

Laura Coscarelli
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Ensuring Quality Teachers for America's Schools

The Issue:

Few educational issues have received more attention in recent times than the problem of ensuring that our nation's elementary and secondary classrooms are all staffed with quality teachers. Most reformers agree that increasing teachers' expertise and effectiveness is critical to the success of ongoing efforts to reform American education. The quality of teachers and teaching are undoubtedly among the most important factors shaping the learning and growth of students.

According to the federal education act, No Child Left Behind (2001), all core subjects must be taught by highly qualified teachers by the conclusion of the 2005-2006 school year. The Act's definition of a highly qualified teacher includes the requirement that teachers demonstrate competence in the subject matter they teach. However, the issue remains unresolved how to train and retain these quality teachers in order to provide all America's children with the education they deserve.

Why Quality Teachers Matter:

The disparity between teachers' abilities has an adverse effect on students' achievement. The finding that the least qualified teachers typically end up teaching the least advantaged students is particularly problematic. It is vital that we address the issue of quality teachers in order to attempt to close the achievement gap. Recent studies have found that differences in teacher quality may represent the single most important school

resource differential between black and white children in the United States (Darling-Hammond, L. 1999: 256). Poor and minority children are routinely exposed to poorer quality curricula and teaching, which account for much of the achievement gap (Darling-Hammond, L. 1999: 254). With access to excellent instruction by highly trained teachers, great strides could be taken in closing the minority gap.

Teacher Preparation Programs:

The quality of teacher preparation programs nationally is integral to ensuring that our nation's schools are staffed with skilled professionals capable of raising student achievement. However, while this is a national concern, the oversight of these teacher education programs occurs at the state level, creating a disconnect between policy and practice. While at the national level, No Child Left Behind calls for all teachers in the country to be "qualified," the Act does not specify requirements for this to occur. Instead, each state education department develops and adopts a set of standards which institutes must meet before its teacher education program is approved (Howsam, R.B. 1985: 53). Because there is no established standard across the board, some states are creating teachers less qualified than others.

Ironically, although teaching's entry training and licensing requirements are lower than those for many other occupations and lower in the United States than in some other nations, they appear to be subject to far more scrutiny than those in other occupations (Ingersoll, R.M. 2004: 8). Because requirements for teacher education are dramatically uneven across the country, and because most states lower or ignore their standards whenever districts have trouble filling vacancies, teachers receive radically different

kinds and qualities of preparation depending on where and how they choose to enter the profession.

The requirements to become an elementary or secondary teacher are still neither uniform nor considered rigorous. Currently, states determine teacher quality by establishing standards and requirements that all teacher candidates must meet before entering the classroom. These standards for what teachers must know and be able to do and the policies related to certification and licensure vary from state to state (Education, U.S.D.o. 2006: 27). In order to be certified in most states, candidates for teaching must earn a minimum grade point average or achieve a minimum test score on tests of basic skills, or general academic ability or general knowledge (or both) in order to be admitted to teacher education or gain a credential (Darling-Hammond, L. 2002: 16).

For every move to tighten certification requirements, loopholes allowing candidates to skirt the requirements have also been created and expanded. Although more than 97 percent of the nation's 3.2 million classroom teachers are now fully certified or licensed, there are an additional 80,975 teachers that remain uncertified (Education, U.S.D.o. 2006: 33). In addition, as of 2005, 15 states have no content area bachelor's degree requirement in place for licensure (Education, U.S.D.o. 2006: 27). This data demonstrates that there remain, in fact, an astonishingly high number of teachers in America's classrooms that are not complying to the same standards as other teachers.

Teacher Retainment:

Once teachers are trained, however, there remains the issue of keeping them in the classroom. Currently there is a shortage of teachers, despite national data demonstrating that for the past four academic years the total number of teachers produced has generally

increased from year to year (Education, U.S.D.o. 2006: 15). Since the mid-1980s student enrollments have increased, teacher retirements have also increased, most schools have had job openings for teachers, and the size of the elementary and secondary teaching workforce has increased (Ingersoll, R.M. 2004: 10).

