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**Editorial: Different, not lower, standards for teachers**

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Gov. Mike Easley says he'll resist all efforts to lower teacher standards. But recruiting certified, experienced teachers from other states may require different standards, and different is not always lower.

At issue is the Praxis II exam, a fairly exhaustive test administered to people who want to enter the teaching profession. Nearly 80 percent of states that include tests as part of their teacher licensure process rely on Praxis, according to the ETS, the organization that administers it. That includes North Carolina.

Easley invokes fears of losing federal education funding if the state does not require incoming teachers to pass the test, but there's some word play going on here. The No Child Left Behind Act requires that by June 30, 2006, all public school teachers be "highly qualified" — possess a college degree, be fully certified and demonstrate evidence of specific knowledge about what he or she is seeking to teach. But the federal law does not define what it means to be fully certified — states set their own criteria — and that's where North Carolina has the leeway to use some other measure.

"Nothing in No Child Left Behind precludes you from being bold on certification," federal education official Michael J. Petrilli told a summit in Austin, Texas, after the law passed. "It gives you a wonderful opportunity to think big, and we hope you take it."

Easley thinks small by oversimplifying the issue. He accuses lawmakers of trying to lower standards just because they see a need for different criteria for out-of-state teachers in middle and high school. (The proposed bill would still require all elementary school teachers to pass the test.) Praxis is not perfect; just last year ETS revealed that scoring errors led it to "fail" 4,100 test-takers who had actually passed in 2003-2004. Besides, the best teachers are those who excel in immeasurable ways: verbal ability, passion for their subject, empathy for children, commitment to high standards and persistence in the face of adversity — which is middle school and high school in a nutshell.

North Carolina is scrambling to fill teacher vacancies, and the state's colleges and universities are not producing enough candidates to fill the void. Considering the alternative to accepting other states' criteria for "highly qualified" — manning classrooms with substitutes — it may be Easley who is forcing schools to lower teaching standards.