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# Ed School Essentials: A Review of Illinois Teacher Preparation



All institutional findings and the appendix for  
*Ed School Essentials: A Review of Illinois Teacher Preparation*  
are available online from [www.nctq.org/edschoolreports/illinois](http://www.nctq.org/edschoolreports/illinois)

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Despite more than a century of formal teacher preparation, a core program of study that aligns with what superintendents and principals say they need has yet to **EVEN BE DEFINED**, let alone **TAKE ROOT** in the nation's education schools.



# Statement of Support

The quality of a district's teachers is one of its most valuable assets. The preparation of the teachers we hire is critical to the goals that we as school superintendents share for improving educational outcomes for our students. All of us believe that having more information about the specific preparation provided by education schools from which we hire will enhance the ability of our school districts to make informed hiring decisions. The more we know, the more strategic we can be in the selection and placement of new teachers.

We endorse the goals of the National Council on Teacher Quality's project to review education schools and express our commitment to fully consider these ratings in our future recruitment strategies.



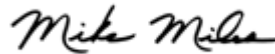
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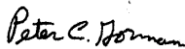
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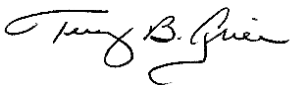
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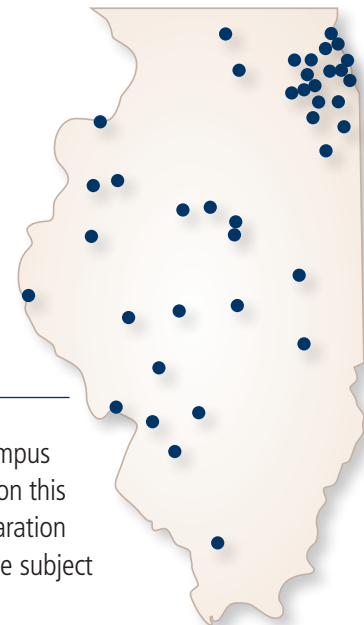
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# Ed School Essentials: A Review of Illinois Teacher Preparation

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As its name indicates, the **University of Illinois’ flagship Urbana-Champaign** campus sprawls across two cities in the flatlands of east-central Illinois. The overarching theme on this public college of education’s website is excellence. The undergraduate teacher preparation program’s home page claims that, as a graduate, “you’ll leave Illinois knowing both the subject you teach and the best ways to help your students to learn.”

Almost 200 miles north lies **Rockford College**, a nationally recognized, small private college that proudly claims Jane Addams, founder of the country’s first settlement house, as its 1882 valedictorian. The education department’s website claims that its teacher candidates will “discover and understand how children and adolescents learn, how to recognize and adjust for individual differences, how to create a positive learning environment, and how to evaluate their own teaching skills.”

Even with a more thorough search of these two websites and the documents they make publicly available, it is impossible to know how these two education schools (or any of Illinois’ 53 education schools, for that matter) differ on some of the most important aspects of teacher preparation.

The imperative for prospective teachers, school districts, Illinois policy makers and the public as a whole to know more about teacher preparation is the motivation behind the National Council on Teacher Quality’s (NCTQ) review **Ed School Essentials: A Review of Illinois Teacher Preparation**. At the request of Advance Illinois, we evaluated 111 undergraduate and graduate programs in 53 education schools as well as three “independent providers” that recruit, but do not fully prepare, teachers. Each program is evaluated against a set of standards drawn from 39 total that indicate if education schools are 1) attracting talented individuals and 2) preparing them in the *specific* ways that will make teachers more effective in the classroom.

In this review we examine in unprecedented detail programs of study at each education school to determine if candidates can acquire the knowledge and skills that school superintendents routinely wish they had acquired. By looking in detail at the design of an education schools’ program, we pursue key questions such as: Will the school’s graduates be able to teach reading or manage a classroom? Will they be sufficiently knowledgeable about

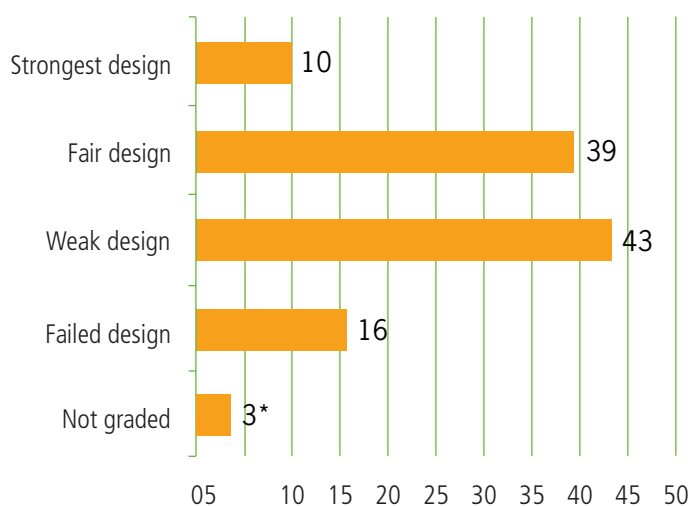
**THERE** have been many attempts over the years to identify the features of a good education school, but none is like the effort here, as both our critics and allies have aptly noticed. We have undertaken this outsized effort because, in our view, it is desperately needed.

**ILLINOIS** programs were inordinately responsive to this work, providing NCTQ with over 3,205 documents to review and trading some 4,400 emails back and forth on the analysis. Half of all deans took advantage of one-on-one phone conferences to tie up loose ends at the conclusion of the review.

their content area? Do they know about different types of assessments? Have they practiced enough and under the tutelage of teachers who are themselves effective?

Keep in mind when interpreting the results here that the point of this review is not to assess whether an Illinois education school is producing good or bad teachers. When we note the “deficiencies” of a program, the only proper conclusion to take away is that the education school in question is not doing everything possible to maximize the potential of its teacher graduates. It may be producing some very good teachers, just not as many as it could with better preparation.

### Summary performance of Illinois teacher preparation programs



\* Grades for three Olivet Nazarene University programs could not be determined because, despite repeated requests, the institution would not cooperate.

For example, it will be quickly apparent that some education schools that enjoy great reputations have received relatively low program grades. This doesn't mean that these programs don't have strengths. Our program grades reflect the fact that we simply cannot discount the importance of the most important aspects of teaching preparation and assume that weak or nonexistent instruction can be mitigated by, for example, strong clinical experiences or highly selective admissions.

