

An hourglass-shaped graphic with a globe inside. The top bulb is dark blue, and the bottom bulb is light blue. The globe is a darker shade of blue. The hourglass is centered on the page.

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*Pass Rates as an Accountability Measure for Teacher
Education Programs*

James B. Stedman and Bonnie F. Mangan, Domestic Social Policy Division

September 22, 2004

Abstract. This report explores selected aspects of the use of teacher education graduates' pass rates as a measure of the quality of teacher education programs, considering specifically the federal requirements established in 1998, the extent to which states are using pass rates as an accountability measure for teacher education schools, and variations in how states hold teacher education programs accountable for the pass rates of their graduates. It concludes by considering issues relevant for federal policymaking in this area.

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Pass Rates as an Accountability Measure for Teacher Education Programs

Updated September 22, 2004

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Pass Rates as an Accountability Measure for Teacher Education Programs

Summary

The caliber of K-12 teacher education programs in colleges and universities has come under increased scrutiny, with particular attention being paid to the rates at which graduates of these programs pass states' initial teacher licensure or certification examinations. The Higher Education Amendments of 1998 brought federal legislation to bear on this issue. Under Title II of the Higher Education Act (HEA), higher education institutions must report the pass rates on certification exams of their teacher education graduates and states must establish procedures for identifying "low-performing" teacher education schools.

State reports filed with the U.S. Department of Education (ED) in October 2001, October 2002, and October 2003, provide data on certification exam pass rates and the extent to which states are using pass rates as a teacher education accountability measure. In 2003, 28 states reported that they had in place procedures assessing their teacher education programs that are based at least in part on the pass rates of program graduates on state teacher licensure exams. Given that these procedures differ substantially from one state to another, interstate comparisons of pass rates are at best problematic. One state's passing rate is not another state's. Further, an education school deemed low-performing by one state might not be so labeled by another.

There are a number of issues relevant to federal policymaking that may be important for the 108th Congress as it reauthorizes the HEA, such as:

- The current reporting of pass rates to ED has come under serious criticism. States and institutions that require passage of initial certification exams for program completion report 100% pass rates, raising concern about the utility of such information.
- Critics are likely to contend that pass rate-based standards fail to identify all truly low-performing programs. At the same time, states may find it difficult, politically, to classify a substantial portion of their programs as substandard.
- Do pass rate-based standards necessarily lead to substantial improvement of teacher education schools and the quality of their graduates? Licensing exams are generally viewed as not rigorous, screening out only candidates lacking basic skills and knowledge.
- Pass rate-based standards may disproportionately affect schools training minority teacher candidates.
- The use of pass rate-based standards is relatively new, making it premature at this juncture to draw firm conclusions about their merits as gauges of teacher education quality.

The House has passed legislation reauthorizing HEA Title II. Among its provisions, this legislation would require institutions and states to report the pass rates of test takers who complete at least 50% of the requirements of teacher preparation programs, not just those who complete the full program.

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Pass Rates as an Accountability Measure for Teacher Education Programs

Introduction

Policymakers at all levels have expressed concern about the quality of the teaching force in public elementary and secondary education. Many view the success of state and local efforts to improve K-12 academic performance as dependent upon the knowledge and skills of classroom teachers. As a consequence, the caliber of teacher education programs in colleges and universities has come under increased scrutiny, with particular attention being paid to the rates at which graduates of these programs pass states' initial teacher certification examinations.¹ The Higher Education Amendments of 1998 brought federal legislation to bear on this issue by requiring under Title II of the Higher Education Act (HEA) that, among other things, higher education institutions report the pass rates on licensing exams of their teacher education graduates and that states establish procedures for identifying "low-performing" teacher education schools. The 108th Congress is considering the HEA for reauthorization and is likely to deliberate over modification and continuation of these accountability provisions during this process.

