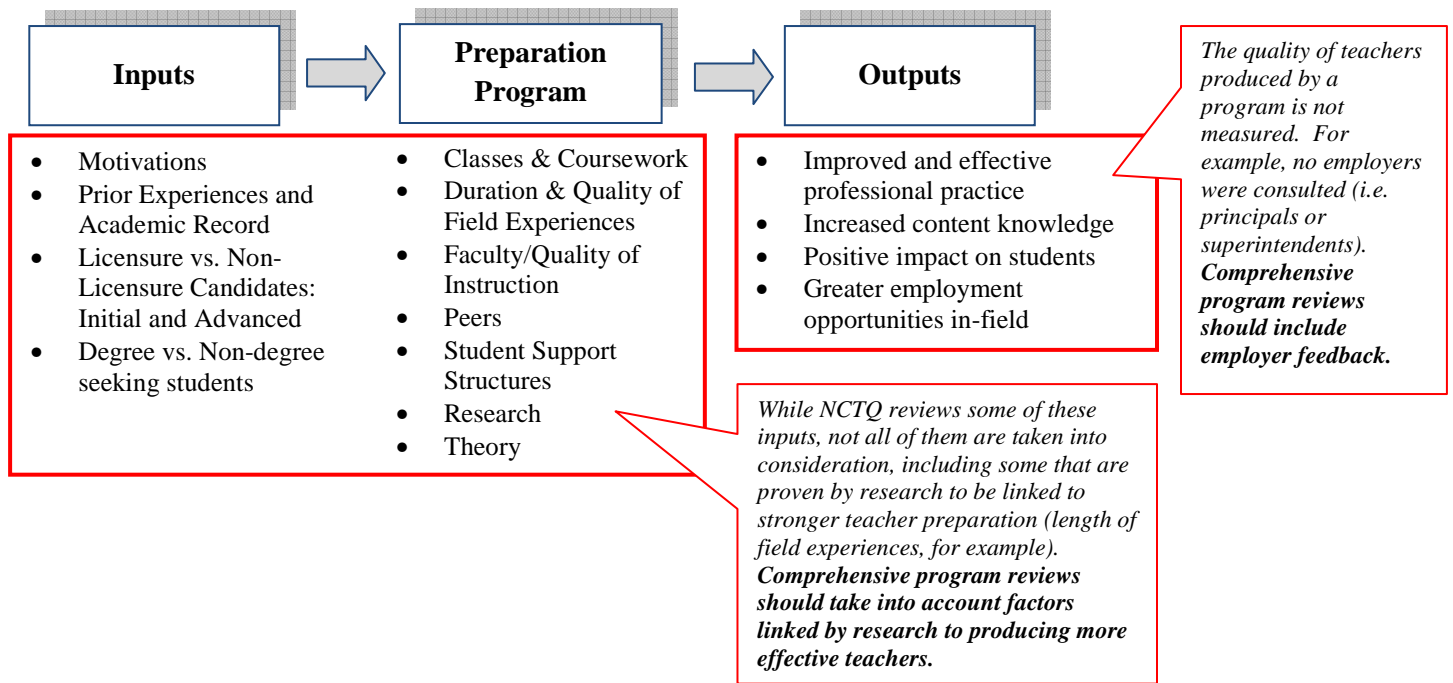
The ratings of SOEs in Illinois are based on an evaluation of institutional inputs; addressing inputs alone without taking into considerations outputs such as the resulting quality of prepared educators, or the impact of teacher education graduates on P-12 student achievement, does not provide a holistic picture of program quality. Based on criticisms of its Texas teacher preparation study, NCTQ preemptively addresses this concern on its website by stating that there is a lack of output data making such a study of SOE outputs currently impossible. Additionally NCTQ contends that an analysis of inputs provides information about “what’s on the menu” at teacher preparation programs. While both of these statements are true, they do not address the main problem with such an analysis; formulating conclusions about the quality of the end product of a teacher preparation program--prepared teachers--solely by analyzing the quality of the course materials. A comprehensive program review would include both inputs and outputs of a teacher education program.