The most meaningful way that we can report our findings is not by the institutions but by the programs within those institutions that we examined (undergraduate or graduate elementary, undergraduate or graduate secondary, or undergraduate or graduate special education). Concerning our grades for 111 programs (housed in 53 institutions), only one program earns a grade of A- (undergraduate secondary at **Northwestern University**), nine programs rise to the top with B grades, 39 fall in the middle with grades in the C range, 43 are unacceptably weak, and 16 fail



entirely. For one institution housing three programs, **Olivet Nazarene University**, grades could not be determined because, despite repeated requests, the institution chose not to cooperate.

The table below gives more information on the programs in each category of performance.

### Performance of Illinois education schools, by program type

Program type	Strong design	Fair design	Weak design	Failed design
Undergraduate early childhood			Columbia College Chicago Kendall College	Dominican University
Graduate early childhood				DePaul University Dominican University Erikson Institute
Undergraduate elementary	Elmhurst College Lake Forest College Loyola University Chicago University of Illinois at Chicago University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign	Augustana College Bradley University Chicago State University DePaul University Eastern Illinois University Illinois College Illinois Wesleyan University Knox College McKendree University National-Louis University Quincy University Roosevelt University Southern Illinois University Carbondale St. Xavier University University of St. Francis Western Illinois University Wheaton College	Aurora College Blackburn College Concordia University Chicago Eureka College Governors State University Greenville College Judson University MacMurray College Millikin University Monmouth College North Central College North Park University Northeastern Illinois University Northern Illinois University Principia College Rockford College Southern Illinois University Edwardsville Trinity Christian College Trinity International University University of Illinois Springfield	Illinois State University Lewis University
Graduate elementary	The University of Chicago	Northern Illinois University Rockford College	Chicago State University National-Louis University Roosevelt University Trinity International University University of St. Francis	Benedictine University Greenville College Lewis University Loyola University Chicago St. Xavier University
Undergraduate secondary	Northwestern University Principia College	Augustana College Eastern Illinois University Judson University Knox College Lake Forest College Loyola University Chicago McKendree University Millikin University	Eureka College Greenville College Illinois State University University of Illinois Springfield	
Graduate secondary	Illinois Institute of Technology University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign	National-Louis University Roosevelt University	Loyola University Chicago St. Xavier University	Chicago State University Concordia University Chicago

Undergraduate special education		Bradley University Eastern Illinois University Elmhurst University Southern Illinois University Edwardsville Trinity Christian College University of St. Francis Western Illinois University	Concordia University Chicago Lewis University Northeastern Illinois University Northern Illinois University Southern Illinois University Carbondale	Illinois State University MacMurray College
Graduate special education		Governors State University National-Louis University University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign	Chicago State University Dominican University Northeastern Illinois University Northern Illinois University University of Illinois at Chicago	Benedictine University

*Does not include the three program selected for evaluation at Olivet Nazarene University, whose grades could not be determined.*

Particular attention needs to be paid to the performance of some institutions. As the state’s largest producer of teachers, it is important to point out that **Illinois State University** ranks among the weakest institutions in the review, with exceptionally low grades in its undergraduate elementary and special education programs. Both programs simply do not teach core content in reading and mathematics. The state’s second largest producer, **Northern Illinois University** did only slightly better, with weak grades in its undergraduate elementary and both its undergraduate and graduate special education program. Again, looking at core content areas, mathematics preparation is inadequate across the board and reading preparation is inadequate in the special education programs at both degree levels.

**A full list of NCTQ standards is found at the conclusion of this report.**



## FINDINGS

When we step back from ratings and grades to take in the big picture of Illinois teacher preparation, this is what we found:

### 1. Inconsistency is the “name of the game.”

Generally, education schools in Illinois provide multiple kinds of certification—for example, offering two distinct programs to certify elementary and secondary teachers. While we did not look at all of the possible undergraduate and graduate early childhood, elementary, secondary and special education programs at any one institution, we did usually look at more than one and sometimes even up to four distinct programs.

What surprised us about these programs—all operating under the administration of the same education school—was how little they can have in common even though they purport to offer much the same coursework. This is not to say that in working for more uniform quality among programs, there is no room for innovation and creativity in teacher preparation. A teacher preparation program that is designed to address the needed fundamentals can look different from program to program and education school to education school, not cookie-cutter models. However, just as no medical school would train doctors without solid instruction in anatomy, no teacher preparation program should neglect instruction or provide inadequate instruction on fundamental content and professional skills.

Here are some examples of the many inconsistencies among programs:

#### ... IN READING

We found that most education schools in the state are not fully equipping elementary teachers or special education teachers to teach reading, and we also found many examples of institutions doing a great job with some elementary or special teacher candidates, but not all. While our “stand-out” institutions illustrate the ideal, this does not appear to be the case generally.

The range of inconsistency that we found was remarkable, as the graphic here illustrates with a few examples. Note that while **DePaul University** provides some preparation in reading for its undergraduate elementary teacher candidates, it does not require any preparation on reading instruction at all—good or bad—for graduate early childhood teacher candidates, who will certainly be teaching reading in grades K-3, the very time that children must learn how to read! **Northeastern Illinois University** ensures that its graduate special education candidates are fully prepared in reading, but does not do so for its undergraduate special education candidates. **Northern Illinois University** does not provide

#### Reading Instruction.

Fewer than one in five of the programs arm future elementary teachers with a full arsenal of knowledge needed for successfully teaching children how to read, particularly children growing up in poverty. Instead, they expose teachers to a limited set of methods that the National Institutes of Health has shown to be effective only 60 percent of the time.

**In effect, these institutions are depriving teachers of the specific knowledge and practice of methods that would be capable of yielding a significantly better success rate of up to 95 percent.**



#### STAND-OUTS

**Rockford College** very effectively prepares both undergraduate and graduate elementary teacher candidates to teach reading.

**Eastern Illinois University** does an excellent job preparing its undergraduate elementary teacher candidates to teach reading.

**READING** experts read and review every textbook required in reading courses. Only a small percentage of 104 textbooks reviewed (12 percent) accurately and comprehensively address effective reading instruction. In fact, there were only four programs that steered entirely clear of unacceptable textbooks: **Bradley University, Kendall College, Knox College** and **Rockford College**.