On July 9, 2003, the House passed H.R. 2211 (Ready to Teach Act of 2003) which reauthorizes Title II of the HEA. This legislation includes amendments affecting the reporting of pass rates. These are discussed later in this report.²

This report explores selected aspects of the use of teacher education graduates' pass rates as a measure of the quality of teacher education programs, considering specifically the federal requirements established in 1998, the extent to which states are using pass rates as an accountability measure for teacher education schools, and variations in how states hold teacher education programs accountable for the pass rates of their graduates. It identifies several issues potentially relevant for federal policymaking in this area, particularly for the HEA reauthorization process. A concluding section highlights relevant provisions in legislation on which there has been action. This report will be updated only when relevant major events occur.

¹ The terms certification and licensure are used interchangeably in this report to describe the state-established process through which individuals gain a state license to teach.

² On June 2, 2004, the House passed H.R. 4409 (Teacher Training Enhancement Act), a nearly identical bill amending Title II. Any references in this report to the content of H.R. 2211 also apply to H.R. 4409.

Federal Requirements in the Higher Education Act

The Higher Education Amendments of 1998 (P.L. 105-244) established the Teacher Quality Enhancement Grants for States and Partnerships as Title II of the HEA. The Teacher Quality Enhancement Grant program has two main components: an array of three competitive grant programs to improve teacher preparation programs at higher education institutions and to recruit highly able individuals to teaching; and a set of broad-based teacher education accountability requirements.

Grant Programs

The three grant programs include state grants, partnership grants, and teacher recruitment grants. All of these grants have matching requirements. The statute authorizes \$300 million for FY1999 and such sums as necessary for the 4 succeeding fiscal years. The annual appropriation is divided among the three programs as follows: 45% for state grants, 45% for partnership grants, and 10% for recruitment grants. The FY2004 appropriation for these grant programs is approximately \$88.9 million.³ Grantees have certain accountability requirements, including annual reports to the Secretary of Education, the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, and the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions on progress toward certain specified objectives. One of those objectives is increasing the pass rate on initial teacher certification assessments.

Accountability Requirements for Teacher Education Programs

Certain accountability provisions included in the Teacher Quality Enhancement Grant Program are likely to affect nearly all teacher education programs in the country. The most significant of these requirements are delineated below. Deadlines for action established by the legislation were modified as noted by the U.S. Department of Education (ED).

³ Examples of the activities for which state grant funds must be used include holding teacher preparation programs accountable for the academic and teaching qualifications of the teachers they prepare; reforming teacher certification; and supporting the recruitment of teachers. Partnership grants must be used for holding teacher preparation programs accountable for the academic and teaching quality of the teachers they prepare; providing preservice clinical experience to teacher candidates; and providing professional development opportunities. Partnerships may also support such activities as teacher recruitment and leadership training to principals and superintendents. Recruitment grants, awarded to states or eligible partnerships must be used for either of the following: teacher education scholarships, as well as support services to help recipients complete college and stay in teaching, or activities enabling high need school districts and schools to recruit highly qualified teachers.

- The legislation provides that, beginning within two years after enactment of the legislation,⁴ each state receiving funds under the HEA must prepare an annual report card on the quality of teacher preparation, including such information as the pass rate on each of the assessments used for teacher certification (and ranked by individual teacher preparation program)⁵ and the extent to which certification requirements are waived, particularly for teachers serving in high and low poverty districts and in different subject areas.⁶ As implemented by ED, the deadline for the first annual state report was set at October 7, 2001 (not October 7, 2000, as stipulated in the statute).⁷ State reports were first filed in October 2001, and each year since then, also in October.⁸
- Beginning within 18 months of enactment, any higher education institution with a teacher preparation program that enrolls students aided under the HEA must release to the state and general public an annual report that includes such information as the latest annual pass rate of its graduates on certification assessments (only for those individuals taking the exam within three years of completing the program), a comparison of the program's pass rate with the average rate for all such programs in the state,⁹ whether the program has been designated as low-performing (see below) by the state, and other program information. The Secretary of Education is authorized to impose a fine of up to \$25,000 on any institution failing to provide the required information in a timely or accurate manner. As implemented, the deadline for the initial institutional

⁴ The Higher Education Amendments of 1998 were enacted Oct. 7, 1998.

⁵ The legislation provides that, if a state does not implement certification assessments or does not set a minimum level of performance on such assessments, the Secretary is required, as *practicable*, to collect data in such states that are *comparable* to the data collected in other states.

