

THE FACTS ABOUT NCTQ'S ILLINOIS REPORT

Research has shown that no school-based factor has more impact on student achievement than the quality of the teacher. Yet there is a consensus among customers that traditional teacher preparation is not adding the value it should to ensure that every teacher graduate is as effective as possible. Many policymakers and PK-12 educators have given up on education schools. NCTQ has not.

NCTQ is a non-profit, non-partisan organization that has one goal: to ensure that every student has a quality teacher. That is why NCTQ sets the bar high for education schools. Some schools are doing their job well. We want them to be even better. Some schools are not doing their job well and we want them to improve.

Over the last six years, NCTQ has conducted reviews of teacher preparation both in a series of studies that used national samples involving a few education schools in every state as well as in seven studies involving all education schools in a given state. Consequently, we've evaluated hundreds of institutions, first focusing on the reading, mathematics and clinical preparation provided to aspiring elementary teachers, but expanding more recently to increasingly comprehensive evaluations of elementary, secondary and special education teacher preparation.

Our methodology is well-researched and extensive and we go to great lengths to create a transparent process. Our studies include multiple opportunities for education schools to both provide us with their own evidence of meeting the standards, but also to respond to our analysis.

Our approach is unique to date. We evaluate programs on the degree to which they impart the knowledge and skills needed by school districts. Our many standards add up to the complete package, addressing the issues about which superintendents and principals wonder when they consider hiring new teachers, such as: "Will a school's graduates be able to teach reading? Manage a classroom? Will they know their subject area? Have they practiced enough and under the tutelage of teachers who are themselves effective?" Our analysis probes on these topics in order to determine how effective programs are at preparing teachers for the classroom.

For more information on the process that took place in NCTQ's evaluation of Illinois education schools, please review the following facts:

The Illinois review was an in-depth analysis of many sources of data, including 3,205 files from Illinois education schools.

NCTQ's report is the product of an in-depth analysis of many sources of data that stretched over 18 months and involved review of 3,205 files from Illinois education schools. Compared to any other rating system used to evaluate higher education programs (many of which involve no

more than a form filled out by an institution), our analysis is extraordinarily comprehensive. We rated each type of certification program against no fewer than 17 standards of a full set of 39 which cover a broad range of the features of preparation. Our technical advisory panel (<http://www.nctq.org/edschoolreports/about/advisoryPanel.jsp>) has reviewed and signed off on the relative merit of each of the standards applied in Illinois, as well as our methodology and research protocols.

We based our evaluations on many different sources of data. While syllabi are sometimes cited as virtually the sole source of our data, they were just one of the sources. The syllabi that we reviewed were provided directly from education schools, not downloaded from websites. Our examination of syllabi was open-ended, looking at whatever number it took to gain an accurate picture of what an institution teaches. We might evaluate as few as four syllabi for an institution that has only one program, but have evaluated up to 46 syllabi in larger institutions offering multiple programs.

Beyond review of syllabi, we had subject-matter experts review and rate textbooks for reading and elementary mathematics courses. They examined every single textbook required for these courses -- 110 total.

Our Illinois analysis was not limited to only syllabi and texts. We also looked at student teaching placement information and handbooks; graduate and employer surveys; institutional admissions standards and an education school's own admission policy; general education course requirements; course requirements for secondary teachers in their subject area(s); professional course requirements and descriptions; graduation requirements; course schedules; teaching assignments and faculty listings. We augmented our analysis of data from these sources with additional information obtained from surveys of personnel in public school districts: principals of those schools in which a program places its student teachers and superintendents who hire a program's graduates.

NCTQ assesses the fundamental design of a teacher preparation program.

NCTQ is absolutely clear about the parameters of our analysis. We are *only* assessing the fundamentals of a program, those features of a program that are necessary—but not sufficient—to produce well prepared teachers.

The best way to explain this approach is by way of example. If we determine that a program is not requiring its elementary teachers to take a course in reading, it doesn't much matter if it offers a great reading course as an elective or that the professor teaching that course is exceptional. All that matters is that the course is not required.

Some critics of NCTQ's efforts dismiss this approach as inappropriately focusing on inputs. We do include standards looking at outputs (particularly value added data that ties teachers to student achievement), but for the most part there is limited output data available to evaluate education schools, making an approach that is only output-driven unfeasible. Nevertheless,

even when such data become more widely available, we will also still need to conduct a standards-based examination. Why? Here are a few reasons:

- A pure value-added approach runs the risk of identifying programs as high-performing when they only look good by comparison to relatively low-performing programs in the same state.
- A value added approach will teach us which are the worst programs—but we won't know how to fix them.
- Programs with tough admission standards are likely to score higher, but they may not be adding significant value.
- It's hard to parse out the impact of districts' own professional development and curricula from the impact of the preparation program.

Further, the ability to actually measure program performance through value added data analysis on a large scale statewide is at least several years away in most states, including Illinois. Can we afford to keep waiting?

NCTQ has one goal: to ensure that every student has an effective teacher.

NCTQ is transparent about our review's methodology and findings, and encourages others to conduct their own analyses. We are also transparent about our agenda: to ensure that every student has an effective teacher. Teacher preparation is obviously an important factor in that equation. While we certainly aim to identify poorly-designed programs, we also aim to defend high-quality traditional education schools from those who would paint all programs with a broad, critical brush. Our reviews do indeed show evidence that high-quality traditional teacher preparation programs exist and should be emulated.

