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## HOLDING TEACHER PREPARATION ACCOUNTABLE

A REVIEW OF CLAIMS AND EVIDENCE

*Marilyn Cochran-Smith, Rebecca Stern, Juan Gabriel Sánchez, Andrew Miller, Elizabeth Stringer Keefe, M. Beatriz Fernández, Wen-Chia Chang, Molly Cummings Carney, Stephani Burton, & Megina Baker*

Boston College

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**National Education Policy Center**

School of Education, University of Colorado Boulder  
Boulder, CO 80309-0249  
(802) 383-0058  
[nepc.colorado.edu](http://nepc.colorado.edu)

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# HOLDING TEACHER PREPARATION ACCOUNTABLE: A REVIEW OF CLAIMS AND EVIDENCE

*Marilyn Cochran-Smith, Rebecca Stern, Juan Gabriel Sánchez, Andrew Miller,  
Elizabeth Stringer Keefe, M. Beatriz Fernández, Wen-Chia Chang, Molly  
Cummings Carney, Stephani Burton, & Megina Baker, Boston College*

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## Executive Summary

Teacher preparation has emerged as an acutely politicized and publicized issue in U.S. education policy and practice, and there have been fierce debates about whether, how, by whom, and for what purposes teachers should be prepared. This brief takes up four major national initiatives intended to improve teacher quality by “holding teacher education accountable” for its arrangements and/or its outcomes: (1) the U.S. Department of Education’s state and institutional reporting requirements in the Higher Education Act (HEA); (2) the standards and procedures of the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP); (3) the National Council on Teacher Quality’s (NCTQ) *Teacher Prep Review*; and (4) the edTPA uniform teacher performance assessment developed at Stanford University’s Center for Assessment, Learning, and Equity (SCALE) with aspects of data storage and management outsourced to Pearson, Inc.

These four initiatives reflect different accountability mechanisms and theories of change, and they are governed by different institutions and agencies, including governmental offices, professional associations, and private advocacy organizations. Despite differences, each assumes that the key to teacher education reform is accountability in the form of public assessment, rating, and ranking of states, institutions, programs, and/or teacher candidates. This brief addresses two questions for each initiative: What claims do proponents of the initiative make about how it will improve teacher preparation and thus help solve the teacher quality problem in the U.S.? What evidence supports these claims? The first question gets at the theory of change behind the initiative and its proponents’ assumptions about how particular mechanisms actually operate to create change. The second involves the validity of the initiative as a policy instrument—that is, whether or not there is evidence that the initiative actually meets (or has the capacity to meet) its stated aims.

This review has two major conclusions. The first is that across three of the four initiatives (HEA regulations, CAEP accreditation, and NCTQ’s reviews), there is *thin evidence* to support the claims proponents make about how the assumed policy mechanisms will actually operate to improve programs. The advocates of these initiatives assume a direct relationship between the implementation of public summative evaluations and the improvement of teacher preparation program quality. However, summative evaluations intended to influence policy decisions generally do not provide information useful for program improvement. The irony here is that while these policies call for teacher education programs and institutions to make decisions based on evidence, the policies themselves are not evidence-based. Thus there is good reason to question their validity as policy instruments that will have a positive

impact on teacher education quality. In contrast, the edTPA has some evidentiary support as a policy initiative, but concerns within the collegiate teacher preparation community plus state implementation problems suggest that widespread implementation and professional acceptance may be challenging to accomplish.

Our second conclusion is that although all of the accountability initiatives we reviewed are intended to diminish educational inequality, underlying most of them is a notion of what we call *thin equity*. When policies work from a thin equity perspective, the assumption is that school factors, particularly teachers, are the major source of educational inequality and that access to good teachers is the solution to the equity problem. This viewpoint ignores the fact that teachers account for a relatively limited portion of the overall variance in student achievement, and it does not acknowledge that inequality is rooted in and sustained by much larger, longstanding, and systemic societal inequalities. In contrast, a *strong equity* perspective acknowledges the multiple in- and out-of-school factors that influence student achievement as well as the complex and intersecting historical, economic, social, institutional, and political systems that create inequalities in access to teacher quality in the first place. A strong equity perspective assumes that teachers and schools alone cannot achieve equity; rather, it requires educators working with policymakers and others in larger social movements to challenge the intersecting systems of inequality in schools and society that produce and reproduce inequity. Working from a strong equity perspective also includes focusing directly on creating the conditions for high-quality teaching, such as supports for teachers and students, stable and supportive leadership, intensive interventions to close opportunity gaps for students in the early grades, and well-supported teacher induction programs.

In something of a contrast to the other three initiatives we review in this brief, the edTPA defines teacher quality in terms of teachers' knowledge, skill, and professional judgment, including supporting English language learners. However, even the edTPA does not prioritize creating the conditions necessary for strong equity. These include preparing and expecting teachers to: recognize and build on the knowledge traditions of marginalized groups; understand and challenge inequities in the existing structures of schools and schooling; and work with others in larger efforts for social justice and social change.

## Recommendations

Although debate remains, educators and policymakers at multiple points along the political spectrum are increasingly recognizing that reforming teacher preparation is an important part of larger efforts to improve the schools and enhance students' learning. Based on our critique of claims and evidence related to four major national accountability initiatives, we offer the following policy recommendations.

- Policymakers must acknowledge and address the multiple factors—in addition to teacher quality—that influence student outcomes, including in particular the impact of poverty, family and community resources, school organization and support, and policies that govern housing, health care, jobs, and early childhood services.
- Systems evaluating teacher preparation must produce results that preparation programs can use to change and improve curricula, practice-based experiences, and assessments—not results that simply grade programs without information about

why or how particular results occurred or what might improve them.