### STAND-OUT

**The University of Illinois at Chicago's** undergraduate elementary program is one of only two elementary or special education programs at either the undergraduate or graduate level that we evaluated that is fully preparing teacher candidates in elementary mathematics, and the design of its preparation is top-notch.

any preparation in reading to special education teacher candidates in its graduate school, although it provides some preparation for those candidates in the undergraduate program.

### Internal inconsistencies in elementary reading preparation



### ... IN ELEMENTARY MATHEMATICS

Knowing only the mechanics of arithmetic does not make for good elementary mathematics instruction. As the teacher training of other higher-performing nations suggests, elementary teachers need to acquire a deep conceptual understanding of elementary and middle school mathematics, knowledge that is generally not imparted in the course of PK-12 and college education. As many institutions nationwide have recognized, it is knowledge that must come from a series of courses tailored to the particular needs of future teachers, and most certainly not the coursework that other students on a college campus might take to fulfill a general education mathematics requirement. Yet, with two exceptions, Illinois programs either require no such coursework or too little to be able to cover all of the topics that they'll be teaching.

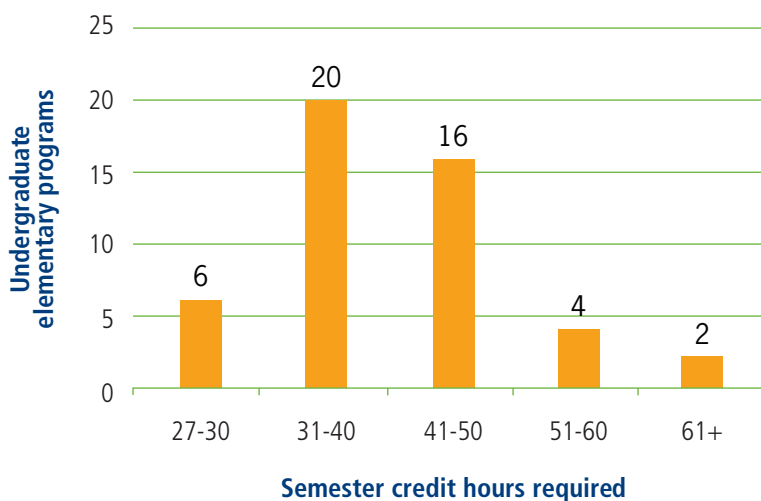
At **St. Xavier University**, for example, while elementary mathematics coursework for its undergraduate elementary teacher candidates is exemplary, their graduate counterparts aren't required to take any such coursework, nor do they have to take a test to show they have learned what the coursework would have taught.

### ... IN COURSEWORK REQUIREMENTS

The amount of coursework required for any given type of preparation program varies considerably from institution to institution. While we are not advocating lock-step preparation and standardized coursework requirements, the range in the amount of coursework required is too large to be justified by the variations in preparation that should be the prerogative of each institution.



### What is the right amount of education coursework?



*Illinois institutions do not seem to have reached any consensus about how much education coursework is needed to prepare an elementary teacher, with coursework ranging from 27 credit hours to over 60 credit hours.*

## 2. Coursework isn't focused enough on the tough job ahead.

Teaching is hard, hard work, particularly in urban environments. Probably the most important job of an education school is to equip future teachers with strategies for effective teaching and have them practice those strategies as much as possible so that the strategies become second nature. Yet when we looked at what students are being asked to do for coursework, little of the expected urgency and focus on the task at hand was apparent.

Looking first across programs we evaluated, the whole tenor of preparation in early childhood programs seems to be misdirected. In spite of the fact that early childhood teachers are qualified to teach up through grade 3, the poor performance of early childhood programs, particularly in the area of reading instruction, suggests that these programs are focusing only on the knowledge and skills needed to teach preschoolers.

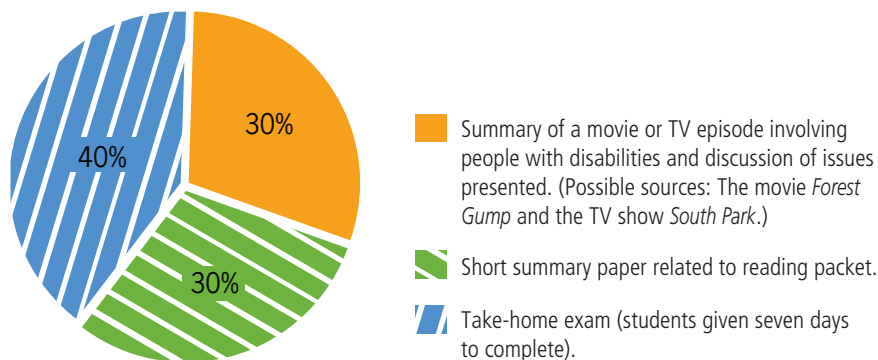
Looking within programs of all types, too many of the assignments were frivolous or utterly irrelevant.

**COMMENDABLY,** Illinois education schools have not allowed the “professional coursework creep” seen in other states, with the result that professional coursework requirements tend to become excessive.

**A FEATURE** we note is all too common at education schools across the United States is the ubiquitous **REFLECTION** assignment. They are rife in professional coursework, and all too seldom do they have the teacher candidate think and write about what should be the focus of their preparation—the learning and behavior of students.

**PROFESSORS** often expect no more from their teacher candidates than the candidates might expect from the children they will teach.

### Course assignments for secondary special education course



*This chart shows the weights for course grades of assignments in a course that purports to teach secondary teachers candidates how to instruct students with special needs. Note that 30 percent of the class grade is earned by producing a movie review.*

A few other examples of the low level of work or irrelevant assignments:

- **A classroom management course** in an undergraduate elementary education program that requires “personal reflections” in 21 assignments. The reflections address such questions as, “What classroom management program most closely reflects your own philosophy?” and “Do you feel that establishing a positive classroom atmosphere at the beginning of the school year is important?” or ask the candidate to comment on class lectures or activities. This course does not include any assignment that requires candidates to develop, for example, a classroom management plan for specific students or circumstances based on strategies discussed in lectures or assigned reading.
- **A child development course** in an undergraduate elementary program in which 25 percent of the grade is based on a “lot in life” paper. For this assignment each student is randomly assigned a condition (e.g., your child was born blind) and is then asked to write a first-person narrative to describe the condition. The connection between, in this case, being the parent of a blind child and teaching elementary school is not made. In fact, the course objectives and its assignments (like so many others we found) never make any explicit reference to the classroom or the implications for instruction of any material addressed.
- **A mathematics methods course** taught at a well-respected Illinois institution with high admission standards in which 60 percent of the grade is based on what appeared to be essentially a crafts project. The instructor provided us with an example of one of the projects that he considered exemplary: a children’s story with crayon drawings, nearly devoid of any mathematics content.



