

NATIONAL TEACHER CERTIFICATION: ADVANCING QUALITY OR PERPETUATING MEDIOCRITY?

By Robert Holland

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Executive Summary

For the past 15 years, the U.S. education establishment has urged teachers to seek national certification through the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), and has recommended that these supposedly master teachers become eligible for substantial state and local bonuses. In 1996, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future advocated that the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and the NBPTS become two halves of a system whereby education professionals (including the teacher unions) would control more tightly entrance to teaching and rewards within the profession.

Critics pointed out that there have been no studies showing that NBPTS-certified teachers are more adept at raising student achievement than are non-NBPTS-certified teachers. One of them, Professor John Stone, looked at value-added data of the 16 NBPTS-certified teachers in Tennessee for whom such data were available and found that achievement gains for students taught by the nationally certified teachers were no greater than for students taught by non-NBPTS-certified teachers. The Education Commission of the States (ECS) then assembled a panel of "experts" to find fault with the Stone study. The tax-funded ECS, which has promoted NBPTS participation, has never paid for a single study to check on the NBPTS' many claims of success.

Meanwhile, the Bush Administration has made a \$5 million grant to an emerging American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence (ABCTE), which is seeking to set up a credentialing system that will be based on teachers' grasp of knowledge and their ability to impart what they know to their students, in verifiable ways. Healthy competition in teacher certification could result.

Details follow.

National Teacher Certification Advancing Quality or Perpetuating Mediocrity?

By Robert Holland

The U.S. education establishment long has maintained that aspiring teachers cannot be truly qualified to teach in this nation's elementary and secondary schools without first obtaining a license based on completing many credit-hours in "how to teach" from the professional schools of education. Critics contend that these schools place only the lightest emphasis on future teachers' mastery of the subject matter they will teach their students. Those are, of course, the same institutions from which many of the reigning education officials themselves graduated. Many of them are reluctant to concede that there are more intellectually productive routes to fulfilling, productive teaching careers.

Over the past 15 years the education powers-that-be have taken that assertion to the next level via the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS). Through this entity lavishly funded by elite foundations and the government, they assert that national certifying of teachers according to the prevailing intellectual standards of the education-school establishment will produce a cadre of master teachers who will help elevate the state of public-school teaching.

Recently the certification-as-usual mindset has come under challenge, notably from the U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige. In implementing the federal No Child Left Behind Act on behalf of the Bush Administration, Paige has disputed any notion that the Act's call for placement of a "highly qualified" teacher in every classroom means that every teacher should be highly certified by the standard educationist yardstick. To the contrary, the Secretary has lauded the idea of bringing able persons into teaching from a preparation in the liberal arts or after valuable real-world experience in other fields of endeavor. Candidates may show they are highly qualified by passing rigorous tests of academic content and teaching skills, as opposed to simply presenting transcripts of completed education-school courses. In addition, Paige's Department has made a \$5 million grant to new organization that is proposing an alternative model of national teacher certification based on rigorous standards of academic achievement as opposed to education-school theory.

Still, expect a battle royal over teacher licensing and certification to continue for years to come. Hard-line education-establishment types in the teacher unions and education bureaucracies will not yield easily to the idea of intellectual diversity. In response to Secretary Paige's fresh thinking, they have been rallying around the NBPTS as well as the other, longer-established instruments of centralized control of teacher preparation and certification.

How the NBPTS Came To Be

The most venerable player in the field of teacher credentialing is NCATE (pronounced *n-kate*), the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, which is a half-century old. Since its founding in 1954 by a coalition of education interests, NCATE has aspired to convince schools of education and state governments to hand over to it all authority over accreditation of teacher education. NCATE had not been around long before it began incurring the wrath of critics of the education establishment. “This is a relatively new organization that promises to become one of the strongest in higher education,” concluded James Koerner, in his seminal work, *The Miseducation of the American Teacher*. In his 1963 book, Koerner added that “the most serious charge against NCATE is that it threatens to become a vast academic cartel that will ultimately prevent the employment of any person for any job at any level in any public school, and perhaps in any private school as well, who has not been through an NCATE-accredited program.”¹