⁶ The statute provided that within six months of enactment, states were to make preliminary reports to the Secretary of Education including basic descriptive information on certification assessments and requirements, pass rates, and waivers of certification requirements.

⁷ The statutory deadlines were moved back by ED as a result of delays in its development of guidelines regarding definitions and reporting methods for information on the quality of teacher preparation programs. Such guidelines were required to have been completed within nine months of enactment (i.e., July 7, 1999), but were issued in Apr. 2000. This rescheduling of deadlines was taken in response to a request by the leaders of the U.S. House and Senate education authorizing committees (letter dated Sept. 10, 1999, from Reps. William F. Goodling and William L. Clay, and Sens. James M. Jeffords and Edward M. Kennedy, to Secretary of Education Richard Riley).

⁸ The latest state reports can found at [<http://www.title2.org>].

⁹ Teacher preparation programs with fewer than 10 graduates taking any specific initial teacher certification assessment are to provide information on their average pass rates over a three-year period.

reporting was set at April 7, 2001 (not April 7, 2000 as stipulated in the statute).

- As a condition of continued receipt of HEA funds, and within two years of enactment, a state must have established a procedure for identifying low-performing teacher preparation programs and for providing them with technical assistance. The state is required to provide the Secretary of Education annually with a list of low-performing schools, as well as any institutions at risk of such designation. The criteria for determining low performance are to be set by the states and may include criteria based on the data collected under HEA Title II. Any higher education institution with a teacher preparation program that has lost state approval or financial support because of its designation by the state as a low-performing program is ineligible for any professional development funding from ED, and cannot accept or enroll in its teacher preparation program any student receiving assistance under HEA Title IV.
- Within two years and six months of the date of enactment, the Secretary of Education was to begin publishing annual reports on the quality of teacher preparation in the U.S. These reports are to include all of the information reported in the state report cards. The statutory deadline of April 7, 2001 for the first report was rescheduled to April 7, 2002. That first report was released in June, 2002.¹⁰

State Accountability Based on Teacher Education Programs' Pass Rates

Overview of Use of Pass Rates

The state reports filed with ED in October 2001, October 2002, and October 2003, provide some data on certification exam pass rates and the extent to which states are using pass rates as an accountability measure for teacher education programs. Under HEA Title II, states are required to report on their assessment criteria and on their low-performing teacher education schools. In the 2003 report, 28 states responded to ED that their criteria for assessing teacher education programs included some consideration of pass rates on state licensure exams.¹¹

¹⁰ There have been three annual reports issued by the Secretary: *Meeting the Highly Qualified Teachers Challenge: The Secretary's Annual Report on Teacher Quality, 2002* (hereafter cited as ED, *First Annual Report*); *Meeting the Highly Qualified Teachers Challenge: The Secretary's Second Annual Report on Teacher Quality, 2003*; and *Meeting the Highly Qualified Teachers Challenge: The Secretary's Third Annual Report on Teacher Quality, 2004*.

¹¹ For this analysis, "states" include the District of Columbia in addition to the 50 states, but not Puerto Rico or any of the outlying areas.

From a review of the information submitted by the states and included in ED's annual reports (see below), it is clear that the performance on a certification assessment that is acceptable in one state is not in another. The specific minimum score considered to be a passing score on a specific licensure exam (the so-called "cut score") varies markedly, from state to state.¹²

What constitutes an acceptable pass rate for teacher preparation programs differs across the states. In Mississippi, for example, 80% of a teacher education program's graduates have to pass the relevant licensing exams for the program not to be designated as low-performing, while in Florida, the minimum pass rate to avoid being designated as low-performing is 90%.

Not only are the specific thresholds for pass rates different from one state to the next, but the particular examinations used are not the same.¹³ In Mississippi, for instance, the pass rate measure is based on graduates' performance on the Praxis II in both subject area and pedagogy tests. For continued approval of teacher preparation programs, Florida measures pass rates on the Professional Education Subtest, Subject Matter Subtest, and General Knowledge Test of the Florida Teacher Certification Examination (FTCE).