### 3. Student teaching: good set-up, questionable follow-through.

Most Illinois education schools are doing a good job putting the right components in place for a high quality student teaching experience. Before student teaching even starts, they make sure that their teacher candidates get into schools for observation. During student teaching, they make sure that candidates have no other course obligations, allowing them to focus on practice teaching. They also do a good job overseeing the experience, forbidding candidates to do their student teaching program abroad where they cannot be effectively supervised.

**But Illinois schools fall flat on the one component that matters the most: the quality of the cooperating teacher whose job it is to mentor a student teacher, modeling high quality instruction and providing plenty of feedback.**

The selection of the classroom teacher to mentor the student teacher is a make-or-break decision that sets the course of the teacher candidate's professional debut. Education schools need to play a pivotal role in the selection process to ensure that the mentor teacher is highly effective and able to mentor an adult. Programs seemed to agree with us: 33 education schools (almost two-thirds) indicated as much to us, providing documents that depicted them as fully involved in selection.

But this is not what the principals in the schools where these cooperating teachers work reported to us. We surveyed and visited with principals in several of the elementary or secondary schools used by each education school. We learned that for the vast majority of education schools (79 percent), principals consider the selection of the mentor teacher fully in their hands, with well less than half of the principals (43 percent) indicating that they had ever seen or been told that the education school had any selection criteria other than pro forma requirements, such as tenured status.

While some school principals may indeed be selecting just the right teacher on their staff to mentor a student teacher, others may simply be picking the teacher who loves children or needs help to manage an unruly class, a fact the education school won't know until after a less than optimal placement is already underway.

What guidance that does come from education schools appears erratic in most cases. Some of the principals we interviewed who work with **North Park University** said that they make placements in consultation with university staff, while some reported that there is no collaboration. Two principals working with **Roosevelt University** were unaware of any formal selection criteria for cooperating teachers, while two had received minimum criteria.



#### STAND-OUT

**Northeastern Illinois University** (NEIU) students may complete eight weeks of student teaching in a public school in Chicago and then travel to Korea to complete 20 more weeks of student teaching, with both experiences supervised by NEIU faculty or clinical supervisors.



#### STAND-OUTS

To choose cooperating teachers, **The University of Chicago** first asks principals to recommend likely candidates. Prospective cooperating teachers must then apply and be interviewed and observed.

Six principals surveyed regarding placements from **Eastern Illinois University** consistently reported active participation of the education school.

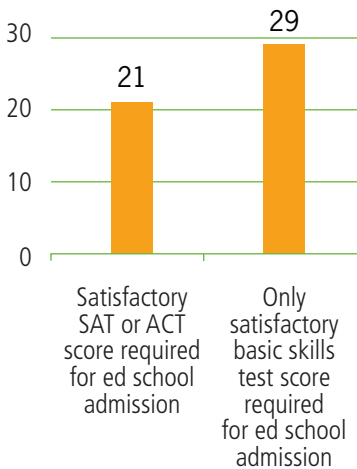
**TEACHERS** who were themselves good students are more likely to be effective than teachers who were not good students.

#### 4. Far too many Illinois education schools discount the importance of selecting the most academically capable teacher candidates.

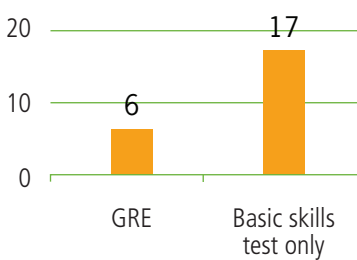
The research on this matter is clear. The practice of other countries whose students out-perform ours is also clear. The popularity of the highly selective **Teach For America** provides compelling evidence for the qualities superintendents seek in their teachers. This doesn't mean that being smart is the only thing that matters, but it is very important.

Illinois education schools have for too long been allowed to neglect this "necessary-but-not-sufficient" attribute of an effective teacher. To its credit, the state has finally increased in a significant way the scores needed on the test serving as the lone required screen for entering a preparation program. In its first administration only 22 percent of prospective teachers passed all four subject areas of the test. But the public needs to be aware that the state and all of the institutions in its wake will be relying on a test *that is still only capable of assessing the knowledge and skills largely acquired in middle school*. There may remain much distance to the goal line for Illinois' education schools to mirror the selectivity practiced in nations in which future teacher candidates must prove themselves academically competitive not only with other teachers, but also with all peers, no matter what their intended profession.

#### What it takes to get admitted to an Illinois undergraduate education school



#### What it takes to get admitted to an Illinois graduate school in education



#### Old and New Illinois Basic Skills Test Cut-Scores

Test Subject Area	Passing score:		Passing score:	
	% of questions correct (old)	% of test takers passing (old)	% of questions correct (new)	% of test takers passing (new)*
Reading	50%	95%	79%	57%
Language Arts	50%	94%	79%	47%
Math	35%	95%	75%	56%

\* Data represents passing rates under old and new cut-scores for the September 2009 test administration. Data on writing subject area are non-comparable and not included.

A number of education schools in the state are sufficiently selective about the aspiring teachers they admit because the institution in which they are housed has appropriately high standards. This is true for 21 education schools in the state for which we evaluated undergraduate preparation programs.

However, the remaining 29 education schools we evaluated are housed in institutions with low to nonexistent admission standards. In the case of these schools, we look to see if the education school employs a higher standard for admission than the college or university at large. While many of these education schools require that applicants be interviewed, provide evidence of "positive dispositions" for teaching



and/or have minimum grade point averages, none had standards enabling them to compare applicant academic caliber to the general college going population.

The picture is no brighter for admissions at the graduate level. As mentioned, nearly three-fourths of the graduate level programs we evaluated still rely on the state's basic skills test as the lone screen into graduate studies that allows comparison of applicant academic caliber to the general college-going population. Only six institutions—**Governors State University, National-Louis University, Northern Illinois University, Rockford College, Trinity International University** and the **University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign**—recognize the unacceptably low standard of relying on a basic skills test, instead employing the standard test used for admission to graduate school (the Graduate Record Exam or GRE).