The recent efforts of the teacher unions and other establishment interests to make NCATE all-powerful lends Koerner's observations the aura of prescience. However, for many years NCATE struggled with limited success to sign up collegiate schools of education and state governments for its accrediting services. *Education Week* reported that by the late 1980s “a number of higher education officials began questioning the value of the organization and discussed the possibility of creating an alternative body.”²

Then to the rescue in the mid-1990s came the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF). With the backing of the Carnegie Corporation, this private panel of Big Education's luminaries lifted NCATE from its prolonged slump and raised the organization to superstar status practically overnight. By embracing a model of reform called “professionalization” that would make NCATE the gatekeeper to all K-12 teaching jobs, NCTAF effectively advocated a cartel to control the teaching market. Under NCTAF's recommendations, which came with its issuance of a 1996 report entitled “What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future,” no person would be allowed to teach without having been trained at an NCATE-accredited school of education. In theory, such a reform would professionalize teaching by putting the profession itself in charge of entrance standards, much as is done in the medical and legal professions. Critics charge, however, that the national teacher unions are the players with real clout, not the everyday teachers.³

North Carolina Governor James Hunt was the founding chairman of the National Commission, while Linda Darling-Hammond, the influential education professor at Teachers College (Columbia University), and more recently Stanford, was its founding executive director. NCTAF has remained active into the 21st Century to continue to lobby for its bid to shift teacher training and certification from state political authorities to private managerial agencies controlled by the “profession” itself. The commission leaders showed a savvy publicist's skills in generating press reports terming its report a “scathing indictment” of the *status quo*. They championed a “caring, competent, and qualified teacher for every child.” Who could disagree with that? Packaging NCTAF as an outsider trying to tear down the education establishment's walls, however, was about as believable as it would be if the New York Yankees proclaimed themselves underdogs in the baseball world. As two noted university economists observed, “Although the NCTAF claims that its report is not the work of education insiders, the largest block of members comes from major education organizations and education schools, including presidents of the two major teacher unions, the NEA and AFT. . . .”⁴

The second major existing entity the national commission anointed as a superstar (and the primary focus of this paper) was the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. NBPTS and NCATE are the two main halves of a scheme for centralizing power over teaching. Actually, there is one more big organization in teacher-credentialing alphabet soup that merits mention: INTASC (The Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium). Created in 1987 and operated essentially as an arm of the Council of Chief State School Officers, INTASC generates the model teacher-licensure standards for the 50 state departments of education. INTASC “aligns” these standards with the pedagogy-heavy teacher training programs that are favored by NCATE.

Recently, the education establishment began making a semantic distinction between state licensure and teacher certification. They now hold that licensure (gained by jumping through the INTASC/NCATE hoops) means permission to teach at a basic level, while certification means meeting NBPTS’ supposedly advanced standards for excellent teaching.

Like the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, the NBPTS has its roots in the 1986 Carnegie Task Force on Teaching as a Profession. A national board to promulgate higher standards for the teaching profession from within was an idea favored by the late Albert Shanker, who as American Federation of Teachers president was one teacher union leader who spoke candidly when he saw sloth within the public-education system.

Thus, the concept of a national board to advance teaching as a true profession sprang from the best of intentions. In his 1960 book, *The Future of Public Education*, Myron Lieberman, a one-time organizer of teacher union contracts as well as consultant to both major teacher unions, first advocated national boards to certify teachers’ excellence in specific academic disciplines.⁵ His idea was that such a system would relieve union leaders’ fears that merit pay for teachers inevitably would be tainted by subjective judgments by school administrators. His concept lay on the table for a long time but in 1985 he persuaded Al Shanker to take up the cause. Shanker got the idea before the Carnegie panel and the NBPTS was on its way. Lieberman by then had grown skeptical that the board could maintain the necessary degree of independence from the unions to be a force for merit, and the subsequent composition of the 63-member board of directors tends to confirm those fears. Almost two-thirds of the directors are either members or officials of the NEA and AFT, the two major teacher unions.⁶ Lieberman, president of the Education Policy Institute, is today probably the nation’s most knowledgeable and astute critic of the teacher unions’ exercise of power to thwart reforms, such as school choice. His book, *The Teacher Unions*, is a necessary read for anyone who wants to understand the arrayed powers in modern American education.⁷

Whether, 15 years after its founding, the NBPTS is the kind of force for excellent teaching Al Shanker envisioned is debatable. But certainly it is powerful, and growing more so by the year. It received seed money from the Carnegie Foundation and then in the 1990s at the urging of President Bill Clinton began to receive major federal subsidies.

