



**NCATE**

The Standard of Excellence  
in Teacher Preparation

## **Meeting Urgent National Needs in P-12 Education: Improving Relevance, Evidence, and Performance in Teacher Preparation**

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## **Moving to Excellence in Teacher Preparation: A Core Value of NCATE Accreditation**

Beginning this year, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) is implementing a new approach to ensuring quality in programs that prepare the vast majority of the nation's teachers, school leaders, and education specialists in the United States. The redesigned NCATE accreditation process is designed to help educator preparation programs attain excellence and help to meet urgent national needs.

In the past, the accreditation process put a premium on compliance and included some reporting requirements that did not necessarily lead programs toward excellence or increase teacher candidates' impact on schools and learning. In addition, the accreditation process enabled institutions to think they were 'done' once they earned accredited status, and did not do enough to encourage educator preparation programs to tackle complex challenges confronting P-12 schools. Meanwhile, though teacher education programs have focused significant attention on measuring teacher and program performance in recent years, some research institutions that prepare teachers have not put their powerful research capacity to use to further the development of evidence-based practice in teaching and learning in schools or teacher preparation.

The new requirements seek to change that. Under the new approach to quality assurance, institutions will no longer be given the NCATE seal of approval for simply meeting an 'acceptable' level of performance against NCATE standards. Beginning this year, NCATE expects institutions to either demonstrate continuous improvement toward excellence or successfully complete a challenging transformation initiative. Under this initiative, teacher education programs will be required to stimulate comprehensive changes in their programs focused on:

- ✧ addressing critical needs of schools, such as recruiting talented teachers and bolstering teacher retention;
- ✧ strengthening the clinical focus of their programs to better prepare educators to meet the needs of today's P-12 students and foster increases in student learning;
- ✧ demonstrating the impact of their programs and graduates on P-12 student learning;
- ✧ increasing knowledge about what works in teacher education to improve P-12 student learning, using a research and development strategy to build better knowledge and help institutions use that knowledge to improve programs; and
- ✧ other similar goals focused on urgent needs.

### **Focus on Clinical Experience**

The new approaches are designed to ensure that teacher education is relevant to classrooms of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They push teacher education programs to close the gap between theory and practice, coursework and classroom, preparation and induction. In the past, accreditation wrapped clinical experience around coursework. The new approach will reverse the priority, encouraging institutions to place teacher candidates in more robust clinical experiences, and wrap coursework around clinical practice.

The focus on clinical experience is in line with the Obama Administration's focus on teacher quality. The Higher Education Opportunity Act will set aside more than \$100 million for Teacher Quality Development grants which involve year-long residency programs. To encourage this shift, NCATE will soon launch a National Task Force on Clinical Preparation, Partnerships, and P-12 Student Learning. The task force will be charged to (1) identify successful school-based preparation programs and strong university-school partnerships, (2) explore better ways to build capacity within institutions preparing teachers and other P-12 educators so that they are able to transform existing programs and structures, and (3) help clinical programs and networks share successful strategies.

### **Continued Focus on Performance**

The redesign of the accreditation process assures more high quality through greater transparency around crucial performance data. NCATE was an early leader in measuring what graduates of preparation programs know and can do, rather than relying on what courses they have taken. NCATE's focus on assessment of teacher candidate performance, since the initiation of its performance-based standards in 2000, has been an important impetus in moving teacher preparation to focus on demonstrable evidence of ability to help P-12 students learn. An increased reliance on performance assessment continues to be a key feature of the redesigned NCATE accreditation system, and the new requirements underscore the importance of evidence of results.

The changes will affect all of the nearly 700 educator preparation programs that NCATE accredits. These programs graduate nearly two-thirds of the new teachers, leaders and education specialists prepared each year – approximately 140,000 candidates who come through 10,000-plus programs in the nearly 700 institutions.

NCATE's announcement outlines what is essentially a new way of doing business. This paper cites examples of what some institutions are doing that already meet these new expectations and identifies the values upon which NCATE's redesign has been built. These examples can potentially serve as national models for other institutions as they begin reaccreditation efforts.

### **NCATE's Transformation Initiative: Connecting to Urgent Local, State, and National Needs**

NCATE's redesigned process offers continuing institutions the option to exercise leadership with a 'Transformation Initiative' that is designed to stimulate projects which contribute to the knowledge base of effective practice and/or focus on the simultaneous transformation of educator preparation and P-12 schools.

