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Great teachers found outside education schools too

On behalf of the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ), an advocacy group committed to restructuring the teaching profession and ensuring that every child is taught by a qualified teacher, there has been much coverage in Nebraska of the often-controversial federal education policy changes called for by No Child Left Behind. They've ignited much discussion on issues central to the debate on education reform and incorporating accountability into public education, including the implementation of new standards for teacher qualification.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) calls in part for uniform standards for the qualifications teachers need, standards that Nebraska leaders opposed. As mentioned in your article in October, the law met some of its fiercest opposition in Nebraska, where state officials have managed to retain much autonomy. According to your coverage, Nebraska argued that the state's teacher qualification requirements were already very high, and "the federal government agreed that the changes of NCLB would not be necessary." They also made the case that it is less common in Nebraska that teachers teach classes for which they are not explicitly certified.

Nebraska has in fact set high standards for new teachers when compared with many states around the country, and we commend state leaders for doing so independently of NCLB. Before NCLB in 2001, Nebraska was one of only 24 states that required new high school teachers to earn an academic major in the subject they intended to teach, and required that middle school teachers earned 36 credit hours in academic subject areas. While Nebraska does not currently use subject matter tests to measure competencies of veteran teachers, academic requirements for entering the teaching profession are relatively high.

But in addition to rigorous traditional certification requirements, we would advocate for change in Nebraska's alternative certification programs. Last year, the state issued only eight certificates to alternate route teacher candidates and all but this handful of Nebraska teachers completed a traditional teacher preparation program in a school of education. Compare this to states like New Jersey where approximately one in three teachers entered the classroom with alternative certification and officials are able to pull from a larger, more diverse pool of qualified teachers.

Currently the state offers but one seldom-used alternative route to

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"For the record, Olive Garden (owned by Darden which also owns Red Lobster) will not build in a town of less than 150,000. I think if you research demographics that you will find that we prob. cater to 150,000+ from surrounding areas, but even still, they would be in competition in this town with themselves (Red Lobster), so it will never happen."

- Posted by *TongaLH*, in our Generally Speaking Forum Topic: [Letter to the Editor - New Restaurants](#)

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teacher certification, and our worry is that Nebraska does not have the means to accommodate those talented, smart individuals who want to teach but lack traditional training. These are individuals who possess the skills necessary to be an effective teacher and have the drive to do so, but who are currently shut out of the profession because of the state's inflexible requirements.

Most policy leaders and educators will agree that academic caliber for teacher training programs is essential, that all teachers should be well educated and know what they teach. They will also agree that teaching skills, such as classroom management or the ability to recognize symptoms of a learning disability, are crucial as well.

Not unexpectedly, the debate begins when we start to explore how teachers acquire these essential skills, how they learn what and how to teach. Most rely on schools of education to teach these skills. Unfortunately, research over the last 50 years has yet to firmly demonstrate teachers trained at schools of education are any more effective at raising student performance than teachers who did not.

We advocate that Nebraska considers offering a more expansive statewide alternative certification program while enacting a number of reasonable criteria to ensure the quality of the candidates without creating insurmountable barriers to the profession by requiring extensive education coursework.

As with the alternative certification program currently in place, Nebraska could further increase its pool of candidates for districts and principals by setting a minimum GPA, requiring a major in the subject matter taught as well as mandating participation in strong pre-service, mentoring or induction programs. In addition, Nebraska could follow the lead of other states that successfully offer a test to alternative certification candidates, thereby providing them the opportunity to demonstrate competency by testing out of education coursework.

NCTQ believes there is more than one way to acquire the skills necessary to be an effective teacher, and Nebraska could gain much by accommodating individuals with a variety of professional and educational backgrounds and welcoming them into the classroom. Not every good teacher fits the same mold, and we urge the state to expand its use of programs like Troops to Teachers, and partner with alternative programs like The New Teacher Project that have demonstrated an ability to put talented people in classrooms and increase academic achievement. To further establish other legitimate pathways to the teaching profession we urge Nebraska to consider approving American-Board certification and accept it as legitimate proof that a teacher possesses necessary teaching skills and understands how to deliver an effective lesson.

Nebraska's participation in an alternative certification route this year suggests that it's starting to recognize what many researchers, practitioners and policymakers across the country have already acknowledged--that great teachers can be found outside the walls of our schools of education.

Kate Walsh is president of the National Council on Teacher Quality.



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