How states determine pass rates can also vary. For example, the number of years of data used in the calculation differs. In Mississippi, three years of data are used in determining the rates, while in Arizona two years are used.

States also impose different sanctions on teacher preparation programs failing to meet the pass rates and other approval standards. For compliance with title II, Maryland will identify an institution as at-risk or low-performing when an onsite visit by the Program Approval and Assessment Branch places an institution on probation. This probation is limited to one or two years with state monitoring. If conditions are not met, the State Superintendent will terminate state approval. In New Mexico, a low-performing school has to have been designated "at risk" for three years without significant improvement of its identified weaknesses, before the State Board of

¹² ED, *First Annual Report*, p.26. To illustrate how cut scores might vary, ED's report considers what is passing on the Praxis Pre-Professional Skills Test that is used in 29 states as part of the assessment of teacher candidates' basic skills in reading, math, and writing. In reading, for instance, the national median score in 1999-2000 was 179 (the score of test takers at the 50th percentile). The highest cut score set by a state was 178; 10 states had cut scores at the 20th percentile (172) or lower. Differences mark the cut scores on academic content and professional knowledge assessments, as well.

¹³ As noted by the National Research Council in its report *Testing Teacher Candidates: The Role of Licensure Tests in Improving Teacher Quality* (2001), "Among states that use tests, the type and number of required tests run the gamut from one test of basic skills ... to four different types of tests, including basic skills, subject matter knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge tests Within types, more than one test may be required." (p. 44) Nationally available exams include the Educational Testing Service's Praxis I (measuring basic academic skills) and II (measuring specific subject knowledge and knowledge about teaching those subjects) assessments, as well as assessments designed by the National Evaluation Systems. States also develop their own assessments.

Education revokes program approval. Such an institution is not allowed to admit new students. A Tennessee teacher education program where the licensing exam failure rate is 30% or more for two consecutive years loses its state certification.

To date, relatively few institutions in states using pass rates as a condition of program approval have failed to meet that standard. In 2003 only 25 schools in nine states were rated low-performing or at-risk.¹⁴ For example, Texas designated two schools as low-performing under the criteria the state has established for HEA Title II (see description of Texas policies below). Texas has a total of 118 teacher preparation programs. In New York, six schools out of 104 in the state have been rated as at-risk of being identified as low-performing (see New York description below).

As a result of the factors identified above and others, it is evident that interstate comparisons of pass rates are at best problematic. One state's passing rate is not another state's. An education school deemed low-performing by one state might not be so labeled by a neighboring state.

Annual Reports from ED

In June 2002, the ED published its first full annual report on the quality of teacher education as mandated by the HEA Title II provisions.¹⁵ This report is based on the data submitted by each state describing the quality of teacher preparation in the state, including pass rates on teacher certification assessments, waivers of certification requirements, and the identification of low-performing teacher education programs. ED concluded that the data reported under HEA Title II describe a nationwide teacher preparation system with serious limitations, particularly in light of the requirement under the No Child Left Behind Act (P.L. 107-110) that, by the end of 2005-2006 school year, all K-12 teachers in core academic subjects must be highly qualified.¹⁶

Specifically with regard to certification assessments, ED found that, despite a plethora of assessments, the states, almost without exception, set the scores needed to pass well below national averages. It asserted, "States typically use licensure examinations to ensure that teachers have a minimum level of knowledge. But what states consider 'minimum' is often shockingly low."¹⁷

ED was particularly critical of the data some states submitted on the pass rates of graduates from teacher preparation programs. Although the Title II legislation

¹⁴ New York, six schools; Kansas, four schools; Illinois and Ohio, three schools each; North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas, two schools each; and Maryland, one school.

¹⁵ ED, *First Annual Report*.

¹⁶ CRS Report RL30834, *K-12 Teacher Quality: Issues and Legislative Action*, by James B. Stedman.