***The list of inputs used to evaluate teacher preparation programs was incomplete.***

While the use of inputs in order to make statements concerning outputs is problematic, the omission of other important inputs further weakens the study. The NCTQ study does not consider other inputs such as the quality of instruction, student support services, professional development provided, teacher induction programming, and many other factors that could potentially be related to the quality of teacher preparation programs. These factors are integral in determining the overall quality of teachers produced by any preparation program and are linked by research to training more effective teachers for schools.

**Figure 1. General Input-Output Process Model for University-Based Preparation**



***NCTQ's standards do not appear to be research-based, and NCTQ provides no clear explanation of how the standards were developed.***

There is no clear explanation of how the NCTQ standards were formulated. NCTQ provides the following explanation of how the common standards were developed on their website:

*The standards were developed over five years of study and are the result of contributions made by leading thinkers and practitioners from not just all over the nation, but also all over the world. To the extent that we can, we rely on research to guide our standards. However, the field of teacher education is not well studied. Therefore, when we can't rely on research to guide our standards, we look to the practices of higher performing nations; where relevant, the practices of other professions; and the best consensus-thinking.*

This explanation does not address the specific reasoning or rationale behind the standards, and the standards do not appear to be research-based. While NCTQ notes that not enough research has not been conducted in the field of education, NCATE's standards, in contrast, are clearly substantiated by research and proven to link to the preparation of stronger educators. When NCTQ's standards are compared with the standards developed by NCATE, the issue of transparency becomes very clear. NCATE notes in their *Professional Standards for the Accreditation of Teacher Preparation Institutions* that "NCATE revises its unit accreditation standards every seven years to ensure that the standards reflect current research and state-of-the-art practice in the teaching profession." NCATE's highly detailed descriptions of their standards and explanations of their ratings system can be viewed in their 98-page document: <http://www.ncate.org/documents/standards/NCATE%20Standards%202008.pdf>. In contrast, NCTQ has not released such a detailed description of their rating system or research-based explanations of their standards.



***NCTQ does not provide a clear explanation of the low, moderate, and high weighting system.***

In addition to the lack of transparency with regards to the formulation of the standards themselves, there is also a lack of clarity with regards to what "low, moderate and high weighting" actually mean in terms of how each standard is weighted to produce an SOE rating. Additionally, no explanation was provided with regards to why or how these weightings were formulated. As noted above, in contrast, NCATE provides clear, detailed transparency into how the ratings for their standards are applied to teacher preparation programs. NCTQ does not make their criteria for weighting clear.



***It is unclear how well the evidence that NCTQ uses to measure a program's adherence with each standard actually measures each standard.***

No explanation or evidence is provided by NCTQ to address the steps taken to ensure that the data collected and used to compare a program to the NCTQ standards actually measures that standard. Thus, the validity of the study's findings is compromised. Additionally, there is no discussion or presentation of the steps taken by the evaluators to increase the validity and reliability of the results. For example, the standard for teacher selectivity denotes that programs were evaluated to see if they are sufficiently rigorous. However, without a clear objective or criteria for 'rigor,' this is a subjective evaluation and is potentially flawed.

## **Conclusion**

While it is important that SOEs be held accountable for preparing high quality teachers, the study that NCTQ has conducted in Illinois of teacher preparation programs is significantly flawed. The quality of outputs and employer ratings are not taken into consideration—an integral piece to consider when judging the quality of preparation program. The federal government and state and local policymakers increasingly emphasize outcomes and results in producing highly effective teachers that increase student achievement, turning away from inputs alone as indicators of teacher quality. The lack of clarity and transparency with regards to the common standards that NCTQ is using and the processes and procedures used to analyze the collected data make the methodology of the NCTQ study in Illinois problematic. While the study provides a high-level look across teacher education program models, its methodology flaws ultimately limit the validity of the study's conclusions and make the findings somewhat unreliable. ***Eduventures analysts recommend that policymakers, the public, and the press should keep these limitations in mind when reviewing the results of the NCTQ study.***

*For more information regarding Eduventures, the Schools of Education Learning Collaborative, or to speak with the team of analysts that evaluated the Illinois NCTQ study's methodology, please contact Mindy L. Anastasia, Senior Analyst, at [manastasia@eduventures.com](mailto:manastasia@eduventures.com).*

## Appendix

### Background on NCTQ

The National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) is a non-profit organization founded in 2005 and based in Washington, DC. NCTQ advocates for reforms on a broad range of teacher policies at the federal, state, and local levels. According to its website, the organization's mission is "to provide an alternative national voice to existing teacher organizations, and build the case for a comprehensive reform agenda [to] challenge the current structure and regulation of the profession." NCTQ aims to build the case for comprehensive reform within what it recognizes as the four sets of institutions that have the greatest impact on teacher quality: states, teacher preparation programs, school districts and teachers' unions.