### 5. "Out-of-field" teaching is tolerated in too many programs.

Education schools that assign faculty members to teach outside their areas of expertise serve neither their students nor their instructors well. Yet a search for only the most egregious practices of assigning faculty to teach courses that bear little to no relationship to one another (e.g. "Early Adolescents and Schools" and "Teaching Methods in Science") turned up too many instances. A quarter of programs engage in this practice. The statistics compares quite unfavorably to Texas, where we found only 11 percent of programs making such assignments.

### 6. While state regulators in Illinois are beginning to make up for years of regulatory neglect, far more urgency is in order.

The state is well-intentioned and has a timetable laid out for reform of various aspects of its regulation of teacher preparation, but the timetable is too slow.

This report's recommendations address weaknesses in regulations surrounding certification of secondary teacher candidates in the sciences and social sciences and in the preparation of elementary and middle school teachers. Some of these weaknesses appear to concern the state as well, but while changes in regulations affecting secondary science teacher candidates are scheduled to take effect in 2012, newly begun reviews of elementary and middle school preparation regulations will not be effective until midway through 2014 at the earliest. Moreover, the degree to which they will address problems in current content and pedagogical preparation, as well as in current licensing tests, is unclear.

For example, the review process for regulations surrounding preparation of elementary teachers will include consideration of special endorsements in reading, mathematics and science, but there is no indication that it will consider the

One faculty member employed at **National-Louis University** taught all of the four following courses: "The History and Philosophy of Education," "Human Learning and Development," "Teaching at the Secondary Level" and "Teaching Biology."



#### STAND-OUTS

While six graduate programs do require that applicants take the GRE for admission, only **Rockford College's** education department specifies a minimum score that a candidate must have to be considered for admission.

On the issue of whether selectivity in admissions is problematic when trying to attract minority applicants, **Teach For America** provides evidence that high standards and diversity can go hand in hand. Nationally, 30 percent of its corps members are persons of color.

### Readiness to teach Common Core.

We evaluated almost every undergraduate elementary program in the state, and a good share of the graduate elementary programs as well, and most (93 percent) are not providing a broad liberal arts education that will improve teachers' knowledge of elementary subject matter (or substitute course requirements with a test to ensure that teacher candidates already possess such knowledge). The lack of attention to subject matter knowledge bodes poorly for the capacity of teachers to be effective after Illinois implements the national Common Core standards.

inadequacy of the current licensing test for general elementary classroom teachers. That test currently addresses eight subjects (literacy, language arts, mathematics, science, social science, the arts, health and physical education), and because no separate cut-scores are provided for these subjects, the test cannot serve as an adequate measure of the knowledge possessed by elementary teacher candidates in any of them.

In contrast to the new vigor in regulatory reform we see elsewhere in the country, Illinois' approach can only be described as tepid. For example:

- Proposed rules for assessment requirements for individual programs add a new one to current requirements on the "dispositions" of candidates (that is, their "values, commitments, and professional ethics"), the measurement of which is of great interest within education schools, but of no proven value in teacher effectiveness.
- Recent changes to requirements surrounding the basic skills test used for education school admission reduces the number of attempts that candidates can make to pass the test, but the reduction is down to an overly generous five. (Recent research by the Education Testing Service indicates that struggling to pass a basic skills test is only a harbinger of later difficulties with other aspects of preparation.)
- Most importantly, proposed rules postpone for eight years the use of student performance data by education schools to evaluate their programs and do not provide any performance standards. Illinois is already behind ground-breaking states such as Louisiana, which now provides information on graduate effectiveness to all teacher preparation programs. In the meantime, the evidence is good that Illinois education schools are open to data-driven decision making, as the vast majority (80 percent) are already routinely collecting reports on their graduates' performance from employers.

Our evaluation of Illinois institutions indicates that all of its 12 public institutions obtain much of the information they should on what supervisors report about graduates' job performance. All of Illinois' public institutions participate in a survey operated by **Eastern Illinois University** as an outgrowth of the state's Teacher Data Warehouse. This Teacher Graduate Assessment provides feedback from hiring districts on their graduates' job performance one year into their teaching careers. While only two private institutions (**Illinois Wesleyan University** and **National-Louis University**) participate in this employer survey, 22 of the other 39 private institutions in the state report that they survey employers on their graduates' job retention and performance.

We commend Illinois for what it has done in improving regulations recently with regard to the increase in the minimum scores on its basic skills test, but we urge the state to have greater aspirations before it falls even further behind other states.



## 7. National accreditation is not adding value.

Accreditation by NCATE (the larger of two national accreditors, just recently merged with the smaller accreditor, TEAC) has been attained by about half of the nation's 1,400 education schools. The process is labyrinthine. Yet our analysis of the performance of the 55 programs in Illinois' 22 NCATE-accredited education schools compared to the performance of programs in the state's non-NCATE-accredited schools indicates that there's no value added by the accreditation process in terms of the standards we have laid out here. Average program grades for programs in NCATE-accredited schools in each of five program types (undergraduate and graduate early childhood/elementary, undergraduate and graduate special education and undergraduate secondary) were virtually the same; the average grade for NCATE-accredited graduate secondary programs was actually significantly lower than for non-accredited programs.

### Structure licensing test to ensure the following:

- Rigor.
- All subjects can be scored separately with valid cut-scores for each.
- The percentage of correct answers needed to achieve a cut-score is made public.
- The percentages of test-takers passing a test and sections of a test are made public.
- Full tests are periodically released for public view.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### For the Illinois State Legislature and State Board of Education

**Accelerate plans to develop data systems that show evidence of teacher effectiveness.** **Louisiana** is already using data on student performance to evaluate teacher preparation programs, and other states, including **Florida, Tennessee** and **Texas**, are poised to do so. Due to the slow timetable set by the state legislature, Illinois officials state that they plan to use performance data to inform policy making as soon as possible, but will not be able to require that teacher preparation programs report such data until 2018—eight years from now. Even with the complexities involved in developing the state’s longitudinal data system, this timeline seems unreasonably slow. At the very least, Illinois should look at ways to make some data available to programs in the shorter term.

### Continue to raise admissions standards until they ensure that teachers are truly capable of meeting the increasing demands of teaching.