¹⁷ ED, *First Annual Report*, p. 23.

requires teacher preparation programs to report on the pass rate of “graduates,”¹⁸ in implementing this provision, ED defined this term as “program completer” in light of differences among institutions in terms of who might be considered a graduate. As a consequence, institutions that required passage of the initial certification exam as a condition for “program completion” had 100% pass rates. Coupled with low threshold scores for passing, ED found that nationwide “93 percent of prospective teachers passed various state examinations necessary for initial certification.”¹⁹

ED noted that one possible response to the prospect that more institutions and states will define program completer as someone who passes the certification assessments would be to also require the reporting of the pass rates of “program participants” for the *initial* time they took the certification assessment.

ED’s second full annual report, issued in 2003, largely reiterated many of the critical findings included in the first report. While the third annual report, issued in 2004, identified similar ongoing problems, it appeared to emphasize that progress was being made.

GAO Analysis of Title II Pass Rate Data

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) reported in December, 2002, on the initial implementation of the Teacher Quality Enhancement Grant program, including the Title II accountability provisions.²⁰ GAO concluded:

The information collected as part of the accountability provisions did not allow Education to accurately report on the quality of teacher training programs and the qualifications of current teachers in each state.²¹

GAO pointed to ED’s definitions of various terms, particularly the term “program completer,” as contributing to the data problems. According to GAO, states and institutions were able to use these definitions to make teacher preparation programs “seem more successful than they might have been.”²²

Procedures and Policies of Selected States

To illustrate the variation among states, the procedures and policies in three states are reviewed below. Many of the general findings presented above are demonstrated in these descriptions. These states are among those that have been

¹⁸ HEA Title II, Section 207(f)(1)(A).

¹⁹ ED, *First Annual Report*, p. 25.

²⁰ Government Accountability Office, *Activities Underway to Improve Teacher Training, but Reporting on These Activities Could Be Enhanced*, GAO-03-6, Dec. 2002. (Hereafter cited as GAO, *Activities Underway to Improve Teacher Training*.) This report was issued prior to the GAO’s name being changed from the General Accounting Office to the Government Accountability Office.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 25.

implementing pass rate-based accountability for their teacher education programs the longest.²³

New York. Under Section 52.21 of the Commissioner’s Regulations, the New York State Commissioner of Education evaluates the curricula in teacher education programs and outlines standards for institutional accountability of teacher education programs. In accordance with regulations that went into effect September 21, 1999: at least 80% of the graduates of a New York state teacher education program who take the New York State Teacher Certification Examination (NYSTCE) or relevant Praxis II exams must attain a passing score, or the New York State Education Department (NYSED) will conduct a registration review of the program. By the end of 2004, education programs must be accredited by an acceptable professional education accrediting body or the Board of Regents.

NYSED tracks the number of students who complete an institution’s teacher education program as well as the number and percent who take and pass the NYSTCE Liberal Arts and Sciences Test (or the Praxis II Communications Skills Test and the General Knowledge Test) and the NYSTCE Assessment of Teaching Skills — Written (or the Praxis II Professional Knowledge Test). Summary pass rates (the ones used to rate institutions) are based on the performance of graduates on the tests they took (one or more of the tests identified above).²⁴ For 2003, six New York colleges had summary pass rates of less than 80% and are listed as “at-risk” in the Title II state report.

If an institution undergoes a registration review, it must submit a corrective action plan within four months of being notified that it did not meet the 80% pass rate on the teacher certification examination. The state department of education establishes a time frame for the plan’s implementation and assesses the progress made by the teacher education program within three years of its initiation. If a program that is under registration review ultimately fails to meet the 80% pass rate it can be denied re-registration. This denial of re-registration means that the institution has to cease operation of the program, and assist students already enrolled in the program to find other means of completing their studies. For purposes of HEA Title II, teacher preparation programs failing to meet the 80% pass rate are deemed at risk of being designated low-performing. Low-performing status is then determined for such institutions by the re-registration review. As a result, the nine programs with summary pass rates of less than 80% are designated at risk, and no programs are currently identified as low-performing.

Texas. In responding to the requirements of HEA Title II, Texas has established a process for identifying schools as “low-performing” that differs somewhat from the state accountability system first legislated in 1995. Elements of both are described below.

