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Push for Quality Faces Uphill Climb for Arkansas's Teacher Preparation Programs

National Council on Teacher Quality Releases Second Annual Review of Teacher Preparation Programs

One Arkansas Program Earns 'Top Ranked' Status

Washington, DC—The National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) released its [2014 Teacher Prep Review](#), with a much expanded and more comprehensive evaluation of 1,612 teacher preparation programs across the United States, and for the first time, a numeric ranking of programs. Henderson State University earned national 'Top Ranked' status—a distinction awarded to 107 programs in the nation for overall strong performance.

Among the 24 Arkansas programs that were fully evaluated, seven elementary and five secondary programs were strong enough to receive a national ranking. Twelve programs in Arkansas did not receive a numeric rank because their performance was in the bottom half of the national sample.

To ensure that all teachers are well prepared, state leaders and local school districts need to demand that programs improve and, if necessary, look across their state lines for the best sources of well-trained teachers. Districts are also advised to dig deeper into the NCTQ findings to identify programs which may not do well overall but do well on particular standards to meet specific district needs, such as teachers with strong preparation in reading instruction.

“Given the increasing knowledge and skills expected of teachers, it is indeed disappointing that we could only find one exemplary program in Arkansas. However, Arkansas is by no means unique,” noted Kate Walsh, President of the National Council on Teacher Quality. “The dearth of high-quality programs is a national problem that public school educators, state policymakers and advocates, working alongside higher education, must solve together.”

NCTQ fully evaluated 24 undergraduate and graduate programs housed in 13 Arkansas institutions—26 percent more than in 2013. In addition to elementary and secondary programs, NCTQ examined one special education program in the state.

Teacher Prep Review Results for Arkansas

Programs earning 'Top Ranked' status in bold

Highest ranked elementary programs (national rank):

- Henderson State University – Undergraduate (40)
- Arkansas State University – Undergraduate (117)

- Southern Arkansas University – Undergraduate (125)
- University of Central Arkansas – Undergraduate (181)
- Harding University – Undergraduate (188)

Highest ranked secondary programs (national rank):

- **Henderson State University – Undergraduate (5)**
- Arkansas Tech University – Undergraduate (127)
- University of Central Arkansas – Undergraduate (187)
- University of Arkansas at Monticello – Undergraduate (368)
- Harding University – Undergraduate (389)

A [complete list of Arkansas rankings](#) is available on the NCTQ website.

NCTQ was unable to evaluate John Brown University, a private institution housing publicly-approved teacher preparation programs. This institution declined NCTQ's invitation to participate and did not turn over course materials for the *Teacher Prep Review*. Nevertheless, the *Review* does provide some limited findings on the programs at this institution, including whether they are adequately selective about who is admitted to the program and the quality of content preparation they provide. A [complete list of non-cooperating institutions](#) is available online.

NCTQ's review of teacher preparation programs focuses on the knowledge, skills, and academic attributes new teachers need to be classroom ready when they graduate. Drawing from a set of 18 standards, NCTQ applies the relevant standards to elementary, secondary or special education programs. Findings for Arkansas include:

Selectivity: 29 percent of programs in Arkansas fully meet this standard, similar to the national average of 28 percent. These 8 programs select candidates above the 50th percentile in the population of college-attending high school graduates, a relatively modest bar compared to what other high-performing nations require.

Early reading instruction: 33 percent of evaluated elementary programs in Arkansas meet or nearly meet this standard by preparing teacher candidates in effective, scientifically-based reading instruction, compared to 34 percent of programs nationally.

Student teaching: No programs in Arkansas were found to ensure a high-quality student teaching experience, in which candidates are assigned only to highly skilled teachers and receive frequent concrete feedback. Five percent of programs nationally require such an experience.

Classroom management: Two Arkansas programs (10 percent) fully meet the standard by providing feedback to teacher candidates on specific classroom management strategies to improve classroom behavior. This is similar to the national average of 15 percent.

Elementary content preparation: Only two programs (14 percent) in Arkansas were found to meet or nearly meet this standard, compared to 11 percent of all elementary programs nationally.

Secondary content preparation: The results were not much better for subject matter preparation of secondary teacher candidates, with 23 percent of programs fully meeting the standard, compared to the national average of 35 percent.

In addition to analyzing colleges and universities providing traditional teacher preparation, NCTQ [reviewed a sample of secondary alternative certification providers](#) not managed by a university or college. The results for these 85 providers, including two programs in Arkansas, were even weaker than for traditional programs. NCTQ found their admissions standards to be too low, efforts to assess subject matter knowledge inadequate, and too little training or support provided to candidates who are asked to hit the ground running in the classroom. Only one provider out of 85 earned high marks (Teach For America, Massachusetts).

The widespread attention surrounding the *Review* has helped to precipitate considerable activity by policymakers to strengthen teacher preparation. Over the last two years, 33 states including Arkansas have made *significant* changes to laws and regulations to improve teacher preparation, and another seven states have taken steps forward. Arkansas now requires a more rigorous licensure content test for elementary teachers.

In April of this year, the federal government also made an important move to improve teacher preparation by announcing its intention to strengthen accountability measures for teacher preparation programs and restrict millions in grants to only high-performing programs.

“While we are encouraged by the action that has been taken by Arkansas and other states, we have a lot more work to do to provide future teachers with the world-class training that both they and students deserve,” added Walsh. “We urge policymakers and higher ed leaders to make this issue priority number one so that teachers in this country get the best possible training for the classroom.”

The full [2014 Teacher Prep Review report](#) is available on NCTQ’s website. NCTQ has identified [steps Arkansas can take to make meaningful improvements to teacher prep](#) and has provided [guidance to districts](#) on how to identify the best trained teachers.

About NCTQ

The National Council on Teacher Quality is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research and policy organization located in Washington DC. Founded in 2000, NCTQ is committed to restructuring the teaching profession, led by our vision that every child deserves effective teachers. NCTQ is committed to lending transparency and increasing public awareness of the four institutions having the greatest impact on teacher quality: states, teacher preparation programs, school districts, and teachers unions.

Funding for the second edition of the *Review* is provided by 54 foundations, located in 22 states.

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