Low pay, isolated job conditions, little professional autonomy, and little sense of a career ladder all undermine longer-term commitment to teaching as a career and profession. A number of studies have found that after just five years, between 40 and 50 percent of teachers have left teaching altogether; other studies have also found that the “best and brightest” – those with higher test scores, such as on the SAT and the National Teacher Exam – are the most likely to leave (Ingersoll, R.M. 2004: 12-3). In addition, high-poverty schools have far higher teacher turnover rates than do more affluent schools (Ingersoll, R.M. 2004: 13).

When creating policy, legislators have been forced to ask themselves, is it better to have a less qualified teacher in the classroom or no teacher at all? The response of many state and local governments continue to be to lower or eliminate standards for entry into the teaching profession rather than to create incentives that will attract and retain an adequate supply of teachers (Howsam, R.B. 1985: 55; Imig, D. 1997: 30; Darling-Hammond, L. 1999: 261).

Alternative certification has been one solution; however, there are many faults with this method of reducing the shortage. Currently, about half of alternative route programs are administered by colleges and universities (Education, U.S.D.o. 2006: 15). This type of certification attracts “career changers,” and is limited to producing no more than 5% of beginning teachers each year (Imig, D. 1997: 28, 30). However, novice

teachers from alternative route programs now make up close to 20 percent of the new teachers prepared nationally (Education, U.S.D.o. 2006: ii), and is ever-increasingly in popularity: in the past four years, the total number of alternative route program completers has increased by almost 40 percent (Education, U.S.D.o. 2006: 17).

Alternative licensure teachers are also working more often in difficult conditions than fully certified teachers. They are teaching some of the most at-need students: for 2004-05, the greatest number of waivers were held by teachers in special education (Education, U.S.D.o. 2006: 35). However, studies of under prepared teacher – those who lack teacher education or who enter the field through short-term, alternative routes featuring only a few weeks of training – consistently find that such teachers are less effective with students and that they have difficulty with curriculum development, classroom management, student motivation, and teaching strategies. With little knowledge about how children grow, learn, and develop, or about what to do to support students' learning, these teachers are less likely to understand student learning styles and differences, to anticipate students' knowledge and potential difficulties, or to plan and redirect instruction to meet students' needs (Darling-Hammond, L. 1999: 257).

Also, if loosening the entry requirements involves lowering an already low bar, this may make the occupation less attractive and reduce the flow of quality candidates, especially in the long term (Ingersoll, R.M. 2004: 8-9). Alternative certification is not a long-term solution to filling classrooms. In fact, it is detrimental to students to have under-qualified teachers in the classroom.

Reform Initiative:

Although there are a number of ways to reform the issue of quality teachers, I propose to target the area of teacher training. Although American schools have tended to treat teachers as semi-skilled workers, success in the American classroom requires high levels of knowledge and a broad range of skills. In order to assure the quality of teachers' performance in the classroom, teachers must first receive the best training possible. I hope to restructure the path of teachers' careers and provide them with the support they need to remain in the classroom.

Education Preparation:

A teacher's education would not end after receiving their bachelor's degree and passing a teaching exam. Instead, teaching training would involve a staged career in order to support their development over the entire course of their career.¹ There would be levels of education: pre-service, in-service, and continuing (Howsam, R.B. 1985: 19). This type of career – with multiple levels and periods of training -- provides additional opportunities for evaluation, increased competence, and screening (Darling-Hammond, L. 1986: 539-40).

Stage 1: Pre-Service

The “pre-service” portion of teachers' career would occur in college. The pre-service portion of training would consist of both subject matter knowledge – in the form of a bachelor's degree in that teacher's core subject – and pedagogical content knowledge, which would enable teachers to represent ideas so that they are accessible to others. Courses would need to be challenging and demanding. Colleges should establish a

¹ See Appendix 1

professional school specifically for future educators. For example, a college graduate with a bachelor's degree in English would also have to complete their Teaching degree with the college's professional Teacher Education program. The full academic program (bachelor's in content area and education professional training) would be completed in four years.