Commendably, Illinois recently raised the cut-scores on the basic skills test required for admission to education schools with the result that it allows a much smaller percent of applicants to pass. While this is a big improvement, it is not clear if the test now ensures that Illinois education schools select candidates from the group they should—the upper half of the population of college students. The state must ascertain if this is the case and act accordingly if it is not.

Even better, Illinois should abandon its current test of middle school level skills and simply identify a range of tests for the general college-going population. Applicants to education schools could use their test results to demonstrate that they are in the upper half of all test-takers. **Texas**, for example, uses a test of academic proficiency that is designed for the general college population, not just for teacher candidates, and it has set minimum scores for admission at nearly the level assuring adequate selectivity.

### Require that elementary and special education teacher candidates be prepared in core subjects—and enforce compliance with licensing tests.

Teachers must have sufficient knowledge of the content they teach so that their students can master content. Although tests have their drawbacks, they are the best means available to measure the full breadth of content knowledge needed in the classroom. With few exceptions, regulations need to address weaknesses in Illinois education schools in three areas in particular:

1. Require that elementary and special education teacher preparation programs address effective reading instruction. Based on experience in **California, Connecticut, Massachusetts** and **Virginia**, adopting a strong stand-alone reading test is critical.



2. Improve mathematics preparation by specifying the nature of the coursework that should be offered, as **Massachusetts** has done. Specifically, an institution will need to require three elementary mathematics courses in order to fully cover the 12 essential mathematics topics, along with one mathematics methods course. Follow **Massachusetts'** example and use a stand-alone elementary mathematics test for elementary teacher candidates.
3. Make sure that elementary teachers and special education teachers will be able to teach the Common Core standards, which emphasize the reading of nonfiction topics in science and history. Follow the states that serve as examples (**California, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Hampshire, Oregon, Texas** and **Washington**) to begin to strengthen the requirements for elementary content preparation. Do not leave out special education teachers from these requirements.

In addition, elementary teachers should be required to take a concentration in an academic discipline of at least 18 semester hours. (As an added benefit, this concentration can provide a second-degree option if the teacher candidate fails student teaching.)

**Eliminate grades K-9 elementary certification—or, at the very least, beef up middle school endorsement for elementary teachers.** Certifying elementary teachers for grades K-9 invites the type of inadequate preparation of middle school teachers now found in Illinois. Illinois is one of only 21 states that still retains “elementary” certification that includes the middle grades.

If certification is not reconfigured, strengthening the middle school endorsement is imperative. Currently, the requirements do not ensure that elementary teachers seeking this endorsement know their subjects. But a middle school teacher candidate should major in the subject she plans to teach *and* pass a licensing test in each subject that confirms her expertise. To increase staffing flexibility in middle schools, Illinois can establish a dual endorsement that requires that elementary teacher candidates take a minor and pass a licensing test in each of two related subjects (such as mathematics and science).

**Really fix secondary certification in the sciences and social sciences.** When it comes to certifying high school science and social sciences teachers, reform in coursework requirements and licensing tests need to go hand in hand. Commendably, Illinois is scheduled to change its certification standards in the sciences beginning February 1, 2012, but the change is not sufficient. Secondary certification in the sciences needs improvement beyond what is slated for change, and parallel reform should be made in certification in the social sciences (a.k.a. social studies).



### STAND-OUTS

**Trinity Christian College's** requirements ensure that its elementary teacher candidates are well prepared to teach all aspects of the Illinois K-9 curriculum.

While not quite as comprehensive, the **University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign's** requirements illustrate how an education school in an institution with broad guidelines for general education coursework can provide strong direction to teacher candidates about selection of courses.

The **University of St. Francis** also does a commendable job with regard to the preparation of undergraduate special education teacher candidates for the Illinois K-9 curriculum.



### STAND-OUTS

**Lake Forest College** requires that all elementary teacher candidates have both an education major and a major in a content area.

**Roosevelt University** requires an 18-credit concentration in a “teachable content area.”

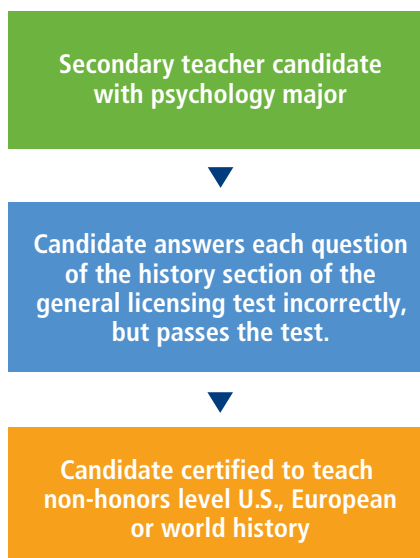


### STAND-OUT

Threading the eye of the needle, **Northwestern University's** requirements for secondary teacher candidates in both sciences and social sciences offer a strong model for what it takes to adequately prepare candidates in these areas.

Currently, teacher candidates being certified in either the sciences or social sciences can teach subjects at the non-honors level for which they have taken no coursework if they pass a general sciences or general social sciences test. Why is that a problem? Because as the figure indicates, a teacher can fail a whole section of these tests (e.g., all of the chemistry questions or all of the American history questions) and still be licensed to teach those subjects. This problem will not be fixed by the 2012 change in regulations.

For those teacher candidates who plan to teach science or social sciences at the honors level, the new regulations will require that they have at least 12 semester hours of preparation in that subject—an improvement over current regulations that allow them to teach without any consideration of preparation—but they still won't have to pass a real stand-alone test in that subject. The general sciences or social sciences test they'll need to pass has more questions on the relevant subject than any other, but it still doesn't truly measure their knowledge on the relevant subject.



We recommend that the state require a major in at least one of the sciences or social sciences to be taught (or a related social science) and a passing score on a stand-alone test that measures knowledge of each subject intended to be taught. Illinois need not develop these stand-alone tests for each of the sciences and social sciences. It can choose a set from one of those used by the 11 states that already do not certify in general science and social science.



## For the institutions:

Ratings against the standards applied in this review are intended to provide each education school with a blueprint for high quality teacher preparation. We urge particular focus on these areas:

**Teach the science of reading.** Teacher preparation programs should take the following steps to improve reading preparation for elementary and special education teacher candidates:

- Build faculty expertise in effective reading instruction.
- Ensure that the overall program design allows for proper coverage of the components of effective reading instruction, with a coordinated sequence of teacher training in reading.
- Provide guidance to help instructors select strong textbooks from the vast number of available options.