- Systems evaluating teacher preparation programs must be built on policy mechanisms that have documented capacity to produce usable information for local and larger program improvement within a complex policy and political climate.
- There should be a conceptual shift away from teacher education *accountability* that is primarily bureaucratic or market-based and toward teacher education *responsibility*<sup>1</sup> that is primarily professional and that acknowledges the shared responsibility of teacher education programs, schools, and policymakers to prepare and support teachers.
- Evaluations of teacher preparation programs should:
  - Reflect alternative forms of accountability that shift the focus from externally generated single-measure tests to multi-pronged internal assessments of teacher performance and student learning.<sup>2</sup>
  - Avoid “placing too much weight” on value-added assessments of program graduates’ and programs’ effectiveness. Evaluations of preparation programs should not be based solely or primarily on students’ test scores. This is consistent with recommendations in the National Academy of Education report on teacher preparation evaluation.<sup>3</sup>
  - Consider teacher educators’ performance (defined as knowledge, practice, commitments, and professional judgment as they play out in the construction and operation of programs), teacher candidates’ performance (defined as knowledge, practice, commitments, and professional judgment as they play out in classrooms and schools), *and* students’ learning (defined as academic learning, social/emotional learning, moral/ethical development, and preparation for participation in democratic society).
  - Recognize that teacher preparation programs have multiple, often complex, goals and purposes, including preparing teachers to challenge inequitable school and classroom practices and work as agents for social change. These goals, which are consistent with a “strong equity” perspective, should be reflected in evaluation processes.

## HOLDING TEACHER PREPARATION ACCOUNTABLE: A REVIEW OF CLAIMS AND EVIDENCE

In this policy brief, we focus on one of the major contemporary trends<sup>4</sup> in teacher education—complex and far-reaching policies intended to enhance teacher quality by “holding teacher education accountable” for its arrangements and/or its outcomes. We take up four national initiatives that share this intention, but are based on differing incentives and disincentives assumed to drive change. These include: (1) the U.S. Department of Education’s (DOE) proposed state and institutional reporting requirements in the Higher Education Act (HEA); (2) the standards and procedures of the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP); (3) the National Council on Teacher Quality’s (NCTQ) annual/biennial *Teacher Prep Review*; and, (4) the edTPA, a nationally available uniform teacher performance assessment developed at Stanford University’s Center for Assessment, Learning, and Equity (SCALE) with aspects of data storage and management outsourced to Pearson, Inc.

These four initiatives reflect different accountability mechanisms and theories of change, and they are governed by different institutions and agencies, including governmental offices, professional associations, and advocacy organizations. Despite differences, each assumes that teacher education in the U.S. requires reform<sup>5</sup> and that the key to reform is accountability in the form of public assessment, rating, and ranking of states, institutions, programs, and/or teacher candidates. Two of the initiatives, HEA regulations and state-required use of the edTPA for licensure, involve *direct* or *bureaucratic* accountability,<sup>6</sup> which means that federal or state offices directly determine rewards and punishment. NCTQ’s review instead involves *indirect market* accountability, generating information to influence prospective “consumers” of preparation programs and/or to promote alterations in the policies and practices of institutions seeking higher ranking. CAEP accreditation and some institutional uses of the edTPA are based on what we call *indirect professional* accountability, which involves self-policing and self-governance.

Because these initiatives share the assumption that accountability is the central mechanism for reforming teacher preparation and thus boosting teacher quality, we treat them together in this policy brief. We take up the initiatives one at a time, addressing the same two questions for each: What claims do proponents of the initiative make about how it will improve teacher preparation and thus help solve the teacher quality problem in the U.S.? What evidence supports these claims? The first question gets at the theory of change behind the initiative and the assumptions its proponents make about how particular mechanisms actually operate to create change. Answers to the second question, which make up the bulk of this brief, involve the validity of the initiative as a policy instrument—that is, whether or not there is evidence that the initiative actually meets its stated aims.

### Federal Teacher Preparation Reporting Regulations

The Higher Education Act (HEA) governs the administration of federal student aid programs, and both states and teacher education providers must meet its Title II reporting requirements to be eligible to distribute TEACH grants to students who are prospective teachers. At the end of 2014, the Obama administration released proposed new Title II re-



porting regulations, which required states to rate and report on each preparation program annually according to: value-added assessments of graduates' effectiveness; employment information; consumer satisfaction data; and program accreditation.<sup>7</sup> States were to classify programs into four performance levels and require low performers to improve or close. These proposed regulations prompted many jurisdictional and other controversies,<sup>8</sup> and revisions to the proposed regulations were announced in December 2015. The revisions give states more authority as well as more flexibility about how to weigh the results of statewide standardized achievement tests in annual reports, what other measures of students' learning to include, and how to determine at-risk and low-performing programs.<sup>9</sup> These regulations function as a vehicle for *direct bureaucratic accountability* in the form of state-developed and enforced federal reporting requirements.

### **Rationale: What Claims Are Made about Reporting Regulations?**

It remains to be seen how the revisions to the HEA reporting regulations will play out in practice across the various states, but on paper at least, revised HEA regulations along with the newly reauthorized Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) will create a lesser level of federal control of teacher preparation than the initially proposed regulations. However, much of the rationale behind the revised HEA reporting requirements for teacher preparation remains the same. Proponents of new reporting regulations assert that states and teacher preparation institutions have generally failed to improve teacher education quality because they have gathered “meaningless inputs-based” data<sup>10</sup> that does not identify program quality and cannot be used for improvement.<sup>11</sup> Proponents assert that what is needed are transparent, comprehensive data systems that include “more meaningful indicators of program inputs and program outcomes, such as the ability of the program’s graduates to produce gains in student learning.”<sup>12</sup> The rationale here is that data systems linking student achievement data to teacher data to preparation program data create “a much-needed feedback loop to facilitate program improvement and provide valuable information” that will put more effective new teachers in high needs schools.<sup>13</sup>