Initiatives must relate to one or more of the NCATE standards and address major issues and challenges in educator preparation and quality. The initiative plan must be approved by NCATE. Examples of potential initiatives cover a broad range of categories, of which the following are examples currently being developed.

## **1. Improving Relevance**

To better strengthen the connections between education programs and the needs of schools, initiatives can include:

- a) *robust clinical preparation, including educator preparation in school settings and*
- b) *stronger preparation in assessment to improve student learning.*

### **Example:**

The **Tennessee Board of Regents Teacher Education Redesign** eliminates traditional university classroom seat time for teacher candidates, streamlining these experiences into participatory, student-directed learning in authentic school settings. The TBR redesign will be the focus of NCATE reaccreditation for all schools involved in the initiative. Information can be accessed at [www.tbr.edu](http://www.tbr.edu).

- ✧ The TBR redesign involves teacher residents being engaged in a comprehensive year-long teaching residency occurring during the undergraduate senior year.
- ✧ Preparation for pedagogy occurs primarily in actual teaching settings under collaborative supervision of university faculty and mentor teachers, and is structured around authentic experiences to attain learning outcomes.
- ✧ Teacher residents' tasks will be aligned with identified school priorities and needs rather than being linked to traditional "college courses." The focus of all aspects of the partnership will be on improved teaching and learning.
- ✧ An elaborate evaluation design is included as part of the initiative.

## **2. Increasing Knowledge about What Works in Teacher Education**

Accreditation can play a significant role increasing the knowledge base for teaching and learning and for improving teacher education programs themselves. Some institutions will pursue transformation initiatives that bring research to bear on:

- a. *Understanding best practices in an area of discipline.*
- b. *Exploring follow-up performance data and its effective use in improving educator preparation.*

### **Example: University of San Diego**

The **University of San Diego** is conducting a research study on four variations of clinical experiences and structures to determine whether there are differences in candidate performance. Candidate records will be examined to compare performance of candidates taking varied sequences of courses that include observation, practicum, and full-time student teaching.

Data to be collected includes candidate course sequences for two years of candidates who have taken the California PACT Assessment, and scores on each competency section of the performance assessment. USD will determine if there are performance differences on specific competencies between groups of candidates who take courses in the intended sequence (courses with observation, practicum, field experiences) or alternate sequences (e.g. practica, courses with observation, field experience; practicum, field experience, courses with observation or taking practicum and courses with observation concurrently).

Faculty will examine the results and changes in curricula will be driven by the data on candidate and P-12 student performance.

This initiative will build knowledge about clinical practice in educator preparation. The effort and its results will be a central part of USD's NCATE reaccreditation documentation.

### **3. Addressing Crucial Needs of Schools**

Schools face tremendous challenges, and effective teacher education must step into the breach to work side-by-side with P-12 educators to address a broad range of issues, from school organization and teacher development to strengthening pathways into teaching to bring new talent into the field. Specifically, transformation initiatives will help establish:

- a. *Partnerships with P-12 schools and school districts to address the transformation of student learning and the conditions that support learning, such as school organization, learning environments, community and family engagement, and other district/school/ and student specific issues of major magnitude.*
- b. *Partnerships with P-12 schools to address the challenge of improving student readiness for post-secondary education.*
- c. *Partnership with P-12 schools to improve the retention of educators in schools.*
- d. *Effective recruitment efforts to ensure that schools have a diverse, highly qualified group of candidates to become teachers.*

#### **Examples:**

**CommPACT Schools** is a five-year school reform program headed by the **University of Connecticut's Neag School of Education** to raise student achievement in high-need urban schools. The model is being piloted in eight schools in Connecticut's poorest cities and is expected to impact approximately 17,000 students. The Neag School's Institute for Urban School Improvement serves as the independent support center for the CommPACT Schools, providing expertise in data-gathering and analysis, priority-setting, and designing professional development to support research-based practices. The Institute for Urban School Improvement assigns site developers who provide on-site coaching and support. The Neag School plans a Transformation Initiative for its NCATE reaccreditation documentation with CommPACT as the focus—helping to solve an urgent need.