²³ The descriptions below for each state are based on the provisions in state statutes, regulations, and policies, as well as on the information provided by states to ED in Oct. 2001, and Oct. 2002.

²⁴ New York State Teacher report, program year 1999-2000, [<http://www.highered.nysed.gov/tcert/respublic/heir99-00.htm>].

Accountability System for Educator Preparation. As part of a rewrite of the Texas Education Code in 1995, Texas established the State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) to oversee all aspects of certification of public school educators. This same legislation mandated an accountability system for teacher education programs.²⁵ The SBEC's rules governing educator certification are codified in the Texas Administrative Code in Title 19, Part VII, Chapters 225-250.

The SBEC "monitors the quality of educator preparation at university and alternative certification programs through the Accountability System for Educator Preparation (ASEP)."²⁶ By using assessment data from the Examination for the Certification of Educators in Texas (ExCET), Texas Oral Proficiency Test (TOPT), and Texas Assessment of Sign Communication (TASC and TASC-ASL) and the performance of beginning teachers, the SBEC assesses program quality and reports annually on Texas teacher education programs. Beginning in the fall of 2002, the ExCET tests are to be phased out and replaced by the Texas Examinations of Educator Standards (TexES) by fall of 2005.

Following procedures outlined in the Texas Administrative Code, the SBEC classified schools as "Accredited," "Accredited — Under Review," or "Not Accredited." To be accredited a teacher education program must submit performance data on the certification exams disaggregated by sex and ethnicity.²⁷ The data must show a pass rate for all candidates and each subgroup of at least 70% on all tests taken during the academic year prior to the accreditation rating, or a *cumulative* pass rate of at least 80% on all tests taken for the two years prior to the accreditation rating. Significantly, the test takers whose performance is measured under ASEP include not only those seeking the initial or base teaching license, but also individuals seeking to add a specialization or endorsement to their stand-alone licenses (e.g., a teacher with a stand-alone license of "elementary self-contained" may seek a specialization such as "elementary Spanish").

Teacher education schools that do not meet the pass rate-based standard receive a classification of "Accredited — Under Review" and are assisted by an oversight team appointed by the SBEC. Failure to meet the standard for a second consecutive year leads to appointment of an administrator over the program. If a teacher preparation program receives an "Accredited — Under Review" classification for three consecutive years, it then receives a "Not Accredited" rating. Currently enrolled students may complete the program and be recommended for certification. A school classified as "Not Accredited" must wait three consecutive years before applying to the SBEC for a new rating of "Accredited — Preliminary Status."

Beginning in September 2002, teachers who met their certification requirements September 1, 1999 or later will be assessed on their teaching performance in their

²⁵ Texas Education Code, Chapter 21, Subpart B, Section 21.045.

²⁶ Texas State Board for Educator Certification, General Information, [<http://www.sbec.state.tx.us/SBECOnline/about/agencywork.asp>].

²⁷ The demographic groups include all students, African-American, Hispanic, white, other, male, and female.

area of certification. This performance assessment becomes part of each education school's accreditation rating.

In the ASEP accreditation ratings and performance summary issued November, 2001, 76 of the 86 programs reviewed by the SBEC were classified Accredited; 10 were classified as Accredited — Under Review. Of those 10 programs, two are in their second year of review and one is under review for the third year.

HEA Title II System. According to the Texas submission to ED in October 2002, one of the primary differences between the ASEP and HEA Title II systems is that the former bases its evaluation of teacher education programs on the performance by candidates for their initial, stand-alone license, as well as, current teachers pursuing specializations or endorsements for their license. Texas concluded that HEA Title II regulations do not allow for the inclusion of the latter test takers in the pass rate calculations.

The first designation of programs as “low-performing” or “at risk of being low-performing” under Texas’ HEA Title II procedures was made in October 2002. The “at risk” designation was applied to programs based on pass rates of all initial test takers, not individual subgroups. Using the criteria of a program having two consecutive years with initial pass rates below 70% and cumulative pass rates below 80%, Texas designated one education program at risk. One education program failed to meet this standard for three consecutive years and was classified as low-performing. In 2003 Texas designated two schools as “low-performing.”