Individuals who enter these teacher education programs would make the commitment that some teachers currently make voluntarily as members of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. These individuals agree to five core principles: 1) teachers are committed to students and their learning, 2) teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach these subjects to students, 3) teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning, 4) teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience, and 5) teachers are members of learning communities (Yinger, R.J. 1999: 99). Any individuals unable or unwilling to meet these philosophical principles would not be allowed entrance to the training program.

Stage 2: In-Service

Most professions require an internship or apprenticeship of some sort for new graduates. In order to further professionalize teacher's education, the "in-service" portion of the staged career would be a year-long internship. Many districts place beginning teachers in the most difficult schools with the highest rates of teacher turnover, the greatest numbers of inexperienced staff, and the least capacity to support teacher growth and development (Darling-Hammond, L. 1999: 261). While under the guidance of a mentor teacher, student teachers would be able hone their craft and be given a chance to

be successful in the classroom. Upon the completion of this stage in their career, candidates would be able to teach on their own and receive an “instructor” certificate.

On this note, the current method of dealing with the teacher shortage -- alternative certification – must be eliminated. Despite shortages, no exceptions can be made for alternate certification. Standards should not be lowered for socio-economically disadvantaged students. Although this could cause a temporary shortage in teachers, particularly in high-needs schools, more teachers will ultimately be attracted to the field.

Stage 3: Continuing Education

There is little point in training teachers if they are going to exit the profession almost immediately. As a result, immense support is needed for teachers while they are teaching.

One vital source of support is continuing education, which would occur throughout the teachers’ career. Teachers could move up a hierarchy of professional achievement. Through continuing education, teachers could achieve the status of “career professional” upon the completion of a six-year certification program. Teachers could further advance in their career by working towards a doctorate and achieve “career professional” status.

While this could be difficult for teachers without easy access to educational institutions, such as those teaching in rural locations, distance learning must be made available to teachers. In order for this to be feasible, there must be strong connections between teacher training institution and teachers in the field. Also, by further professionalizing the teaching field, more teachers would have the motivation to remain in the classroom.

Additional Supports:

While the majority of support for teachers in the classroom would come from their increased training and continuing education, one must recognize that these two areas of support are not enough. In order to retain these quality teachers once they are in the field, teachers require assistance in the form of within school support and additional funds.²

There must be financial incentives to teaching. First, the costs required to complete teacher-training programs must be lowered. The current cost of completing the teacher training program reduces the attractiveness of teaching as a career. Federal grants would have to be allocated to pay for the education of future teachers. One distinct advantage in these grants would be the increase the number of minority candidates in the field (Darling-Hammond, L. 1999: 268). The grants could, however, result in some students mis-using the system, and becoming teachers merely because of the financial attraction. Nevertheless, increased compensation for teachers could boost the quality of the candidate pool if the higher pay results in more highly qualified individuals seeking teaching careers.

There are, however, some opportunities to have the cost of one's education reimbursed. For example, the *Higher Education Reconciliation Act of 2005*, removed any deadlines for loan forgiveness available by law to highly qualified teachers in high-poverty districts. Those who specialize in mathematics, science or special education are eligible for a greater amount of forgiveness, providing another tool for recruiting teachers who can prepare students to compete in today's global economy. *HERA* also extended

² See Appendix 2

these same loan forgiveness benefits to private school teachers. (Education, U.S.D.o. 2006: xi). This act provides incentives for teachers to teach in high-poverty districts, however it is also problematic. Through monetary motivation, the position could attract individuals that are not actually invested in the children's success. Also, such funds should be made available to teachers in all districts to alleviate the financial burden of their teacher education.

Even so, pay incentives may not be enough to draw quality teachers to high-needs schools. Because studies have shown that “incentives such as bonuses for teachers who accept positions in hard-to-staff schools are insufficient to retain teachers or enhance their teaching” (Bruno, J.E. 1986), additional support must be made available to teachers in high-needs schools.