The **University of Cincinnati College of Education** is leading a comprehensive transformation initiative to respond to high needs schools and populations in the districts surrounding it. Beginning with an intense focus on the transformation of two urban elementary schools and an urban high school, the partnership's mission is to produce and support engaged teachers for urban settings who embrace the moral imperative to be change agents aspiring to meet the needs of every student through evidence-based practices. The college of education's reaccreditation through NCATE will document changes in P-12 student learning where candidates are placed.

In 2008-2009, 16 teachers at the partner school, Taft STEM Elementary, received robust professional

development around assessment and curriculum planning, infusion of technology and evidence-based strategies to teach all learners. In tandem, several University of Cincinnati candidates were placed in in-depth clinical experiences at Taft.

The result: Improved P-8 student learning outcomes are being documented in the year-end data from the first school to be redesigned, Taft Elementary. In 2008-09, benchmark scores indicated marked improvement in many areas, including Literacy scores in Kindergarten, Grades 3, 6 and 7 and Math scores in Grades 4-7. Science scores in Grades 5 and 8 also improved dramatically during the school year.

#### **4. Demonstrating Performance**

NCATE encourages institutions to develop Transformation Initiatives in these areas as well:

- a. *Evidence of the value-added of accreditation in improving student learning.*
- b. *Validity studies of performance assessments or other research on assessment and evidence of candidate ability to facilitate P-12 learning.*

#### **Commitment to Inclusivity, Partnerships, Collegiality and Cost-Effectiveness**

In addition to the core value of excellence, the redesign effort aims to further advance NCATE's commitment to three additional core values of inclusivity and partnerships, collegiality, and cost-effectiveness.

##### **Inclusivity and Partnerships**

Accreditation exists in a mixed market of providers. The NCATE of the future will include providers of educator preparation outside of colleges and universities. Two non-university providers are candidates for accreditation; discussions are underway with a number of others. It is important that these organizations also meet high quality standards. Accrediting high quality alternative providers and forging partnerships among all providers and school districts must be encouraged and implemented. Recognizing high quality innovations that can be brought to scale should be part of the work of accreditation, whether the innovations exist within institutions of higher education or within other providers. Attempting to differentiate between 'alternate' providers and 'traditional' university providers leads to a false dichotomy, as many universities offer multiple pathways to the education profession. More partnerships between higher education and other providers in the future may contribute to building models of educator preparation that incorporate new practices in recruitment, preparation, mentoring, and other components of effective preparation.

##### **The Role of Partnerships with States to Achieve the Goals of the Redesign**

NCATE wants to work collaboratively with states to improve policy that supports high quality educator preparation. We currently have a regulatory patchwork of policies on educator preparation; we need a new regulatory framework. It is time for all programs to be measured against high standards, regardless of pathway. State policies around preparation, recruitment, licensing, induction, and professional development are not now closely aligned. NCATE and the states and school districts can work together

to improve teacher quality along the continuum of preparation and development.

Current partnerships between NCATE and the states, which have helped to unify state and national professional expectations, will be extended as NCATE's redesign takes shape and is implemented. The states and NCATE will need to work together in close partnership as institutions develop Transformation Initiatives through NCATE's redesign. The institution initiatives should create synergies among the districts, their P-12 schools, universities, and other community partners.

NCATE and its State Partners can work together to ensure that all providers produce results which help P-12 student achievement improve. With the advent of state databases which can track teachers, the educator preparation programs from which they graduate, and P-12 student performance, the states and NCATE have new tools to use as they evaluate programmatic effectiveness.

## **Collegiality**

Accreditation must create perceived value for educator preparation to help leaders improve their programs. The system should systematically share knowledge and expertise.

The redesigned NCATE accreditation process helps educator preparation programs focus on continuous improvement and offers formative features which enhance a professional collegial review.

The redesign creates multiple points of contact over the seven year cycle, and helps avoid accreditation as a onetime periodic event. This should make accreditation more meaningful to institutions and also improve the review process.

## **Cost-Effectiveness**

The effort, time, and cost that an organization places in an accreditation review must result in better programs. Going through accreditation must be perceived as worthwhile by participants in the process and other stakeholders.

## **Conclusion**

NCATE recognizes that the needs of students and schools are changing, and this requires changing expectations for teacher training institutions. The new processes force institutions to stretch in the most crucial areas where schools have urgent needs. This effort to reshape teacher accreditation will further encourage more research on what works in teacher education and provide the data to ensure that the public and policymakers have confidence in the nation's teachers and education leaders and the programs that prepare them.

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