The **Teacher Reading Academies** provide a good resource for institutions in need of assistance with their early reading coursework. Developed by the Vaughn Gross Center for Reading and Language Arts at the University of Texas at Austin, these grade-specific training modules delineate the specific skills teachers need to be effective at teaching children to read. More information can be found at: <http://www.meadowscenter.org/vgc/otra/>.

**Teach elementary mathematics.** Teacher preparation programs should take the following steps to improve elementary mathematics preparation for elementary and special education teacher candidates:

- Ensure that the overall program design allows for adequate coverage of the essential topics.
- Provide guidance to help instructors select strong textbooks from the available options.

Instructors of elementary mathematics courses may find NCTQ's **Math Instructors' Resource** website useful (<http://www.nctq.org/resources/math>).

**Improve content preparation.** College administrators, liberal arts department chairs and education program administrators should configure general education and education program requirements to ensure that elementary and special education teacher candidates are fully prepared to teach the K-9 Illinois curriculum as it evolves to meet the more rigorous Common Core standards. And, as an operating principle, 80 percent of non-education courses should be taught by permanent liberal arts faculty.

**Adopt exit standards that assess content mastery.** Nothing prevents a school or a consortium of schools from developing and administering exit exams of appropriate rigor in the areas in which current licensing tests are deficient. We recommend that those Illinois programs that received exemplary NCTQ ratings on elementary reading preparation take the lead in obtaining and administering suitable exit tests in this key area.

## Background and Explanation of Standards

Since 2005, NCTQ has been examining formal teacher preparation programs across the country as part of our broader mission to understand the institutional impact on teacher quality of not only education schools, but also a whole range of authorities, including state education departments, legislatures, teachers' unions, and school districts.

In our estimation, education schools suffer the same ills that plagued PK-12 education before the 1990s' accountability movement kicked in: a lack of transparency and accountability. In particular, the "consumers" of education schools— aspiring teachers and hiring school districts—receive no meaningful information from any source that would allow them to weigh the quality of one education school against another. It was clear that some organization had to step up to the plate to provide consumers with the information they needed.

The standards that we have been developing for reviewing education schools began with a basic question: "What do schools say they need new teachers to know and be able to do?" While we have yet to find an education school dean who doesn't tell us that their graduates are in high demand from local school districts, school district superintendents and principals routinely complain about the overall quality of new hires. Our standards address those commonly cited deficiencies.

The process of selecting what precisely to measure and how to measure it coalesced from research findings on teacher effectiveness, consultations with expert panels, the best practice of other nations and the states with the highest performing students in the nation. Some of our standards exist only because they make perfect sense—such as the standard that requires student teachers to be assigned to effective mentor teachers. No research has been done and arguably none is needed to support an obviously sound practice.

Our standards are intended to reveal the *design* of a teacher preparation program—and not the quality of the professors or the environment of the campus. We're assessing whether the fundamentals are in place to produce the best possible teachers, provided that instruction is of high quality and teacher candidates have the aptitude to gain from that instruction. Therefore, our standards represent *necessary*, but not sufficient, conditions for producing first-rate teachers.

Many education schools have suggested that measuring education schools against a set of standards represents an irrelevant focus on inputs, that the only thing that should matter are outputs. We agree about the importance of outputs, particularly the classroom effectiveness of an institution's graduates using value-added methodology, which permits important comparisons among programs. However, the contribution will be limited in a number of ways; for example:

- We run the risk of identifying programs as being strong simply because they are the best in a pack among potentially all mediocre programs. We will not learn what would be possible to achieve if programs were the best they could be, meeting high standards of performance.
- We may learn which are the worst programs—but we will not know how to fix them.
- More selective programs are almost certainly likely to score higher, even though they may not be adding any significant value by virtue of the content they teach.
- There are significant measurement problems, making it hard for researchers to parse out the impact of the district from the impact of the preparation program—especially for those institutions that send most of their teachers to a single district or those that scatter small numbers of them to many districts.



- The ability to actually measure program performance through value-added analysis on a large scale statewide is at least several years away in most states, including Illinois.

Given these limitations, meaningful standards—those based on what will make teachers more effective—remain an essential complement to output data as it increasingly becomes available.

#### A FEW IMPORTANT DETAILS ABOUT HOW WE RATED PROGRAMS:

**Some standards' ratings count more than others.** Ratings on some standards, such as admission, reading and subject matter preparation, are weighted more heavily than others. (See section 14 of the report's appendix. [www.nctq.org/edschoolreports/illinois/illinoisReportAppendix.jsp](http://www.nctq.org/edschoolreports/illinois/illinoisReportAppendix.jsp)).

**Some standards don't count at all toward a program grade.** We gave institutions a pass when state regulations are responsible for low ratings. We still provide a rating for the standard but do not include the rating in our calculation of the overall grade. This is the case, for example, in our ratings of Illinois programs on two standards: 1) how they ensure through exit examinations that teacher candidates know the content they will teach and 2) whether they collect value-added data on their graduates' effectiveness as teachers.

**On some standards we provide our findings, but no ratings.** The absence of a rating can be explained by one of three reasons: 1) we were not satisfied with the quality of data we were able to collect, 2) information alone is sufficient for consumers, or 3) because the standard is still under development. There are seven standards for which there are no ratings:

1. The program exposes teacher candidates to the history, culture and language of the principal minority and ethnic groups residing in the state.
2. The institution places value on imparting a global perspective to its students.
3. The institution exposes teacher candidates to the most critical education issues of the day.
4. There is a commitment to training teachers in high-needs, high-functioning schools.
5. The institution requires that teacher candidates understand key principles from cognitive psychology that address how children learn and develop.
6. The institution gears pedagogical training for special education teacher candidates to the specific knowledge and skills that they need for teaching.
7. The institution appears to produce special education teachers in some proportional relationship to the state's demand for such teachers.

**For three "independent providers" that recruit but do not fully prepare teachers, we provide narrative evaluations but no ratings.** These three providers—the **Academy for Urban School Leadership**, the **Chicago Teaching Fellows Program** of **The New Teacher Project**, and **Teach For America's** Chicago program—provide only a small portion of the preparation for those enrolled in their programs. Traditional education schools provide the larger share, either by partnering directly to offer coursework during the program or by enrolling individuals in coursework required after program graduation. Given their unique designs, our conventional evaluation approach could not be taken. Instead, we applied as many of our 39 standards as were relevant and indicated the strengths and weaknesses of each program rather than ratings.