An increase in pay, coupled with improvements in teacher education and induction have led to reductions in teacher shortages and improvements of teacher qualifications in states like Kentucky and North Carolina (Darling-Hammond, L. 2000). Most teachers identify compensation *and* working conditions as key factors in their decision to leave their current schools (Kelley, C.a.K.F. 2004: 268). As a result, better working conditions must be made available to teachers in high-needs schools, in the form of reduced class sizes, reduced teaching loads, and more opportunities for professional growth. This combination could result in higher retention rates of quality teachers in high-needs school.

Educational Institutions:

Colleges must establish professional schools in order to properly train potential teachers. While candidates would receive a degree in their background field, educational

professional schools must be established in order to oversee the “in-service” portion of teachers’ careers. Some colleges’ current programs may not pass the grade in their current states, and it could take several years to attract the required faculty and re-think the curriculum offered to students.

Programs must also conduct research to ensure that the most accurate information is collected and evaluated. There remains a critical need within the educational field for a large-scale effort to add to the knowledge base through fundamental and applied research; “in the long run, the greatest contribution the federal government can make is through research and development activities” (Howsam, R.B. 1985: 51).

Teachers’ Teachers:

While it is established that the quality of teachers in classrooms is incredibly important, equally vital is the quality of those educators that are training teachers. Teacher educators must be given a voice in the creation of policy, particularly when establishing standards for these training programs. As a result, close relationships must be forged and maintained between these educators and policy makers.

One barrier to this reform is the possible shortage of quality teacher educators as programs raise their standards to meet the new requirements. More individuals in the educational field would have to leave the classroom and/or pursue doctorate level study to staff the teacher training programs.

Evaluating Teachers:

In order to retain the quality aspect of the NCLB Act, teacher evaluation is an integral step to ensuring the best education possible for students. If teachers are to be considered professionals, they must be evaluated by their peers. “in contrast to current

approaches to teacher teaching, testing in other professions goes beyond multiple-choice paper-and-pencil tests of basic information” (Darling-Hammond, L. 1986: 539). These peers must themselves be highly knowledgeable in the particular area. Evaluation by non-peers reduces the accuracy and validity of observations and impedes the further development of standards of practice.

In order for the teaching candidates to advance from stage to stage in their career path, they must be evaluated by their peers. A meaningful evaluation would provide an assessment of teaching that reveals not only whether or not a teacher does specific things at certain times (e.g. whether or not a teacher has lesson plans, behavioral objectives, and an orderly classroom during the two periods a year when the evaluator appears) but whether a teacher has sufficient knowledge, skill, and judgment to make sound teaching decisions over a sustained period of time on behalf of many students with diverse needs (Darling-Hammond, L. 1986: 533).

I would advocate adopting an evaluation based on the evaluation on a portfolio of the teacher’s work: “this portfolio, which includes videotaped lessons, teacher plans and commentaries, and samples of student work – is used as a basis for determining licensure for new teachers” (Darling-Hammond, L. 1999: 272).

National Coordination:

National standards for certification and teacher training programs must be established and coordinated between the states.³ Each state cannot continue to work independently to train and evaluate their teachers according to completely different standards. There is no reason that students in certain states should be taught by more

³ See Appendix 3

poorly trained teacher than in other states. A national standard would ensure that our nation's children were being taught by the same level of highly trained teachers, regardless of what state the teacher was trained in.

This would mean that many states would have to raise their level of teaching programs and standards to meet the current, better programs in high achieving states. This is a view shared by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE), which has recently called for a common national assessment for all new teachers, regardless of the nature of their pre-service teacher preparation program, or lack thereof (Richardson, V.a.D.R. 2004: 116).

A change in structure between the national and local levels would also make recruitment easier. The application process must be streamlined; teachers should not be held back from applying to or accepting jobs because of bureaucratic issues. There should be a common application designed for teacher applicants that can be used nation-wide. If there is a demand for teachers in another state, it should be easier for them to move to the state and begin teaching.