### Standards used by NCTQ in the Illinois study

#### 1. Preparation standards for ALL teachers

**Selectivity:** Evidence that the institution has adequate admission standards, restricting admissions to students who were in the top half of college-going high school peers, as well as providing a flexible program of study tailored to students' knowledge and skill level (1) (high weighting); that courses are sufficiently rigorous, reflecting college-level work (2) (low weighting); and that the institution seeks to set a higher standard for program completion than licensure requires (3) (moderate weighting).

**21<sup>st</sup> Century teaching:** Evidence that the institution places high priority on imparting an understanding of the world, its history and cultures to all students enrolled in the institution, including teacher candidates (1); that teacher candidates acquire specific knowledge of the traditions, culture, and languages of principal minority and ethnic groups residing in the state (2) (low weighting); that teacher candidates become familiar with the most critical education issues of the day, notably the "achievement gap" (4) (low weighting); that the needs of English language learners are fully embedded in instruction (5) (low weighting); and that applications of technology are integrated into the pedagogy associated with specific content areas (6) (low weighting).

**Student teaching:** Evidence that the institution has a strong student teaching model conveying a commitment to training students in high performing high needs schools that is preceded by early and efficient exposure to field-work (1) (moderate weighting); that requires a full-time, primarily local clinical experience (2) (moderate weighting); that carefully screens and qualifies experienced cooperating teachers in the partner school (3) (moderate weighting); and that the structure of the degree requirements make it possible for a student who is unsuccessful in student teaching to qualify for a college degree (4) (moderate weighting).

**Program Evaluation:** Evidence that the institution tracks graduate outcomes such as employment and retention (1) (low weighting); and that the institution fully utilizes any available data from the state or districts to measure the quality of its teacher program graduates and adjust accordingly (2) (low weighting).

**Faculty:** Evidence that preponderance of the coursework is taught by faculty members who are permanently employed by the institution (1) (low weighting); and that the institution does not expect faculty members to teach multiple disparate disciplines (2) (low weighting).

**Professional Training:** Evidence that pedagogical training is age specific where advantageous and that teacher candidates obtain a solid understanding of all types of classroom assessments and acquire an ability to analyze student data (1) (low weighting); that the institution requires the teacher candidates to

understand key principles from cognitive psychology about how human beings learn and children develop (2) (low weighting); classroom management (3) (low weighting); and special education (4) (low weighting); that professional preparation is delivered efficiently (5) (low weighting); and that all required courses are offered at least once a year (6) (low weighting).

## **2. Standards specific to elementary teachers**

Evidence that elementary teacher candidates receive a broad liberal arts education, appropriately focused on the background knowledge relevant to elementary grades (1) and an area of concentration (2) (moderate weighting); that the institution prepares its elementary teachers in scientifically-based reading instruction (3) (high weighting); that the institution provides adequate preparation in the specific mathematics content needed by elementary teachers (4) (high weighting); and that the institution provides effective methods (5) (low weighting).

## **3. Standards specific to secondary teachers**

Evidence that the institution provides adequate subject area preparation (1) (low weighting), and effective subject methods (2) (low weighting), including teaching reading in the subject area (3) (low weighting).

## **4. Standards specific to special education teachers<sup>2</sup>**

Evidence that special education teacher candidates receive a broad liberal arts education (1) (moderate weighting); that the institution dedicates resources to meeting state needs for special educators (2) (low weighting); that special education teacher certificates are prepared to employ scientifically based reading instruction (3) (high weighting); that there is adequate preparation in mathematics (4) (high weighting); and that pedagogical training geared to the specific knowledge and skills needed by special education teachers at the elementary and secondary level, including behavioral analysis and modification (5) (low weighting).

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<sup>2</sup> NCTQ is not analyzing the quality of the programs designed to train teachers for low incidence education, such as teaching students who are blind, deaf or have serious cognitive impairments.