NCTAF wants an entire network of professional boards established in the 50 states to certify teachers according to NBPTS standards. At the national level, the NBPTS itself would certify more than 100,000 teachers who would be presumed to be exemplars for the profession.

Thus, NCATE for teacher preparation, INTASC for basic licensure, and NBPTS for national teacher certification would be the standards-setters for all of elementary and secondary education. And NCTAF is the entity that would boost them into that catbird's seat. Yet, this would be less the result of independent actions than a well-greased machine, or even the "interlocking directorate" that Arthur Bestor in his hard-hitting book *Educational Wastelands* saw the education establishment resembling a half-century ago.⁸ A look at the overlapping memberships on the boards of directors of these powerful organizations makes that clear. For instance, as of early 2001, the president of NCATE was on the board of NBPTS, and the president of NBPTS was on the board of NCATE. The National Commission's founding chairman, Jim Hunt, served as chairman of NBPTS, and in addition the Commission's executive director, Darling-Hammond, did a stint on the NBPTS board. For certain, the footprints of the nation's largest teacher union, the NEA, are all over the lot. The president, vice president, and secretary/treasurer of the NEA all served on the NCATE board, while the NEA president and an NEA board member also graced the NBPTS board.

This layering of interests shows the centralizers have clout, but a fair question is: *What good does this exercise of power do for education?* Linda Darling-Hammond's vision is of a "democratic profession of teaching" that through its own entities (such as NCATE, INTASC, and NBPTS) will develop high standards for learner-centered instruction based on such theorists as Harvard psychologist Howard Gardner of "multiple intelligences" fame. Such standards "share a view of teaching as complex, contingent, and reciprocal, that is, continually shaped and reshaped by students' responses to learning experiences." Darling-Hammond contrasts her vision of a teacher profession's self-generated standards with what she dismisses as an outmoded "technicist" model of teacher training based on implementing knowledge supposedly disconnected from students' real needs.⁹ In a subsequent work written collaboratively with NCATE president Arthur Wise and RAND Corporation research scientist Stephen Klein, Darling-Hammond further expressed a conviction that in teaching, as in other professions, a consensus can be reached as to a "core of knowledge that most teachers and teacher educators would agree must be mastered by any individual who wishes to practice responsibly as a professional teacher." This "growing consensus," they concluded, also embraces a concept of teaching "based on the integration of many areas of knowledge, characterized by the use of multiple skills appropriately applied to particular situations and dependent upon considerations of students and subjects."¹⁰

While Ms. Darling-Hammond and NCTAF may sound entirely reasonable when they talk about teaching being governed by a consensus of its body, "they are completely oblivious to a key difference between the teaching profession and others," notes a critic from within the education-school world, Professor J.E. Stone. "The teaching profession," says Stone, "is governed by a consensus among stakeholders who have never been concerned about public acceptance of their practices. Teachers populate publicly regulated local monopolies and their leaders have historically seen the profession's role as one of shaping rather than serving society. Darling-Hammond's insistence that the NCTAF's vision be legally enacted amounts to further empowering the teaching profession to impose its will on the country."¹¹

Stone, who founded an Internet service (found at www.education-consumers.com) to help education consumers exert more influence on education policy, drew the fire of the education establishment by doing a small-scale study that threw into question the value of NBPTS certification in identifying great teaching. That controversy is examined later in this study. Ultimately, one has to wonder if the education establishment's fondest wishes for

professionalization, however sincerely expressed, are too dependent on subjective judgment to be useful in preparing teachers to help students reach high levels of academic achievement. The most recent NCATE Standards, adopted in 2000, pay lip service to elevating student achievement but the primary emphasis seems to lie elsewhere.