Immediate Action to Take

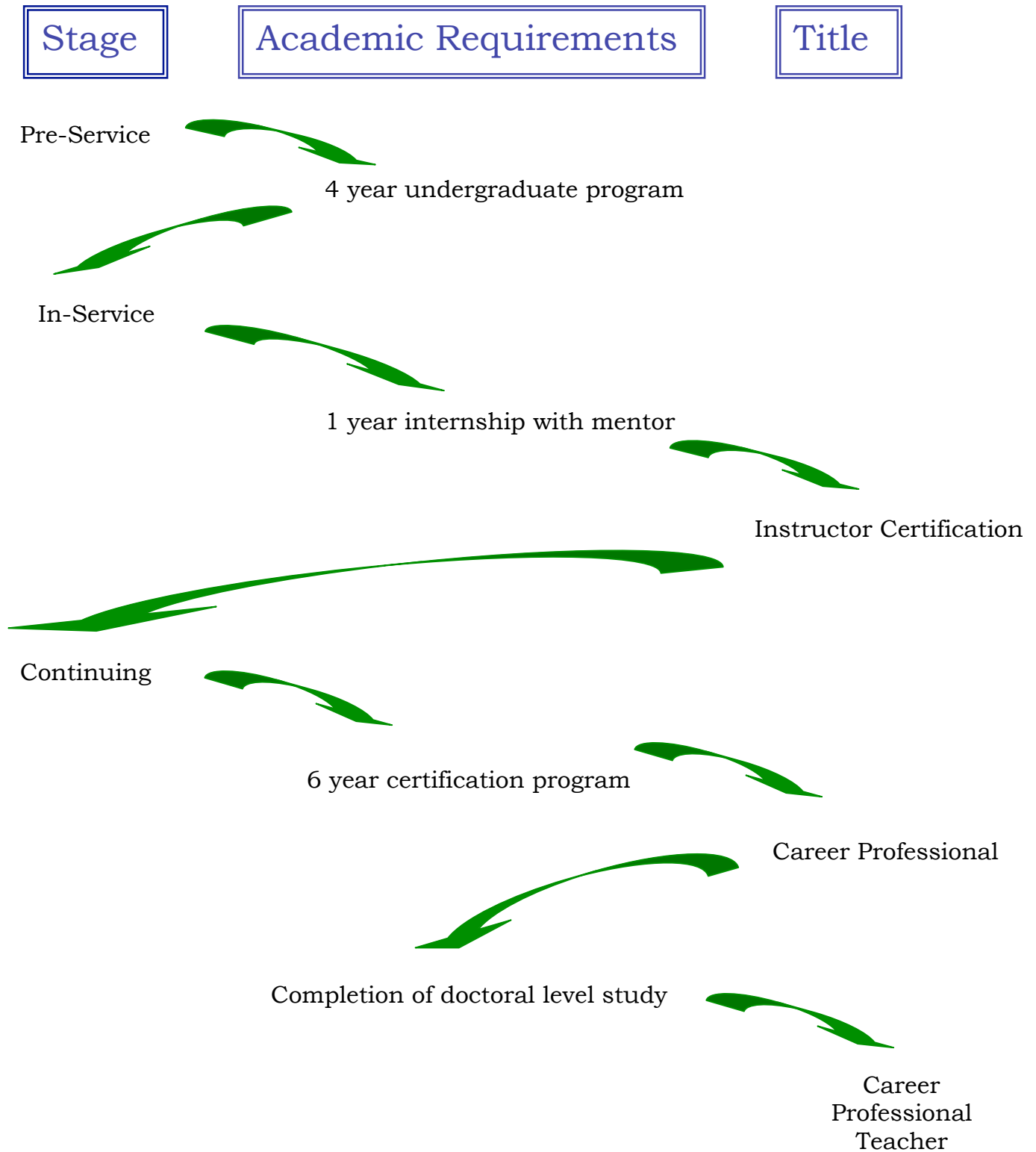
Although standards are currently in place to ensure that quality teachers are in America's schools, there remain significant improvements to be made.