This rationale depends on three claims. The first is that an accountability system required by the federal government but developed and implemented by individual states is an effective mechanism to control teacher preparation by identifying good and bad programs and thus improving teacher quality. The second claim is that making reporting data public will help preparation programs “make necessary corrections and continuously improve” and help states reform low-performing programs.<sup>14</sup> The third is a market claim that new data systems will be used by prospective teachers, employers, and the public, thus motivating programs to improve.<sup>15</sup>

### **Validity of Federal Reporting Regulations as a Policy Instrument: What Is the Evidence?**

Recent history provides the best evidence regarding the first claim—that federally required accountability systems are effective at improving teacher preparation. As part of HEA Title II requirements, since 1998 preparation programs and states have reported to the federal government.<sup>16</sup> These reports provide 17 years of evidence about how well federal requirements mandating state enforcement function as a mechanism for teacher preparation program

improvement. According to the DOE itself, this approach has failed: few low-performing programs have ever been identified by states, and according to DOE criteria, new teachers continue to be unprepared.<sup>17</sup> The revised rules give the states more flexibility than the rules originally proposed (i.e., states can determine how to designate low-performing programs) and reflect a major shift in data from the 1998 regulations (i.e., from program inputs to various measures of student learning outcomes), but the central mechanism—state enforcement of federal reporting requirements—is similar. History gives us good reason to doubt the first claim, that this is an effective policy mechanism to improve teacher preparation quality.

The second claim is that making systematic data about preparation program outcomes public will facilitate program improvement.<sup>18</sup> Because this is similar to one of the claims about CAEP accreditation as a policy instrument (below), the following discussion applies to our review of both HEA regulations and CAEP accreditation. Both allow multiple measures of student learning, but require the use of statewide standardized achievement tests in determining teacher preparation program effectiveness, with HEA requiring state report cards and CAEP accreditation requiring institutional self-studies. The most relevant evidence about the usefulness of students' test scores as a measure of teacher preparation program effectiveness comes from research on state systems linking program graduates' value-added teaching scores to their preparation programs as a way to evaluate and improve programs. This approach has been very controversial, and there are multiple reasons for

*Many analysts caution that value-added evaluations should not be given much weight in policy decisions about teacher preparation*

caution.<sup>19</sup> However, we drew several conclusions from this research: (1) it is difficult to disentangle the effect of graduates' characteristics from the impact of programs;<sup>20</sup> (2) some states (Tennessee, Louisiana, Florida, Texas, North Carolina, and Ohio) are already using longitudinal data systems to link programs and student test scores;<sup>21</sup> (3) with value-added assessments, myriad technical decisions about selection, estimation, and interpretation have major consequences for conclusions

about program quality,<sup>22</sup> and there is much "methodological messiness;"<sup>23</sup> and (4), in some states and/or labor markets, the results of value-added assessments have identified programs whose graduates consistently outperform or underperform other teachers—but the differences in impact are small, and in some studies, nonexistent.<sup>24</sup> For these and other reasons, many analysts caution that value-added evaluations should not be given much weight in policy decisions about teacher preparation.<sup>25</sup>

This list of conclusions is notable for what is absent: evidence that value-added assessments of teacher preparation programs provide a "feedback loop" for improvement.<sup>26</sup> In Tennessee, yearly report cards show that most institutions are consistent in ratings from year to year, and changes cannot be attributed to institutions' use of the ratings.<sup>27</sup> The developers of Louisiana's value-added system point this out explicitly, stating that results "do not answer why a particular result occurred or what might be done to improve on it; rather, all it does is provide feedback on performance."<sup>28</sup> In fact we could locate no studies that systematically investigated whether or how programs actually used value-added and other outcomes data for improvement. Even some strong advocates concede that the effects on program improvement of outcomes-based state program reviews and/or national accreditation have not been empirically demonstrated.<sup>29</sup>

The third claim behind the proposed federal regulations is that new public accountability systems will be used by those seeking information about preparation quality, thus motivat-



ing programs to improve through market forces. There is little evidence along these lines. However, in some states where teacher tests were implemented in the late 1990s coincident with then-new HEA reporting regulations, institutions were accused of “gaming the system” by requiring teacher tests as an admission—but not an exit—requirement, thus producing (meaningless) 100% pass rates for their programs.<sup>30</sup> This kind of response casts doubt on the market claim.

The validity of federal reporting regulations as an accountability policy depends on how well it fulfills its three claims. We argue that there is good reason to doubt that state development and enforcement of a federally required reporting system is an effective mechanism for improvement. Further, although there is a growing body of work about the development of systems for value-added assessments of teacher preparation programs, there is almost no evidence that these provide actionable evidence or serve as a useful feedback loop for improvement. Finally, there is little evidence that the market impact of public data about preparation leads to meaningful reform.<sup>31</sup>

## CAEP Accreditation

The Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) was founded in 2013 as a merger between the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and the Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC), which created a single national educator preparation accreditor<sup>32</sup> that provides for *indirect professional* accountability. Although state approval of teacher preparation programs is required in all states, 18 currently have partnerships with CAEP.<sup>33</sup> To meet CAEP standards, programs are accountable for the systematic collection, management, and synthesis of reliable and valid evidence about: the quality of candidates; effectiveness of completers and programs based on value-added or other measures of teaching effectiveness as well as surveys of employers and completers; program outcomes, measured by graduation, licensure, and hiring rates; and, student loan default rates.<sup>34</sup> This array of evidence is similar to the data that new HEA regulations require states to develop.