No doubt most parents who send their children to public schools favor a good and just society, too, but what they primarily want from the schools is that their children be taught to read and write and compute.¹² The “knowledge and skills” assessed by NCATE, on the other hand, have far more to do with perpetuating progressive or learner-centered philosophy. Repeatedly, Standard One subtexts stress that the teacher candidates are to “facilitate” learning for all students. They are to “know how students learn and how to make ideas accessible to them.” They are to “consider school, family, and community contexts in connecting concepts to students’ prior experience, and applying the ideas to real-world problems.”

The leadership of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards shows a similar ideological leaning. The NBPTS confers its national certification on the basis of a “performance-based” process that shows a decided preference for teachers who practice that old-time progressivism of the education schools. The Board calls this an evaluation of “pedagogical content knowledge.” Nowhere in the process is there any value-added measurement to see if a teacher has aided students in measurably raising their achievement during the school year. Instead, candidates submit portfolios of their lesson plans and their students’ work, and videotapes of themselves teaching in the classrooms. They must pay a \$2,300 application fee up front but frequently school boards or other public authorities pick up the tab for them.

Forty-eight states and almost 400 school districts offer sizable bonuses (as much as \$5,000 to \$7,500) to teachers who successfully negotiate the NBPTS hoops, and not just one-time bonuses but yearly ones for the 10-year life of the certification (which is renewable). The teacher unions -- the NEA and AFT -- have displayed their eagerness that national certification spread and spread by jointly publishing a comprehensive guidebook to seeking NBPTS certification.¹³ Some of the “cameraperson” tips for teachers taping themselves are almost comically banal: Before taping, “make sure the tape is in the camera.” To improve sound, avoid taping “when there is extraneous noise (*e.g.*, band practice, recess, lawn mowing, etc.)” Such advice suggests the NEA and AFT fret about teachers being competent enough to be even just semi-skilled cinematographers. More telling, however, is their repeated admonition that teacher-candidates for national certification pay attention only to the NBPTS standards because they constitute the only criteria used to award certification. (The guidebook uses “only” in boldface three times in one sentence.) The instruction continued:

*You probably have your own standards of what you consider to be good teaching, or you may agree with another set of teaching standards. Although these teaching standards may be helpful to you in developing your teaching practice, they **should not** {boldface theirs} be your focus during the National Board Certification process. Your sole focus should be the National Board standards, because it is those -- and **only** {boldface theirs} those standards -- on which your work will be evaluated.*

That is stunningly cynical advice. Even if teachers have developed their own philosophies based on years of proven success in elevating student learning, they should totally ignore what works unless it happens to correspond with the practices favored by the National Board. Here we have process scoring an absolute knockout over academic results. And what might be the pedagogical

approach favored by the NBPTS standards? That is not difficult to discern, simply from a perusal of the NEA/AFT guidebook to meeting the NBPTS standards. For instance, a friend of the teacher is supposed to fill out a “critical observation worksheet” to go into the applicant’s portfolio after witnessing his or her teaching. This worksheet asks for evidence that the teacher has tapped the children’s “natural curiosity and interests” and has allowed for the children “to have some control of the activity,” directives showing a clear preference for progressivism over teacher-directed instruction. Another request is for evidence that “learning experiences are designed to help children discover {fill in the blank} principles for themselves.”¹⁴ Whether “mathematical” or “scientific” or “literary” fills in the blank, that is a clear nod to the constructivist or discovery method of instruction.

Such portfolio assessment solicits subjective judgment on the nature of a teacher’s work. One indicator of competence that does not interest the NBPTS is the teacher’s level of literacy. By policy, the National Board deducts no points for errors in spelling, punctuation, and grammar the applicants may make in the written portion of their assessments, no matter how egregious such errors may be. Amazingly, that policy applies even to English teachers seeking the NBPTS stamp of approval. Given that most NBPTS-certified teachers are assigned as mentors for other teachers, a legitimate concern arises as to the example of verbal facility some mentors may provide for some protégés (though undoubtedly many of the nationally certified teachers are literate).