- Efforts must be coordinated between the state, national, and local level. This includes establishing a national standard for educator's preparation programs, as well as national standards for certification. If our nation's children are to be held to national standards, so should our teachers.

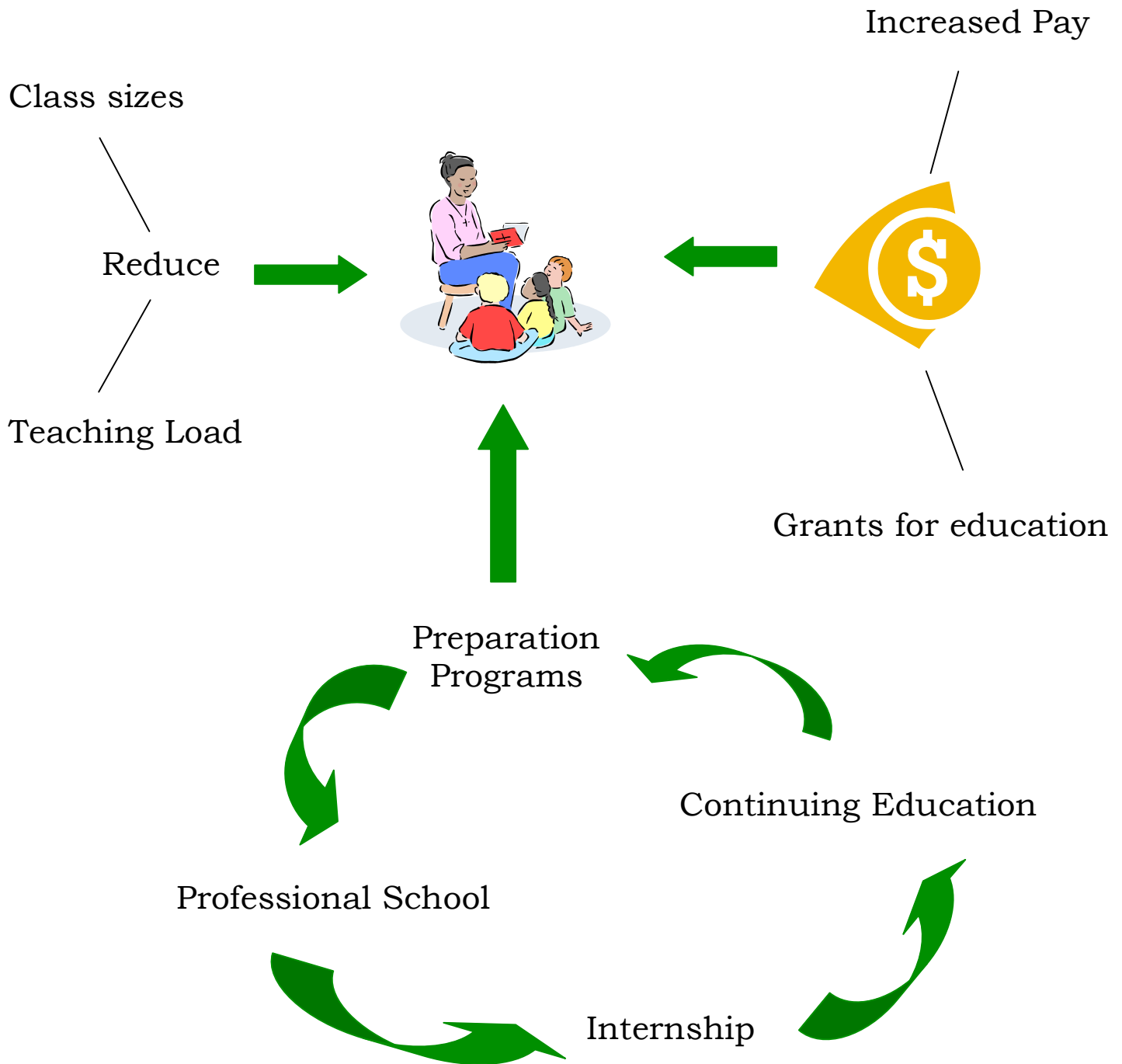
- No further alternative certifications will be issued, which will create a short-term shortage. As a result, current teachers will have to take on a greater load and/or class size.
- Because current teachers will be forced to have more work in the classroom to combat this shortage, they will be granted more time to complete their continuing education.
- Teachers that are currently teaching will be required to submit a portfolio of their work to be reviewed. Those deemed unfit will have the opportunity to continue on if they agree to enroll in continuing education.
- Because there will be a rush to enroll in continuing education, preference will be given to those who are in most need of support (such as those teachers that do not pass their portfolio inspection), followed by those teachers that have been out of university the longest, as they will need access to the newest research on teaching methods.
- Students currently enrolled in teacher education programs will complete their programs, and will begin their staged career with a yearlong internship.
- Funding for grants to pay for teachers' education at all stages of their career, and increased pay, particularly to those working in high needs schools.
- Individually, I plan to discuss my findings with the individuals in charge of teacher preparation with the organization Teach for America.