### Rationale: What Claims Are Made about CAEP Accreditation?

CAEP’s advocates assume that the public has lost confidence in preparation programs because they have not produced teachers who close the achievement gap and teach all students to world-class standards.<sup>35</sup> For CAEP advocates, the presumed cause of this problem is the teacher education profession itself and its failure to make decisions on the basis of evidence about graduates’ and programs’ impact.<sup>36</sup> Working from the assumption that the profession does and should have jurisdiction for regulating preparation, CAEP’s goal is to “raise the bar” through tougher requirements<sup>37</sup> and become the “gold standard” in higher education accreditation.<sup>38</sup> CAEP’s theory of change is that the continuous use by the profession of data systems featuring “revolutionary” approaches to assessing teachers’ and programs’ impact<sup>39</sup> will promote program accountability and improvement.<sup>40</sup>

The rationale for CAEP accreditation as a policy instrument relies on three claims. The first is that a national accreditation system developed and managed by the profession<sup>41</sup> is an effective mechanism for raising standards and thus improving the quality of preparation,

defined primarily as graduates' impact on students' learning.<sup>42</sup> The second closely related claim is that in the process of meeting standards for accreditation, programs will engage in "continuous improvement and innovation"<sup>43</sup> based on reliable and valid evidence about outcomes; this process will enhance teacher education and teaching quality. The third claim is that an accreditor-created massive database containing systematically collected performance data will provide usable consumer information, thus restoring policymakers' and the public's trust in the teacher education profession.<sup>44</sup>

### **Validity of CAEP Accreditation as a Policy Instrument: What Is the Evidence?**

Given that no institutions have yet completed the full CAEP accreditation process, there is no direct evidence about the efficacy of CAEP national profession-managed accreditation as a mechanism for raising standards and improving preparation programs. Although studies about the impact of national accreditation by CAEP's forerunner, NCATE, are related, there is little evidence overall in this area.<sup>45</sup> The results are mixed regarding the relationship between teacher candidates' completion of an NCATE-approved program and their scores on licensure tests,<sup>46</sup> and there is virtually no evidence about whether completion of an NCATE program predicts teachers' practices or career trajectories.<sup>47</sup> More importantly, however, even though NCATE and CAEP involve very similar policy mechanisms—institutions seeking national professional accreditation conduct an institutional self-study according to accreditor-established and profession-vetted standards followed by peer review—their standards and evidence requirements are dramatically different. CAEP drastically shifted the evidence requirements for accreditation—from NCATE's inputs, processes, and assessments of candidates' knowledge and skills to CAEP's outcomes, performance, and consumer satisfaction. CAEP's outcomes approach essentially eliminates the "middle man" in the evidence game by ignoring a host of relevant variables that intervene between teachers' preparation and the achievement of their eventual students. Because programs must now show direct evidence of their graduates' effectiveness, employment patterns, and consumer satisfaction to earn CAEP accreditation, there is not much need for external examinations of correlations between CAEP accreditation status and program graduates' licensure test scores and/or accreditation status and graduates' performance.

A major question here is whether measures of outcomes, especially program graduates' impact on students' achievement, are valid assessments of teacher preparation program quality in the first place, an issue that is enormously controversial,<sup>48</sup> prompting many calls for caution from measurement experts and professional organizations.<sup>49</sup> The National Academy of Education's analysis of teacher preparation evaluation concluded that CAEP legitimacy hinges on: whether preparation programs can provide evidence of graduates' impact on students' achievement, how other measures of teacher effectiveness can be integrated, and whether differences in the features of preparation can be linked to graduates' classroom effectiveness.<sup>50</sup> There have been very few studies along these lines.<sup>51</sup> There have also been multiple concerns about CAEP accreditation as an accountability mechanism, including lack of confidence within the collegiate teacher education community that CAEP has the capacity to manage the reformation of a field fraught with competing policy and political agendas.<sup>52</sup> Further, questions have arisen about how programs can demonstrate impact on achievement if they are not in states with already existing value-added assessment systems,<sup>53</sup> and there are mounting reservations about what these approaches leave out of assessment, such as diversity and social justice goals.<sup>54</sup>

CAEP's second claim is that the accreditation process will promote "cycle[s] of evaluation and continuous improvement"<sup>55</sup> that are "sustained by quality assurance systems,"<sup>56</sup> centering on new teachers' effectiveness, employment, and consumer satisfaction. As we noted above, this claim is very similar to the second claim involved in the rationale for new HEA rules, which we discussed above. As we show, there are studies that describe the development of value-added systems in certain states, but they offer almost no evidence about how these systems actually provide for and/or motivate continuous improvement.

CAEP's third claim is that the massive database that CAEP plans to accumulate will serve as a clearing house for consumer information about preparation, which will restore trust in the teacher education profession. As we noted above, there is no evidence along these lines.

The validity of CAEP accreditation as a profession-managed accountability policy that will improve teacher education hinges on the evidence for its three claims. Our conclusion is that there is very good reason to doubt the first claim about the efficacy of a profession-managed national accreditation system to raise standards by focusing primarily on students' achievement scores. Further, although there is research about the development of state-level value-added assessments of preparation programs, there is little evidence that these systems provide actionable feedback loops for program improvement. Finally, as far as we can determine, there is no relevant evidence that speaks to the impact on policymakers' or the public's trust in teacher education as a result of making accreditation data public.

## NCTQ Teacher Prep Review

The *Teacher Prep Review* is an evaluation of collegiate and alternative teacher preparation programs in the U.S.,<sup>57</sup> conducted by the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ), a private advocacy group.<sup>58</sup> The *Teacher Prep Review* ranks preparation programs based on NCTQ-developed input criteria using publicly available and solicited information, including syllabi and student teaching guidelines.<sup>59</sup> NCTQ's rankings are published in *US News and World Report* and disseminated through multiple press releases and NCTQ's *Path to Teach*, an online consumer guide to preparation options.<sup>60</sup> Although the *Teacher Prep Review* is not technically a policy instrument, it "holds teacher education accountable" through *indirect market* accountability in ways similar to some of the other initiatives we review, and it has become a powerful influence on policy related to teacher education.<sup>61</sup> Thus we ask the same questions about the *Teacher Prep Review* that we ask about the other accountability initiatives reviewed here.