Telltale Showdown: Battle of the Stone Study

In the end, the most critical question about the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards is whether it makes a difference for the better in the American schoolhouse. A fierce dispute rages over that point. One of the leading critics -- Michael Podgursky, chairman of the economics department at the University of Missouri/Columbia -- has persistently contended that the education establishment has undertaken “no rigorous study” to ascertain if students of NBPTS-certified teachers learn more than do students of other teachers.¹⁵ He contends that an analysis of NBPTS funded to the tune of \$500,000 by the U.S. Department of Education failed any legitimate test of effectiveness because it rejected out of hand taking students’ standardized test scores into account. Not surprisingly, Betty Castor, the president of NBPTS, sharply disagreed. As “proof” she cited a study by researchers at the University of North Carolina/Greensboro that compared 65 teachers who have applied for the national certification, approximately half of whom received it.¹⁶ The team funded by the U.S. Department of Education and NBPTS found that the certified teachers did significantly better on most of the “dimensions of teaching expertise” that NBPTS assesses in its standards. But these Dimensions exude a subjective quality -- for instance, one assaying “multidimensional perception,” defined as “demonstrating a deeper understanding of students’ verbal and non-verbal responses, and using this information to prioritize instruction.” Given that it was by such murky yardsticks that the NBPTS candidates were measured, it was no surprise that those winning certification did better than those that did not. That’s in fact self-obvious. The still-unanswered question is: Does that make any difference in the classroom in terms of what students achieve?

Drawing on data from the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System for the 16 NBPTS-certified grades 3-8 teachers in Tennessee who have value-added teacher reports in the state database, Professor of Education J.E. Stone from East Tennessee State University found in May 2002 that the nationally board-certified teachers had not risen above average in bringing about increased achievement by their students.¹⁷ With the value-added yardstick, an annual gain equaling or

surpassing 115 percent of the national norm gain is regarded as “exemplary” and awarded an “A.” Conversely, a gain of less than 85 percent is deemed “deficient” and given an “F.” Looking at the 16 NBPTS-certified teachers collectively, Stone found that only 14 percent of scores on various subjects met the “A” standard, while 10 percent got “Fs.” With the bulk of scores falling between those extremes, the achievement gains realized under NBPTS teachers were no greater than gains made under other teachers, according to Stone.

In a move typical of the fury exhibited by an education establishment scorned, the NBPTS quickly issued a release slamming Stone’s work as “hardly independent research,” given that Professor Stone (the founder of the online Education Consumers Clearinghouse) had criticized the NBPTS and advocated market-based reform of teacher preparation and licensing. Of course, that ignored the reality that researchers -- including those working on NBPTS’ dime -- rarely lack opinions about the issues they study. The relevant question is whether opinions determine the outcome. The Denver-based Education Commission of the States (ECS), a tax-funded pillar of the education establishment since its founding in 1965, also cast aspersions on the small study of NBPTS’ effectiveness. However, such prominent education researchers as Eric Hanushek, a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution, defended Stone’s study, noting that it “follows a well conceived methodology.”¹⁸ The NBPTS complained that value-added data from just 16 teachers were too skimpy to permit valid conclusions, but the NBPTS itself had been touting studies of its own drawing on as few as three NBPTS-certified teachers. The relatively small number of teachers, noted Dr. Hanushek, “is not Stone’s fault or choice. It simply represents the available universe of teachers.”¹⁹ Indeed, if the NBPTS as a Big Education producer could sponsor its own studies, why couldn’t a small education consumers group do likewise without having its integrity impugned?

ECS President Ted Sanders, who served on the national commission that plugged for a vast expansion of NBPTS’ influence, appointed a four-member panel headed by University of Pennsylvania education dean Susan Fuhrman, to evaluate Stone’s study. Clearly, the panel’s mission was one of fault-finding, not objective analysis. The ECS has not funded so much as a single analysis of the several studies the NBPTS and its allies have issued over the years that purport to show the NBPTS’ worth. Amazingly, a key point the panel used to discredit Stone’s work was that he had not made clear how he selected the “study sample” of 16 teachers out of the 40 in Tennessee who have received NBPTS certification.²⁰ However, Stone’s study explicitly stated that these 16 teachers were those who “teach in grades three through eight and therefore have value-added ‘teacher reports’ in the state database.”²¹ They were not a sample at all but the entire contingent of NBPTS-certified teachers in Tennessee for whom value-added data were available. Anyone who read Stone’s analysis with a reasonably open mind could discern that.