NCTQ bends over backwards to be transparent and maintain our standards.

NCTQ is always looking for ways to refine our process and improve our analysis. Throughout our evaluation of Illinois education schools, we bent over backwards to be transparent, maintain our standards and ensure that the education schools always had information about the process.

We also went out of our way to ensure fairness in our analysis. For example, there are seven standards (out of 39) that we did not rate in this review. For those seven we provided information but no rating because: 1) we were not satisfied with the quality of data we were able to collect, 2) information alone is of sufficient value for consumers, or 3) because the standard required further development.

While NCTQ provided Illinois education schools with both draft ratings and a complete guide to the methodologies behind our ratings, this guide was not provided during our data collection phase. Doing so could have biased the nature of the materials education schools provided.

For example, three of our professional preparation standards (assessment, classroom management, and special education) have ratings criteria that penalize institutions for addressing the topic in three or more courses. Had institutions been aware of these ratings criteria, they may not have provided full information on the coursework in which these topics are addressed.

NCTQ's standards are aligned to research.

To the extent that high quality research can inform how teachers should be prepared, NCTQ uses that research to formulate standards. Unfortunately, there is not a large body of research in education that connects to teacher effectiveness. The lack of standards and research supporting almost everything that comprises teacher education were made all too clear in the exhaustive review conducted in 2004 by the American Educational Research Association. That effort reviewed every aspect of teacher preparation and found little to no support for almost all current practices.

In areas where there is strong research evidence –such as effective early reading instruction—our standards are based firmly on that evidence. Our other standards, where research is not as strong, have coalesced from research findings on teacher effectiveness, consultations with expert panels, the best practices of other nations and the highest performing states in the nation, and, most importantly, what superintendents around the country tell us they are looking for in the teachers they hire.

NCTQ's role is not that of the accreditor or state regulator.

The purpose of an NCTQ review is not to retrace the steps of accreditation teams or state regulators. But it is not just that NCTQ has a different set of standards; there are clear indications that the states' standards set a low bar and that national accreditation is of uncertain value.

For example, over the last three years, Illinois has identified just one program out of over 255 as being "at risk." Nationwide, 39 programs out of some 7,000 programs have been put on probation, and none of them has been shut down. This paucity of regulatory action may lead consumers to the false conclusion that these 7,000 programs operating out of 1,400 colleges and universities are performing at a satisfactory level.

As far as national accreditation goes, not a single study has found that an accredited school of education is of higher quality than non-accredited schools. In fact, the Illinois review found no "value added" by the national accreditation process in the 55 programs we evaluated in accredited education schools.

NCTQ openly communicated with education schools throughout the review process.

Given the highly interactive process involved in NCTQ's review, ample opportunity was provided to ensure that in the limited instances in which there was any misinterpretation of information, ratings were not impacted. Over the course of the review process, education schools were provided with two reports on what NCTQ had learned and also a report providing draft ratings. Education school staff sent NCTQ over 2,500 emails; NCTQ responded with well over 1,900 emails.

At the conclusion of the review process, to ensure the accuracy of ratings, deans of half of the education schools participated in individual 30 minute conference calls with NCTQ's senior policy director to clarify any remaining questions regarding analysis, source documents and ratings.

There were many, many exchanges with programs on how NCTQ interpreted specific syllabi or other materials. We didn't always agree with what an education school asserted, but we did make sure that we understood the content provided.

NCTQ offered every education school the opportunity to review findings and ratings and correct any errors prior to the report's release.

Every school had an opportunity to correct any errors in the report prior to release, although the interpretation of "error" for schools was clearly different from NCTQ's definition. To illustrate this point, consider the following statement from an education school about an "error" in a rating (left column) and NCTQ's response (right column). More examples of this type of communication can be found in Section 13 of the report's appendix:

http://www.nctq.org/edschoolreports/illinois/docs/illinois_report_appendix.pdf

We fail to see how the 14+ Philosophy and Religion courses [we offer] do not meet [the "world geography" requirement].

The institution's "Philosophy and Religion" department offers courses such as:

***Work Ethics** Business practices, economic trends and policies, personal deportment and interpersonal relations in the workplace invite many moral questions. A combined application of the study of moral theories and applied ethics will address contemporary issues related to work.*

An elementary teacher candidate choosing this course will not prepare herself for teaching the K-9 Illinois curriculum in world cultures and geography. The same is true for many other course choices in "Philosophy and Religion."

The number of factual errors in the Illinois review is vanishingly small.

Since the release of the final report, only two specific factual errors have been brought to our attention. One involved a mistaken rating that was corrected. In the second case, an education school was entitled the "College of Education and *Social* Services" rather than the correct "College of Education and *Human* Services."

NCTQ analysts and reviewers are up to the job.

NCTQ employs reviewers whose experience is commensurate with the requirements of the review. Obviously the qualifications of analysts who catalogue course requirements are very different from the qualifications of those who review reading textbooks, whose credentials are available in our report's appendix:

http://www.nctq.org/edschoolreports/illinois/docs/illinois_report_appendix.pdf