North Carolina. In June 1997, North Carolina enacted the Excellent Schools Act. Components of the Excellent Schools Act included general knowledge tests for teachers in low-performing schools to assure teacher competency; and annual performance reports to the State Board of Education (SBE) from all teacher education programs in North Carolina institutions of higher education.²⁸

Under the terms of the Excellent Schools Act, all North Carolina teacher education programs are to provide performance reports based on a common format to the SBE. The SBE was mandated to review teacher education programs and the process of accrediting them “to ensure that the programs produce graduates that are well prepared to teach.”²⁹ Some of the elements to be included in the teacher education performance reports include graduation rates; time-to-graduation rates; average scores of graduates on certification exams; and percentage of graduates receiving initial certification. As is described below, the pass rates on initial licensing exams are but one factor in determining whether a teacher education program is considered low-performing.

The IHE (Institutions of Higher Education) Performance Report rates the state’s teacher education programs by three overall criteria: “compliance with state and national accreditation standards, the quality of program completers, and involvement

²⁸ North Carolina Gen. Stat. §115C-105.38A and §115C-296 (b).

²⁹ North Carolina Gen. Stat. §115-296 (b1).

with and service to public schools.”³⁰ Schools are awarded points based on meeting or exceeding the criteria, with 150 points being the highest attainable. “Low-performing” schools are those scoring less than the minimum standard of 105 points. Teacher preparation programs are liable for sanctions including revocation of approval by the SBE.³¹ If an institution receives a rating of “Does Not Meet Criterion” on any of the three broad criteria of the Performance Report, it must submit a written plan to the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) detailing plans to correct the deficiencies. If a program has two consecutive assessments of “Does Not Meet Criterion” then the DPI will conduct an on-site review which could result in the closure of a licensure program.³²

The broad criterion gauging “quality of program completers” includes seven criteria on which each teacher education program is rated. A program that fails to meet the standard for a particular criterion receives 0 points for that factor. If it meets the standard for the criterion, it receives 5 points. An institution exceeding the standard receives 10 points. Two of those seven criteria are based on the percentage of a program’s completers who pass specific licensing exams — their Principles of Learning and Teaching exam and their specialty area licensing (Praxis II) exams. Each of these criteria is met if 70%-85% of the completers pass those exams and exceeded if the pass rate is higher than 85%. With a pass rate below 70%, a program earns no points for this criterion.

The fifth IHE Performance Report rated 47 teacher education programs for 2002-2003. Beginning with this report, programs were designated as “Meeting Criteria” or as “Low Performing” with the exemplary designation dropped. Two programs were rated low-performing.³³

Selected Issues

Under the provisions of HEA Title II, the federal government will continue to focus on pass rates as a measure of accountability for teacher education programs. There are a number of issues relevant to federal policymaking that are likely to be important for the 108th Congress as it considers the HEA for reauthorization. Some of these are identified in this section.

³⁰ North Carolina State Board of Education, Department of Public Instruction, *State Board Releases First Performance Report on Teacher Education Programs*, Apr. 6, 2000. See [<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/news/99-00/040600a.html>].

³¹ North Carolina General Statutes §115C-296 (b1). Mary Elizabeth Deangelis, “State Grades N.C. Colleges on Ability to Teach Teachers,” *Charlotte Observer*, Apr. 7, 2000, p. 1B.

³² North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, *North Carolina Public Institutions of Higher Education Report, 1999-2000*, Presented to the State Board of Education, Dec. 7, 2000. See [<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/ihe/2000/>] and [<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/ihe/2000/summary.html>].

³³ North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, IHE Performance Reports, 2002-2003. [<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/ihe>].