Stone pointed out that, in contrast to studies that sample a population and draw inferences about a larger group, his Tennessee study “was simply a multiple replication trial of the NBPTS certification process. The value-added achievement gains of 16 NBPTS-certified teachers were examined. In 16 out of 16 cases they were found not to be exceptional producers of student achievement.

“When a certification process is checked 16 times and found wrong every instance, any reasonable person would say it isn’t trustworthy regardless of what might be inferred about others who have been certified by the same process.

“Here is an analogy: Suppose 100 football players are found to weigh 300 pounds when weighed on a bathroom scale, and 16 of them are taken to a doctor’s office and reweighed on a professional quality scale. If the 16 were found to weigh less than 250 on the doctor’s scale, the accuracy of the bathroom scale would be in doubt regardless of what might be presumed about the 84 who had not yet been reweighed.”²²

The ECS’ fault-finding panel also took a swipe at the use of teacher effects data from the Terra Nova test, from which the Tennessee value-added system draws data for analysis of teacher impact. The panel commented that “some teachers increase student scores on multiple-choice tests like Terra Nova by narrowly focusing on the specific knowledge and skills it covers. If teachers recognized by the NBPTS do not focus so narrowly while other teachers do, their students may not perform as well as the students of other teachers.”²³ That statement not only implies a level of disdain for objective testing, but also that the panel is *simpatico* with the NBPTS in its defining of great teaching in the absence of evidence on the measurable impacts on students.

As 2002 began, the National Board suddenly seemed to be tacitly conceding the need for more substantial research establishing its effectiveness. It had put out a call for scholars to examine its processes without favor, and was marshaling donors willing to give “multiple millions of dollars” to bankroll new scholarship. It had retained a team headed by Tennessee Value-Added guru William Sanders to compare 800 teachers in North Carolina including those who had the national certification, those who applied but didn’t receive it, and those who have not chosen to apply. The results are widely anticipated, but even if they should show an achievement edge for NBPTS teachers, that would not necessarily show the certification process brought about that good result.²⁴

Meanwhile, it was quite telling that the education establishment could be so discombobulated by one small study questioning NBPTS’ value. Sure, they no doubt perceived a threat to the continued flow of money to the vaunted project. But more than that, the conclusions imperiled the whole edifice of accreditation, licensure, and certification standards. Given that those NCATE/INTASC/NBPTS standards are thoroughly aligned and interlocked, demonstrated failure in one realm could bring down the whole house of cards.

An Alternative Begins to Emerge

As noted earlier, critics of the education establishment’s tightly controlled system of credentialing teachers have been vocal for much of the past century. Finally, on April 20, 1999, the opposition got its game plan in order in a big way. The proponents of drawing on a much freer market to get quality teachers in the classroom issued a call to action -- a manifesto -- that carried considerable clout.

Released by the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, the manifesto ran under the title, *The Teachers We Need and How to Get More of Them: A Manifesto*, a slight twist on E.D. Hirsch, Jr.’s best-selling critique of progressive education entitled, *The Schools We Need and Why We Don’t Have Them*. Indeed, Dr. Hirsch was one of the 54 original signers of the manifesto. (The manifesto continues to be accessible on the Internet and available to be signed at www.edexcellence.net/library/teacher.html.)²⁵ Among other notables were the Republican Governors of Michigan and Pennsylvania, John Engler and Tom Ridge (now the U.S. Director of Homeland Security); former U.S. Secretary of Education William Bennett; the Arizona

Superintendent of Public Instruction, Lisa Graham Keegan (now CEO of the Education Leaders Council), and Pennsylvania Secretary of Education Eugene Hickok (now the U.S. Under Secretary of Education). A key player is a veteran critic of the education establishment, Chester E. Finn, Jr., who was an Assistant Secretary of Education during the Reagan Administration, and who now serves as president of the Fordham Foundation. Finn's criticisms appear in many forums, especially conservative-leaning ones like *The Weekly Standard* and *The Wall Street Journal* editorial sections, and he produces a weekly online digest that he calls "The Education Gadfly."

