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MEMORANDUM

DATE: February 7, 2011

TO: Education Deans, Presidents, Directors from AAU Universities

CC: Brian Kelly, *US News and World Report*

FROM: Kate Walsh, President
National Council on Teacher Quality

February 3, 2011 letter to Brian Kelly, Editor, *US News and World Report*

Given that the work of the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) is the subject of your letter to *U.S. News & World Report*, I would like to respond directly to your many concerns about our review of the nation's teacher preparation programs.

Let me begin by making one overarching point about our motivation for launching this review: NCTQ strongly believes that high-quality teacher preparation is essential. Fast track pathways into the profession will not best serve the interests of our children unless schools of education become more selective and offer programs of consistently high quality. This belief separates us from many of our colleagues in the education reform community. We are one of the few groups—apart from institutions of higher education themselves—that has not essentially given up on reforming traditional teacher education, turning instead to various “work around” strategies.

We, and the editors of *U.S. News*, believe that there is a need for an independent third party, unaffiliated with academia or government, to evaluate teacher training programs with the intent of providing useful information to practitioners and consumers. We realize that we are not the only source of evaluation, but given the nature of previous and ongoing evaluations—which tend toward academic, industry-centric inquiries—we think we have a useful role to play. Our effort need not be the only one and in fact we would encourage others to launch a parallel effort.

As a substitute for our review, you propose applying InTASC standards to measure quality at teacher preparation programs. Yet surely if these standards, first developed in 1992, were going to have a major impact on the field of teacher preparation, they would have done so by now, as 38 states have already adopted them. Perhaps the reason is that the standards—for all their explicit descriptions of “performance”—permit so much variation in interpretation as to provide no firm basis for determining whether programs have met them.

My apologies for getting into the weeds here but it is impossible to explain what we are doing (and what others are not doing) without some specifics. Take, for example, InTASC Standard #4 referring to the content knowledge that elementary teachers need to know. It states that the teacher "understands major concepts, assumptions, debates, processes of inquiry, and ways of knowing that are central to the discipline(s) s/he teaches." InTASC never specifies what these concepts, assumptions, debates, etc., are. Not surprisingly, institutions are routinely judged to have met these vague standards. In Illinois, where institutions are required to meet InTASC standards, we found plenty of evidence that of programs void of content. Approximately 80 percent of the programs we examined lacked basic course requirements in English, history, the sciences and the arts.

These InTASC standards form the basis of NCATE's own accreditation standards. Fifteen years after teacher preparation programs got serious about national accreditation, the former dean of Teacher's College, Arthur Levine, noted that we still are unable to measure any difference in quality between institutions accredited by NCATE and those that are not. Other studies have shown that graduates from NCATE accredited schools are no more effective, in terms of impact on student learning, than those who come from non-accredited schools. For our part, we have looked at 103 institutions that have been accredited by NCATE, presumably meeting its standard on literacy. Yet we found that only 38 of those 103 institutions even provide the most basic instruction in scientifically based reading instruction.

If you are suggesting that all efforts to hold education schools accountable be tabled until InTASC standards are once again refashioned or NCATE reinvents itself, you may find that public patience has worn thin. You write that you share U.S. Secretary of Education Duncan's sense of urgency for improving the nation's teacher preparation programs. In October 2009 Secretary Duncan asserted that "America's university-based teacher preparation programs need revolutionary change – not evolutionary tinkering." Any system for evaluating teacher preparation programs based on the flawed approaches of the past would not seem to meet Secretary Duncan's charge, a charge that is widely supported by K-12 educators and policymakers at all levels.

Let me turn to your concerns about our methodology, which you deem to be opaque and fraught with problems.

In support of your assertions, you cite a report by the consultancy firm Eduventures claiming that the review we did of Illinois programs failed to meet basic academic standards. In case you are unaware, Illinois education schools paid Eduventures to write its critique. Further, its response to our study was written *before* we had even completed a first draft of our final report on Illinois, let alone published it. Accordingly it was based on assumptions about our methodology and findings and full of numerous blatant inaccuracies. I am not sure how a report could fall farther below any reasonable standards of practice than this one.

We believe that the basic aspects of our methodology are quite transparent. In each of the past ten reports we have issued on teacher preparation programs, we have taken great pains to be

open about how we do this work. We have certainly refined this methodology over time—a primary objective of the many trial runs we did—in order to proceed with the strongest possible methodology for the national review. For example, we intend to release our standards and related indicators well in advance of commencing our document review, explaining exactly what we are looking for and why, so that institutions know exactly what we are looking to identify.

We also are looking to implement a more transparent process so that anyone can see how we rated an institution. After our analysis and rating are released, an institution can make a challenge using a section of our website as a public forum, provided that they agree to allow the documents underlying our analysis to be published as well. All communication will be public. We will either acknowledge that we have made a mistake (and change the rating) or we will post our own rationale for adhering to the original rating.

As challenges accumulate, the public will be able to judge their merits, given both the institutions assertions and NCTQ's response. It will either become clear to the public (and to the institutions as well) that NCTQ is conducting fair and accurate assessments or our credibility will be undermined and our work shut down. We are confident that the former outcome will turn out to be the case.

As for the consequences for institutions that choose not to cooperate, let me be clear that all institutions will be rated regardless of their decisions. There are standards which do not require cooperation and we will rate those as planned. After hearing your concerns, we have decided, however, not to automatically fail institutions that do not participate. We instead expect to estimate a rating for the remaining standards based on material that we are able to assemble. Those rankings based on estimates will be clearly labeled. However, the public will be informed that the school refused to supply information needed and that alternative methods were used to develop the rankings. This is a format used by *U.S. News*. If you have an alternative method that will encourage program cooperation, we are certainly open to considering it.

In any case, programs are certainly free to refuse to cooperate. But doing so frees us to render our judgment that *publicly* regulated programs (even those at private institutions) that produce teachers for *public* schools that refuse to participate *are not meeting their responsibilities to the public*. In fact, the review will suffer if we allow those education schools that fear our review to avoid it, as then the public would be left with the ratings of a self-selected group of schools that likely felt themselves able to meet our standards.

You challenge the notion that reviewing fundamental design components of teacher preparation programs can be as valuable as looking at outcomes measures. To us, it is not one or the other. Reviewing the quality of inputs and tracking the impact of teacher graduates are both essential and, in fact, complementary. Unfortunately, the capacity to track the effectiveness of all programs' graduates is still years away. Nevertheless, in response to the concerns that you and other institutions are raising, we will be developing a new standard on the value added by graduates of teacher preparation programs where such data are available (beginning with

Florida, Tennessee and Louisiana). We are also prepared to pursue your suggestion on graduates' performance on performance-based licensing examinations (e.g., California's PACT), provided the next generation of such assessments produces something more meaningful than a 98 percent pass rate.

We remain open to any suggestions that will make institutions feel that they are being treated fairly and that do not compromise the integrity of this work. As you consider your position on this matter, I urge you to consider the big picture: there are far too many programs in the United States that continue to prepare teachers poorly, year in and year out. Our collective willingness to tolerate this harms new teachers but, more importantly, harms children in their care.