### Rationale: What Claims Are Made about the *Teacher Prep Review*?

NCTQ asserts that the cause of educational decline in the U.S. is teacher education programs that are chaotic, out of sync with policy and public demands, and incapable of preparing teachers to perform in the classroom.<sup>62</sup> The rationale for the *Teacher Prep Review* depends on a market claim and an effectiveness claim. According to NCTQ, the only way to enforce standards in the vast and uneven field of teacher education is by "fully engag[ing] the unparalleled power of the marketplace" by shining a "harsh spotlight on programs [which] is highly motivating to them."<sup>63</sup> NCTQ's theory of change is that their creation of "the largest database on teacher preparation ever assembled... [will] set in place market forces that will

spur underachieving programs to recognize their shortcomings and adopt methods used by higher scorers.”<sup>64</sup>

NCTQ’s effectiveness claim is that teacher preparation programs that are highly rated by NCTQ produce teachers who are more effective than other teachers. This is a fundamental premise of the *Teacher Prep Review*: “The National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) has long been an advocate for the idea that ‘effective’ teaching must be rooted in academic results for students. Whatever else they accomplish in the classroom, effective teachers must improve student achievement.”<sup>65</sup> Although the effectiveness claim is not emphasized in NCTQ’s promotional materials with the same force or frequency as its market claim, the former is in fact the *sine qua non* of the entire rationale behind the viability of the *Teacher Prep Review* as an accountability mechanism that will drastically improve teacher education quality.

### Validity of *Teacher Prep Review* as an Accountability Instrument: What Is the Evidence?

There is no existing empirical research about the impact of the *Teacher Prep Review* on the market.<sup>66</sup> The most relevant evidence comes from studies about how prospective students and institutions respond to *US News and World Report’s* annual rankings of the nation’s colleges and universities as undergraduate institutions.<sup>67</sup> The findings of several key studies<sup>68</sup> lead to the conclusion that *USNWR* undergraduate rankings do indeed have some impact on the application/admissions decisions of potential students as well as the admissions and other behaviors of higher education institutions. However, some analyses raise questions about whether rankings-prompted institutional changes actually make sense educationally or are only attempts to game the system by engaging in “sneaky” actions deliberately intended to influence rankings.<sup>69</sup>

If we simply extrapolated from the research on the impact of *USNWR’s* rankings on undergraduate colleges and universities, it would seem reasonable to conclude that some prospective teachers might be more likely to apply to programs ranked higher in NCTQ’s *Teacher Prep Review*. However the major assumption behind NCTQ’s market claim is that the rankings will prompt programs and institutions to change in order to improve their future rankings. However the primary reason the *USNWR* undergraduate rankings have an impact on institutions is that the institutions themselves—whether public or private, elite or not—take them so seriously, in some cases paying excessive attention.<sup>70</sup> This reasoning cannot be extrapolated to the NCTQ rankings of teacher preparation programs. In fact many collegiate programs and professional organizations put little stock in the NCTQ rankings with most private and many elite institutions not participating,<sup>71</sup> and many publics participating only through compulsion.<sup>72</sup> In addition NCTQ’s review has been publicly critiqued by many of these institutions through widely disseminated open letters and other statements that raise major questions about NCTQ’s methods, motives, and procedures.<sup>73</sup> Further the NCTQ standards have not been vetted by the profession,<sup>74</sup> and they lack full alignment with the Berlin Principles, an internationally approved set of criteria for higher education ranking systems.<sup>75</sup> We conclude that there is good reason to doubt NCTQ’s market claim that the “harsh spotlight”<sup>76</sup> of the rankings will prompt substantial changes in the policies and practices of teacher education programs.

Research that speaks to NCTQ’s effectiveness claim is limited but direct. The most relevant

evidence is a 2015 study by Henry and Bastian that investigated the association between NCTQ's ratings of preparation programs and two measures of teacher performance—

teachers' value-added scores and their evaluation ratings—for more than 4500 first or second year teachers in North Carolina.<sup>77</sup> Henry and Bastian found that higher NCTQ program ratings generally did not predict either higher teacher value-added scores or better teacher evaluations.<sup>78</sup> They concluded: “With our data and analyses, we do not find strong relationships between the performance of teacher preparation program graduates and NCTQ's overall program ratings or meeting NCTQ's standards.”<sup>79</sup> Two smaller studies corroborate Henry and Bastian's general conclusions. Fuller noted that NCTQ program ratings and licensure pass rates among Texas teacher candidates were not correlated<sup>80</sup> and that NCTQ program ratings did not predict teachers' value-added scores in the state of Washington.<sup>81</sup> Dudley-Marling found no relationship between the proportion of preparation programs meeting NCTQ's criteria for teaching early reading in individual states and the NAEP reading performance of pupils in those same jurisdictions.<sup>82</sup>

The validity of the *Teacher Prep Review* as an accountability instrument depends on whether it fulfills its market and effectiveness claims. Our conclusion is that there is reason to doubt the market claim and that there is evidence showing that NCTQ program ratings do not predict the effectiveness of the graduates of those programs. This calls into serious question the validity of NCTQ's *Teacher Prep Review* as an accountability mechanism that will boost teacher education quality.