**We increased program grades slightly to reflect particularly innovative practices not sufficiently captured in our standards.** We identified exemplar practices that *are* sufficiently captured by our standards with “strong design” awards.

## Supporting material on our website

The webpage for *Ed School Essentials: A Review of Illinois Teacher Preparation* ([www.nctq/edschoolreports/illinois](http://www.nctq/edschoolreports/illinois)) provides access to the following:

- A consumer guide that generates rating reports for programs that satisfy various conditions specified by the viewer, such as distance from any given zip code.
- Individual institutional reports, including comments about the review from the institution itself.
- Performance of Illinois institutions on each standard, including rationales and methodology.
- An appendix comprising the review’s chronology and methodology, textbook evaluations and explanations of our review processes.

## Conclusion

Only one program out of 111 programs examined in this review earned an “A-.” Too many programs tilt toward the bottom end of the scale. If we are to improve teacher quality, we must find a way to shift this curve so that it is skewed right rather than left.

It is true that many of these programs are complying with the standards set by the state and accrediting agencies. Unfortunately, these standards are not sufficient. In the name of teacher quality, institutions must choose to exceed these standards.

In essence, we are recommending that institutions redesign their teacher preparation programs in ways that will ensure that every component—from what it takes to be admitted, what happens during the preparation, to what it takes to successfully graduate—is in line with excellence. We do so not as an enemy of high quality traditional teacher preparation, but as a strong defender. As such, institutions should take our review not as a call to arms against this messenger, but as an opportunity for surmounting a growing national sentiment that the time has come to give up on improving education schools. In effect, what we offer is a survival guide.



## National Council on Teacher Quality Standards for Teacher Preparation

### **Standard 1:**

The institution admits teacher candidates with strong academic records as determined by objective measures used typically for admission to undergraduate or graduate programs.

### **Standard 2:**

The institution ensures that coursework has a seriousness of purpose, reflecting college-level work.

### **Standard 3:**

When state standards as measured by licensing exams appear inadequate, the institution elects to set a higher standard for program completion.

### **Standard 4:**

The institution exposes teacher candidates to the history, culture and language of the principal minority and ethnic groups residing in the state.

### **Standard 5:**

Where relevant, the institution incorporates the state's student learning standards into the preparation program.

### **Standard 6:**

The curriculum required by the institution acknowledges the challenges teachers will face in meeting the instructional needs of English language learners.

### **Standard 7:**

The institution exposes teacher candidates to the most critical education issues of the day, notably the achievement gap.

### **Standard 8:**

The institution ensures that applications of technology are integrated into the pedagogy associated with specific content areas.

### **Standard 9:**

The institution ensures that special education teacher candidates are adequately prepared on the uses of assistive technologies.

### **Standard 10:**

The institution values the importance of a global perspective, imparting an understanding of the world, its history and its cultures to all students enrolled in the institution, including teacher candidates.

### **Standard 11:**

The institution has a strong clinical model with some level of commitment to training student teachers in high-needs, high-functioning schools.

### **Standard 12:**

The institution exposes teacher candidates to field work early on in their preparation.

### **Standard 13:**

The institution designs a full-time student teaching experience.

### **Standard 14:**

The institution designs student teaching to have a local experience of sufficient length.

### **Standard 15:**

The institution carefully screens and qualifies expert cooperating teachers from its partner schools.

### **Standard 16:**

The institution sets degree requirements that make it practical for any candidate who may be unsuccessful in student teaching to still qualify in relatively short order for a college degree.

### **Standard 17:**

The institution provides a thorough overview of all types of classroom assessments, including how to analyze student data.

### **Standard 18:**

The institution provides a thorough overview of the use of assessment data to plan education programs for students with special needs.

### **Standard 19:**

The institution requires teacher candidates to understand key principles from cognitive psychology that address how children learn and develop, omitting those principles that do not have a scientific basis.

**Standard 20:**

The institution imparts methods in classroom management targeted to the grade levels at which the candidate intends to teach.

**Standard 21:**

The institution provides an orientation to special education targeted to the grade levels at which the candidate intends to teach.

**Standard 22:**

The institution offers an efficient program of study, as indicated by the required credit hours needed for completion.

**Standard 23:**

The institution offers all required courses at least once each year to make it possible to complete the program in a timely fashion.

**Standard 24:**

The institution tracks graduate outcomes such as employment and retention.

**Standard 25:**

The institution fully utilizes any available data provided by the state or school districts to measure the effectiveness of its graduates in order to make program improvements.

**Standard 26:**

The institution mirrors the scholarship practiced in other fields by not expecting faculty members to teach multiple disparate disciplines.

**Standard 27:**

The institution requires that elementary teacher candidates receive a broad liberal arts education appropriately focused on the background knowledge relevant to elementary grades.

**Standard 28A:**

The institution prepares elementary teacher candidates in the essential components of effective reading instruction.

**Standard 28B:**

The institution ensures that all coursework adheres to the essential components of effective reading instruction.

**Standard 29:**

The institution provides adequate preparation in the specific mathematics content needed by elementary teachers.

**Standard 30:**

The institution provides appropriate preparation in elementary mathematics methods.

**Standard 31:**

The institution provides appropriate preparation in methods in elementary science, social studies and language arts/writing.

**Standard 32:**

The institution requires rigorous academic coursework of its middle school teacher candidates.

**Standard 33:**

The institution requires an academic major of its high school teacher candidates that is equivalent in rigor to that of non-education majors.

**Standard 34:**

The institution provides appropriate preparation for secondary teacher candidates in content area methods.

**Standard 35:**

The institution ensures that special education teacher candidates receive a broad liberal arts education.

**Standard 36A:**

The institution prepares special education teacher candidates in the essential components of effective reading instruction.

**Standard 36B:**

The institution ensures that all coursework adheres to the essential components of effective reading instruction.

**Standard 37:**

The institution provides adequate preparation in the specific elementary mathematics content needed by special education teachers.

**Standard 38:**

The institution gears pedagogical training for special education teacher candidates to the specific knowledge and skills that they need for teaching.

**Standard 39:**

The institution is attentive to the numbers of special education and general education teachers it graduates, striving to achieve production in some proportional relationship to the state's demand for such teachers.





This report is available online from [www.nctq.org/edschoolreports/illinois](http://www.nctq.org/edschoolreports/illinois)



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