The manifesto depicts the regulatory strategy for elevating teacher quality as a flawed process that is likely to become even more counter-productive under proposals to make NCATE and NBPTS more powerful. The other way championed by the upstarts comes through in the following paragraph that follows a critique of the regulatory approach:

"A better solution to the teacher quality problem is to simplify the entry and hiring process. Get rid of most hoops and hurdles. Instead of requiring a long list of courses and degrees, test future teachers for their knowledge and skills. Allow principals to hire the teachers they need. Focus relentlessly on results, on whether students are learning. This strategy, we are confident, will produce a larger supply of able teachers and will tie judgments about their fitness and performance to success in the classroom, not to process or impression."²⁶

The manifesto takes the view that there is no "one best system" for preparing and certifying teachers, though its signers clearly are fond of Teach for America, the program that puts bright liberal-arts graduates into needy classrooms without prior grounding in professional education classes. The signers believe it reasonable to pay teachers higher salaries if their fields are subjects in which teachers are in short supply, and if their teaching produces gains in student learning. They are all for giving power to principals, and letting them be held accountable for the productivity of the teachers they hire. They would not eliminate all regulations: Would-be teachers would have to pass criminal background checks, and they would have to demonstrate their subject-matter competence by majoring in that subject in college or passing a rigorous examination of their knowledge. The Manifesto's authors are certain that this sort of alternative pathway to teaching will assist in getting able teachers in the nation's classrooms, although studies are few to prove the point.

From the Manifesto sprang the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ), with largely the same cast of supporters -- notably, Finn's Fordham Foundation, and the Education Leaders Council. The NCTQ opened a Washington office in February 2001 and quickly became a lively presence on the Internet with a weekly e-mail bulletin, *Teacher Quality Bulletin*, that gave blow by blow on the teacher-education wars. *TQB* reports from its own perspective that markets work better than regulation, of course, but does so in a highly literate and entertaining way. NCTQ's website has a searchable database of activity in every state on the teacher-quality front.²⁷ The founding policy board featured not only Arizona's Lisa Keegan, but a former National Teacher of the Year, Tracey Bailey, who has led efforts to help independent-minded teachers form professional associations serving as alternatives to the national teacher unions. The NCTQ tapped as its first president Michael Poliakoff, a former college Latin teacher who had a major hand in creating Pennsylvania's Teachers for the 21st Century initiative.

The fledging NCTQ progressed to the big game very quickly when in the fall of 2001 it announced plans for an American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence (ABCTE). Support came from the education-conscious George W. Bush Administration in the form of a \$5 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education to help the ABCTE set up a credentialing system for both new and experienced teachers. The new Board's mission states that it "will use rigorous assessments to identify and honor teachers who demonstrate outstanding ability to impart skills and knowledge to their students and who can serve as mentors and models for other teachers." Although the ABCTE advertises itself as complementing, not supplanting, existing certification mechanisms, it clearly intends to differ sharply from the establishment's National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. For instance, the ABCTE will require evidence that teachers have helped their students measurably improve their achievement while the NBPTS does not. And while the NBPTS trains its own graders and instructs them to ignore errors in spelling, punctuation, and grammar in applicants' portfolios, the ABCTE plans to have a major testing service do the scoring according to high standards for accuracy. The ABCTE also promises that it "will ensure a robust supply of talented new teachers without relying on traditional college-of-education training."²⁸ That stands in stark contrast with NCATE, which insists not only that all teachers should be products of education schools but also that they all should be products of NCATE-accredited schools of education.

It is a healthy thing that competition is emerging at long last in the certification of K-12 teachers. National certification based on teachers' exemplary grasp of knowledge and ability to convey it to their students will contrast sharply with national certification based largely on theories about self-esteem and child-centered learning. Schools should benefit from the increased intellectual diversity.

Endnotes

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