## The edTPA

The edTPA is a nationally available assessment used to evaluate the performance of teacher candidates, currently required for teacher licensure in a number of states and widely used in programs across the country.<sup>83</sup> Designed to assess what candidates do and how they reflect on their work, the edTPA was developed at Stanford University's Center for Assessment, Learning, and Equity (SCALE),<sup>84</sup> partly as a corrective for narrowly focused standardized certification exams.<sup>85</sup> Based on the Performance Assessment for California Teachers (PACT) and informed by work related to the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), the edTPA requires teacher candidates to submit a portfolio of lessons and reflections, which is scored by external reviewers through a data storage and evaluation system managed by Pearson, Inc.<sup>86</sup> Proponents of the edTPA, which is based on *indirect professional* accountability, promote its use as a requirement for initial teacher licensure and its use as part of a package of evidence for national program accreditation.<sup>87</sup>

### Rationale: What Claims Are Made about the edTPA?

Proponents of the edTPA assume that teacher quality is a major determinant of student achievement.<sup>88</sup> They locate the current problem of uneven teacher education quality within the profession itself—specifically teacher education's failure to develop as a legitimate profession with uniform expectations about what teachers know and can do.<sup>89</sup> The assumption behind the edTPA is that the way to fix the problem is implementation of widespread state-wide licensure policies that require authentic performance assessments.<sup>90</sup>

The rationale for the edTPA as a policy instrument that will boost teacher education quality



and ultimately teacher quality involves three closely coupled claims. The first is an authenticity claim—that the edTPA is a valid and authentic measurement tool that both reflects and predicts teacher candidates' success in the classroom<sup>91</sup> and thus ultimately improves learning for students.<sup>92</sup> The second is the professional claim that implementing the edTPA will positively impact the professional learning of teacher candidates and prompt continuous program improvement and renewal.<sup>93</sup> The third is a professionalization claim about broad impact: widespread implementation of the edTPA will steer improvement from inside the profession,<sup>94</sup> and teacher education's self-regulation will boost the status of the profession in the eyes of policymakers and the public.<sup>95</sup>

### Validity of the edTPA as a Policy Instrument: What Is the Evidence?

To assess validity and effectiveness claims about the edTPA, we reviewed evidence regarding the edTPA itself, the PACT, and National Board for Professional Teaching Standards certification. Internal studies of the PACT<sup>96</sup> and edTPA<sup>97</sup> were conducted internally, by the organizations that developed the instruments—researchers at Stanford University and SCALE, respectively. These traditional psychometric studies indicated that both the PACT and the edTPA were valid and reliable tools for the assessment of individual teacher competence and licensure decisions. On the other hand, some analyses based primarily on teacher educators' experiences have asserted that these assessments are not appropriate for all fields, have limited conceptions of teaching and learning, and do not acknowledge the impact of school constraints, local contexts, and social justice aims.<sup>98</sup> In response, an extensive conceptual analysis authored by a member of the edTPA national design team concluded that despite claims to the contrary, the edTPA does allow for candidates' equity and social justice aims.<sup>99</sup>

The predictive validity of the edTPA has not been established.<sup>100</sup> However, there is related evidence from the PACT, which is the edTPA's forerunner. A pilot and follow up study of the PACT (with 105 and 14 candidates, respectively) linked teacher candidates' PACT scores with value-added assessments and concluded that PACT scores predicted later teaching effectiveness, as evidenced by statistically significant but small differences in students' achievement gains.<sup>101</sup> In addition, studies have concluded that although differences are small, NBPTS certified teachers are generally more effective than non-NBPTS teachers.<sup>102</sup> An important caveat here is that NBPTS results do not necessarily extrapolate to the edTPA, given important differences in populations and purposes. The edTPA is a required assessment for teacher candidates to gain initial state teaching certification, while NBPTS assessments are part of optional advanced licensure opportunities for experienced teachers.

A number of studies are relevant to the edTPA's second claim that it promotes professional learning and prompts positive institutional and program change. Again we draw on both PACT and edTPA studies here. Most candidates who participated in pilots of the PACT reported that it was a source of learning and that their programs helped them prepare for the assessment,<sup>103</sup> although some also said the PACT could induce stress and take time away from other coursework and fieldwork priorities.<sup>104</sup> Candidates whose programs helped them prepare were more likely to report the PACT was a source of learning.<sup>105</sup> In contrast, most surveyed teacher candidates who took the edTPA in New York and Washington, the first two states where the edTPA was required for licensure, reported that the assessment was unfair, unclear, and time consuming and that their programs did not prepare them well; teacher candidates in Washington, where there was a gradual rollout of the edTPA, generally reported greater understanding and preparation than those in New York where high-stakes



implementation was sudden.<sup>106</sup> Finally, institutional self-studies of several large-scale institutional implementations of the PACT or the edTPA concluded that implementation of the assessments had a positive institutional and curricular impact,<sup>107</sup> and that even when there were faculty concerns about alignment or loss of local control,<sup>108</sup> successful implementation depended on distributed leadership and support at all university levels.

The third claim about the edTPA is that its widespread implementation will enhance public perceptions about collegiate teacher education as a self-regulating enterprise and boost the status of the profession. Only history can really speak to this claim. However it is worth noting that there have been multiple concerns about the edTPA within the teacher education community, including concerns about the role of Pearson, Inc., contracted by Stanford to manage edTPA data scoring and data storage, as well as concerns about the edTPA's lack of attention to local cultural issues and its potential to undermine teacher educators' professional autonomy.<sup>109</sup> Concerns like these could preclude widespread acceptance of the edTPA. In addition, given that the dominant U.S. approach to education reform equates teacher effectiveness with boosting students' test scores (and not with professional judgment, which is at the heart of the edTPA), it may be that those outside the profession will have no interest in the edTPA and thus it will not have the desired effect on professional status as perceived by outsiders.<sup>110</sup>

Based on the evidence, our conclusion is that the edTPA is a valid assessment of some valued aspects of teaching, although there is no evidence to date that the edTPA itself predicts effectiveness. Implementation of the edTPA has the potential to prompt professional learning for candidates, programs, and institutions under certain conditions: alignment of edTPA and program/institutional goals and values, adequate institutional leadership and capacity building, and gradual supported implementation. However, as the problematic case of edTPA implementation in New York State indicates,<sup>111</sup> these conditions may be difficult to meet. In addition, although we favor complex evaluations of teacher education, we acknowledge they will have major difficulties reversing the "common sense" conclusions of the education reform movement that collegiate teacher education is a failed enterprise.<sup>112</sup>

