# NCATE NEWS

# **Testing Does Not Equal Teaching:**

## One Test Does Not Make a Highly Qualified Teacher

### **Arthur E. Wise**

new organization, the American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence (ABCTE), has announced plans to develop a national teacher test. There is much to recommend national norms on teacher tests. Currently, state cut-off scores preclude a comparison of the scores of candidates in different states even on the same test. A national test will apply a common yardstick to the knowledge of candidates in Maryland or Mississippi.

But the teaching field is already served by two testing companies. Though these two national companies offer teacher tests to the states, they do not provide a national yardstick. One of these companies, ETS, is working with the profession to establish national norms on the Praxis tests in the various disciplines.

ABCTE is driven by an agenda different from adding to those tests already in the marketplace. It is the deregulation of state licensing for teachers. This effort undermines the hard work that the teaching profession

has undertaken during the past two decades to strengthen preparation, licensing, and certification.

ABCTE's stated goal is "to identify and certify well prepared teachers who may not have gone through traditional teacher preparation institutions," and to "facilitate entry of new people into the teaching profession. For beginning teachers, 'Passport Certification' will open up opportunities to teach across the nation." For administrators, it will signify "that a job candidate is a highquality, effective professional ready to contribute significantly to student learning."The Board continues, "When hires must be made quickly, instead of the anxiety of hiring candidates with 'emergency certificates,' schools will have the assurance that passportcertified teachers are qualified and knowledgeable individuals." But how will they know?

Basically, ABCTE is proposing that college graduates take a test on a computer that will assess content knowledge and teaching skills. ABCTE will face quite a challege in assessing the personal and interpersonal skills and dispositions

required of teachers in today's classrooms. If the individuals pass the test, as well as a background check, they are then 'certified.' ABCTE does not require that prospective teachers have worked with children or youth or successfully completed an internship in schools. It does not require that they show any evidence that they can help students learn.

ABCTE has moved quickly to try to convince states to accept its simplistic approach to certification. At least one state says it will use the Board's test as a tool to meet NCLB's challenge that every child has a highly qualified teacher. It has done so before the test has been developed, tested, and found to be reliable and valid.

The issue is not a national test for teachers; it is how the Board intends it to be used as a teaching certificate, enabling individuals without preparation to enter the classroom not merely as "certified," but as "highly qualified."

This is not how states certify people to practice medicine, law, psychology, dentistry, and the other professions. Licensing in other professions is a careful enterprise, requiring graduation from an accredited program of study, a substantial internship experience, and a licensing process that is not limited to a multiple choice test, but includes multiple measures of knowledge, skills, and performance over a period of time.

Teacher licensing now measures only some of these important factors and needs to measure more. Careful preparation is the foundation for licensing in the established professions. It is why Americans place trust in professionals such as doctors, nurses, engineers, and veterinarians. Yet ABCTE appears ready to entrust the minds of the next generation to those who pass a multiple choice test.

Let's look at the data on the effects of teacher preparation.

### 1. Teacher Retention

Richard Ingersoll of the University Pennsylvannia conducted study on teacher attrition for the National Commission on Teaching and American's Future. He found that teacher preparation programs significantly reduce attrition of first vear teachers—from 25 percent among those individuals who are unprepared—to 12 percent among those who have prepared. Teacher preparation performs a vital function. It helps reduce the cost to school districts of hiring, training, and replacing teachers. It can reduce the cost of the constant churning in schools when more than one-third of teachers are either moving in or out. The biggest cost of hiring unprepared teachers is the cost to the students. Many in inner cities are taught by unlicensed, unprepared first-year recruits year after year, with the predicable resultfailing teachers teach already failing students, who experience more failure.

#### 2. Teacher Effectiveness

A study recently released by the Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning in California documented that students in schools with high percentages of unprepared teachers have a high probability of failing the state's high school exit test. If 21 percent of a school's teachers lack a full credential, at least 75 percent of sophomores fail the math portion of the test. The preponderance of research evidence reinforces common sense—that those who are prepared help students learn better. In addition, those teachers who have prepared pass existing state examinations at a much higher rate (91 percent) than those who have not prepared (73 percent).

With this information, why would anyone embrace a system that does not include high quality preparation? One answer is that it is cheap—and seemingly convenient. With teaching being a job in which almost half of those hired leave within five years, new recruits are always needed. The 'test-only' system keeps the revolving door going at an even faster rate. It also provides a veneer of respectability to 'quick-fix' alternate routes.

The ABCTE addresses the 'supply' side of the issue: "there is a need for more teachers...and soon." But it fails to address why many who are prepared never enter the profession, and also why so many leave the profession so soon, costing districts millions of dollars in hiring and professional development money. The problem, as NCTAF as recently shown, is not supply but retention. The solution is not to push more individuals through the revolving

door; the solution is to reform teaching so that more who enter will stay in the school building rather than be propelled back out the revolving door.

States that use the test to certify individuals without any preparation are undermining the hard work of the teaching profession during the past two decades. The profession has, in the space of 20 years, set standards for P–12 students in the various subject areas, set corresponding standards for teacher preparation and initial teacher performance, and set benchmarks for accomplished teaching performance.

proposal ABCTE's sets up individuals and systems for failure. It proposes that those who pass a test of content knowledge can simply walk in and teach. When they try, they find out that teaching is the hardest work they've ever done and for low pay at that. Many unprepared individuals are gone by winter break. The stress on the unprepared individual, not to mention the children who are not learning, is mirrored in the test scores of students who cannot score at the 'basic' level on achievement tests most in the inner cities and rural areas.

Placing unprepared individuals in hard-to-staff schools is a prescription for increasing the achievement gap ...and leaving many children behind.

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