- The current reporting of pass rates to ED has come under serious criticism. As the ED annual reports have stressed, many states set the scores needed to pass the certification assessments at very low levels, thereby ensuring high pass rates. In some states, teacher candidates must pass initial licensing exams before they can enter into, or before they can graduate from, the program. As a result, pass rates of graduates in those states will be 100%. The ED and GAO reports highlight that some institutions and states have defined “program completer” for purposes of HEA Title II reporting in such a way as to achieve 100% pass rates.
- Currently, standards based on pass rates identify few schools as low-performing or in need of improvement. Critics of teacher education programs are likely to contend that these standards are failing to identify the full array of programs that should be classified as low-performing. But, it may be asked to what degree states will be able, politically, to establish standards that classify a substantial portion of their teacher education programs as substandard.
- Directly related to the issue of relatively few schools falling afoul of the pass rate-based standards is the question of whether such standards will actually lead to improvement of teacher education schools and the quality of their graduates. There is a growing body of research concluding that current licensing examinations used by most states are not rigorous, screening out only those teacher candidates lacking basic skills and knowledge.³⁴ As a consequence, even if pass rate levels are raised, they still gauge performance against a minimal standard, not one measuring high or even moderate levels of skills and knowledge. This may not mean that such a standard should be abandoned. Rather, a pass rate-based standard could be viewed as establishing the basic threshold that teacher education programs must cross as the first in an array of additional steps necessary to improve program quality.
- Pass rate-based standards, according to some critics, disproportionately affect schools training minority teacher candidates. A review of the characteristics of the student bodies at higher education institutions whose teacher education programs have failed to meet current state standards suggests this may be a real concern. For example, in Texas, the teacher education programs designated as low-performing under the criteria for HEA Title II are both at historically black colleges; both programs identified by North Carolina as low-performing are at historically black colleges; and four of the six New York institutions with teacher preparation programs designated as at risk of being designated as low-

³⁴ See, for example “The Education Trust, Not Good Enough: A Content Analysis of Teacher Licensing Examinations,” *Thinking K-16*, vol. 3, issue 1, spring 1999.

performing have institutional enrollments that are over 50% minority.³⁵

- The use of pass rate-based standards is relatively new. The data recently reported to ED suggest that such standards are not being applied in all states and, further, that the gathering and reporting of these data has proven difficult for many states. As a result, it would be premature at this juncture to draw firm conclusions about the merits of pass rates as a gauge of teacher education quality.
- Licensing exam pass rates are at present state specific. As delineated earlier, available data do not allow for interstate comparisons. Pass rate-based standards are determined and applied differently across the states. To the extent that federal sanctions are imposed based on these state standards, they will be applied inconsistently nationwide.³⁶

Reauthorization Action

This concluding section highlights relevant provisions in legislation on which there has been action during the 108th Congress.

H.R. 2211

On July 9, 2003, the House passed H.R. 2211 (Ready to Teach Act of 2003). The bill had been reported by the House Education and the Workforce Committee on June 26, 2003. This bill would amend and extend Title II of the HEA.³⁷

Among its provisions, the bill seeks to address concerns about 100% pass rates being reported by those states and teacher preparation programs requiring passage of initial certification exams as a condition of program completion. To do so, the bill would require reporting by states and institutions on the pass rates of test takers who complete at least 50% of the requirements of teacher preparation programs. Further, each institution would have to compare the average raw score on teacher certification

³⁵ The determination of minority enrollment for the New York institutions is for institutions as a whole, not specifically their teacher preparation programs.

³⁶ Possibly, the reporting of raw data on the assessment performances of teacher education graduates would permit ED or an independent entity to compare those states that use the same examination (or parts of those examinations). The 107th Congress wrestled with a similar issue for K-12 education when it deliberated on the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and the setting of student performance standards. The legislative response to potentially inconsistent state standards was to require states to also participate in a nationally based assessment program, offering a consistent national standard against which the state standards might be compared.

³⁷ As was noted previously, on June 2, 2004, the House passed H.R. 4409 (Teacher Training Enhancement Act), a nearly identical bill amending Title II. The provisions described for H.R. 2211 are also found in H.R. 4409.

exams of its students (those completing at least 50% of the teacher preparation program's requirements) with the average raw scores for other institutions in the state. State report cards would also have to include average raw score data for teacher preparation programs. The bill also would require states to include among their criteria for assessing the performance of teacher preparation programs evidence of student achievement gains. Finally, each state's governor or the entity responsible for teacher certification and preparation would have to attest as to the quality (e.g., accuracy) of the data being reported by the state to the Secretary of Education.