### **Holding Teacher Preparation Accountable: Thin Evidence, Thin Equity**

Although it is widely assumed that teacher quality is a critical determinant of student and school outcomes,<sup>113</sup> the role that *teacher preparation* plays is less clear. Teacher preparation has emerged as an acutely politicized and highly publicized issue in the U.S., and there have been fierce debates about whether, how, by whom, and for what purposes teachers should be prepared. This means that assessing the impact of major national initiatives designed to "hold teacher education accountable" is of great interest to policymakers, educators, and the public. Based on our extensive review of evidence and claims for four major initiatives intended to hold teacher preparation accountable, we conclude that for the most part, they are based on both thin evidence and a thin notion of equity that does not adequately account for the complex and longstanding out-of-school factors that produce and reproduce educational inequality.

## Thin Evidence

Few would oppose the idea that those engaged in the enterprise of teacher preparation should be professionally accountable for their work. Yet our critique of the claims and evidence regarding four accountability initiatives raises many questions. Across three of the four initiatives (HEA regulations, CAEP accreditation, and NCTQ's reviews), there is thin evidence to support the claims proponents make about how the assumed policy mechanisms actually operate—or would operate if implemented—to improve the quality of teacher preparation.<sup>114</sup> Rather, the advocates of these initiatives assume a more or less causal relationship between the implementation of their summative evaluations and the improvement of teacher preparation quality. This black box kind of logic is misguided. Summative evaluations intended to influence policy decisions generally do not provide usable information for program improvement.<sup>115</sup> The irony here is that while these policies call for teacher preparation programs and institutions to make decisions based on evidence, the policies themselves are not evidence-based, and there is good reason to question the validity of these initiatives as policy instruments that will have a positive impact on teacher education quality.

The edTPA is something of an exception here. Because it builds on California's PACT assessment of teacher candidates, the implementation of PACT serves as a pilot study for the edTPA, and there have also been multiple field tests of the edTPA itself. Thus, unlike the

*There is good reason to question the validity of these initiatives as policy instruments*

policy mechanisms of the other three initiatives reviewed here, the policy mechanism behind the edTPA—a state-wide uniform teacher candidate performance assessment required for initial teacher licensure—does have an evidentiary basis, although it is very limited as shown above. Even with the edTPA, however, major difficulties in the roll out of the edTPA in the state of New York raise many questions about the feasibility of statewide implementation.<sup>116</sup> In addition there are multiple concerns within the collegiate teacher preparation community about what the edTPA leaves out and about the problematic role of Pearson, Inc. These situations suggest that widespread statewide implementation and widespread professional acceptance of the edTPA as a uniform assessment, both of which are essential to the edTPA's capacity as a driver of change, will be challenging to accomplish.

In addition to the fact that there is thin evidence about the feasibility of the above policy mechanisms to produce change, our review also raises questions about the definitions of teacher quality underlying the policies. Even though revisions to the HEA regulations give states the option to use multiple measures of students' achievement, both the HEA regulations and CAEP procedures hinge on the assumption that teacher preparation program quality is primarily a function of teacher quality, defined in terms of graduates' impact on students' achievement, as measured by standardized tests. Defining student learning (and teacher quality) largely in terms of students' test scores has been so widely challenged and critiqued as a narrow, limited, and superficial approach<sup>117</sup> that we do not elaborate further here, but we do add our voices to these challenges. In contrast, NCTQ's teacher preparation reviews rely on an input-based definition of teacher education quality that is out of sync with both the dominant, though problematic, approach to education reform and with notions of teacher quality that are prominent within the collegiate teacher education community. Nevertheless, as we show above, the NCTQ reviews assume that teacher effectiveness is ultimately defined by student test scores and that the inputs the reviews emphasize are related to test score outcomes.

The definition of teacher quality underlying the edTPA reflects an alternative to, and a clear rejection of, value-added type assessments of teachers and teacher education programs, and instead focuses on teachers' deep knowledge of how children learn, their complex classroom skills, and their professional judgment.<sup>118</sup> We see this definition of teacher quality as promising but partial, and we return to this in our recommendations.

## Thin Equity

At a general level, all four of the accountability initiatives we reviewed are intended to promote equity by ensuring that all students have access to good teachers. But our analysis reveals that underlying most of these initiatives is what we call “thin equity,” borrowing from democratic theorist Benjamin Barber’s<sup>119</sup> now classic distinction between “thin” and “strong” democracy. Barber defined “strong” democracy as the participation of all of the people in at least some aspects of self-governance at least some of the time. In contrast he critiqued “thin” or representative democracy, suggesting that thin democracy was based on an individualistic, rights perspective rather than a strong participatory view.

As noted above, we use the term “thin equity” to refer to teacher education accountability policies wherein equity is defined as equality or “sameness.” The assumption is that equity can be achieved by assuring that all students have the same access to “high quality” teachers (as noted, for HEA, CAEP, and implicitly NCTQ, this primarily means teachers who boost students’ test scores or other measures of achievement) but *without* addressing the larger historical and institutional systems of inequality and lack of participation that produced inequity in the first place. In contrast, the edTPA is grounded in a notion of teacher quality that involves teachers’ knowledge, skill, and professional judgment, including understanding the language demands of academic tasks, which supports English language learners. Even with this viewpoint, however, the edTPA does not give precedence to preparing teachers to understand and challenge inequities in the existing structures of schools and schooling, to recognize and build on the knowledge traditions of marginalized groups, or to work with others as agents of social justice and social change.

When policies work from a thin equity perspective, the assumption is that school factors, especially teachers, are the major sources of educational inequality, even though this is, as we stated above, a conclusion that is not based on evidence. This means that access to good teachers is assumed to be the solution to inequality. This viewpoint does not adequately acknowledge that inequality is rooted in and sustained by much larger, longstanding, and systemic societal inequities. In contrast, a “strong equity” perspective acknowledges the complex and intersecting historical, economic, social, institutional, and political systems that create inequalities in access and lack of access to teacher quality in the first place. This perspective assumes that equity cannot be achieved by teachers and schools alone; rather it requires educators working with policymakers and others in larger social movements to challenge the intersecting systems of inequality in schools and society that produce and reproduce inequity.

## Recommendations

Although debate remains, educators and policymakers at multiple points along the political

spectrum are increasingly recognizing that reforming teacher preparation is an important part of larger efforts to improve the schools and enhance students' learning. Based on our critique of claims and evidence related to four major national accountability initiatives, we offer the following policy recommendations.

- Policymakers must acknowledge and address the multiple factors—in addition to teacher quality— that influence student outcomes, including in particular the impact of poverty, family and community resources, school organization and support, and policies that govern housing, health care, jobs, and early childhood services.
- Systems evaluating teacher preparation must produce results that preparation programs can use to change and improve curricula, practice-based experiences, and assessments—not results that simply grade programs without information about why or how particular results occurred or what might improve them.
- Systems evaluating teacher preparation programs must be built on policy mechanisms that have documented capacity to produce usable information for local and larger program improvement within a complex policy and political climate.
- There should be a conceptual shift away from teacher education *accountability* that is primarily bureaucratic or market-based and toward teacher education *responsibility*<sup>120</sup> that is primarily professional and that acknowledges the shared responsibility of teacher education programs, schools, and policymakers to prepare and support teachers.
- Evaluations of teacher preparation programs should:
  - Reflect alternative forms of accountability that shift the focus from externally generated single-measure tests to multi-pronged internal assessments of teacher performance and student learning.<sup>121</sup>
  - *Not* be based solely or primarily on students' test scores; as the National Academy of Education report on teacher preparation evaluation recommends, state-level decision makers and K-12 administrators should avoid “placing too much weight” on value-added assessments of program graduates' and programs' effectiveness.<sup>122</sup>
  - Consider teacher educators' performance (defined as knowledge, practice, commitments, and professional judgment as they play out in the construction and operation of programs), teacher candidates' performance (defined as knowledge, practice, commitments, and professional judgment as they play out in classrooms and schools), *and* students' learning (defined as academic learning, social/emotional learning, moral/ethical development, and preparation for participation in democratic society).
  - Recognize that teacher preparation programs have multiple, often complex, goals and purposes, including preparing teachers to challenge inequitable school and classroom practices and work as agents for social change. These goals, which are consistent with a “strong equity” perspective, should be reflected in evaluation processes.

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- 4 A number of major trends stand out, including, but not limited to: complex and far-reaching new accountability schemes; the dislocation of teacher preparation from universities; the clinical or “practice turn” toward schools and other sites of practice wherein teacher candidates presumably learn the core activities of teaching; and, the emergence of powerful new actors and political advocates on the teacher preparation stage.
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[statements-press-releases/inaugural-board-of-directors](#)

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- 39 CAEP has other important standards, including standards related to the selection of academically able teacher candidates, candidates' knowledge and skills, and clinical partnerships with schools; however, it is very clear that the essential standards are those related to program impact and graduates' effectiveness, defined as impact on students' achievement.

40 See, for example:

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Teacher Preparation Analytics. (2014). *Building an evidence based system for teacher preparation*. Washington, DC: CAEP. Retrieved April 23, 2015 from <http://caepnet.org/accreditation/caep-accreditation/caep-accreditation-resources/building-an-evidence-based-system>

- 41 In every state where it is available, CAEP accreditation procedures are carried out through some sort of partnership with the state; however, CAEP's aspiration is to be the sole arbiter of accreditation required by states, but monitored and managed by CAEP as a professional organization.

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United States Government Accountability Office. (2015). *Teacher preparation programs. Education should*

*insure states identify low performing programs and improve information sharing*. Washington, DC: United States Government Accountability Office. Retrieved December 1, 2015 from <http://www.gao.gov/assets/680/671603.pdf>

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Brabeck, M. (2015). Open letter to AACTE [Press release]. Retrieved April 18, 2015 from: <http://caepnet.org/about/news-room/statements-press-releases/open-letter-to-aacte>

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- 44 See:

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Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation. (2015). *CAEP accreditation manual*. Washington, DC: CAEP. Retrieved December 8, 2015 from <http://caepnet.org/~media/Files/caep/knowledge-center/caep-accreditation-manual.pdf?la=en>

- 45 See:

Feuer, M.J., Floden, R.E., Chudowsky, N., & Ahn, J. (2013). *Evaluation of teacher preparation programs: Purposes, methods, and policy options*. Washington, DC: National Academy of Education.

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- 46 See:

Ballou, D. & Podgursky, M. (1999). Teacher training and licensure: A layman's guide. In M. Kanstoroom & C. Finn (Eds.), *Better teachers, better schools*. Washington, DC: Thomas B. Fordham Foundation.

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- 86 Pecheone, R.L., Pigg, M.J., Chung, R.R., & Souviney, R.J. (2005). Performance assessment and electronic portfolios: Their effect on teacher learning and education. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 78(4), 164-176.
- 87 American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education. (2014). *edTPA® provides support by the profession, for the profession*. Retrieved October 12, 2014 from [https://secure.aacte.org/apps/rl/res\\_get.php?fid=1621&ref=edtpa](https://secure.aacte.org/apps/rl/res_get.php?fid=1621&ref=edtpa)
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