If the issue of teacher quality remains unaddressed, student achievement will decline, particularly for those students that are socio-economically disadvantaged. Selection and induction into teaching should be rigorous so that the public can have confidence that teachers are competent. These new reform will encourage qualified individuals to enter into the teaching profession and will provide them with the tools to grant America's children the best education possible.

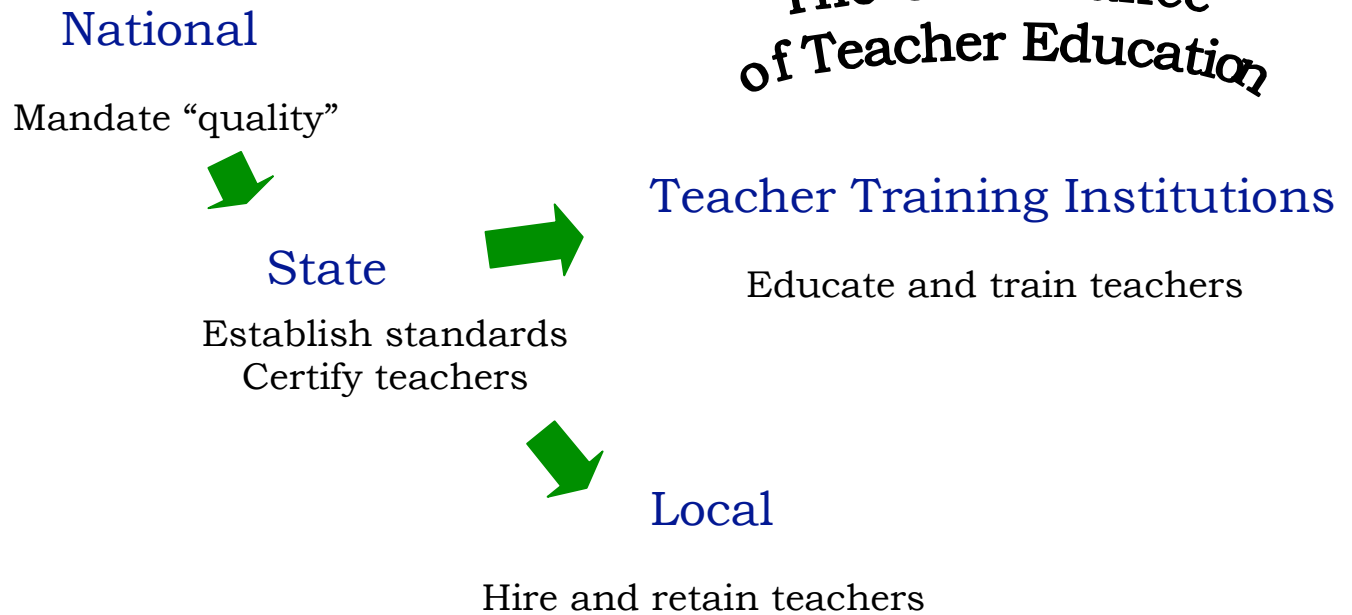
The New Career Path



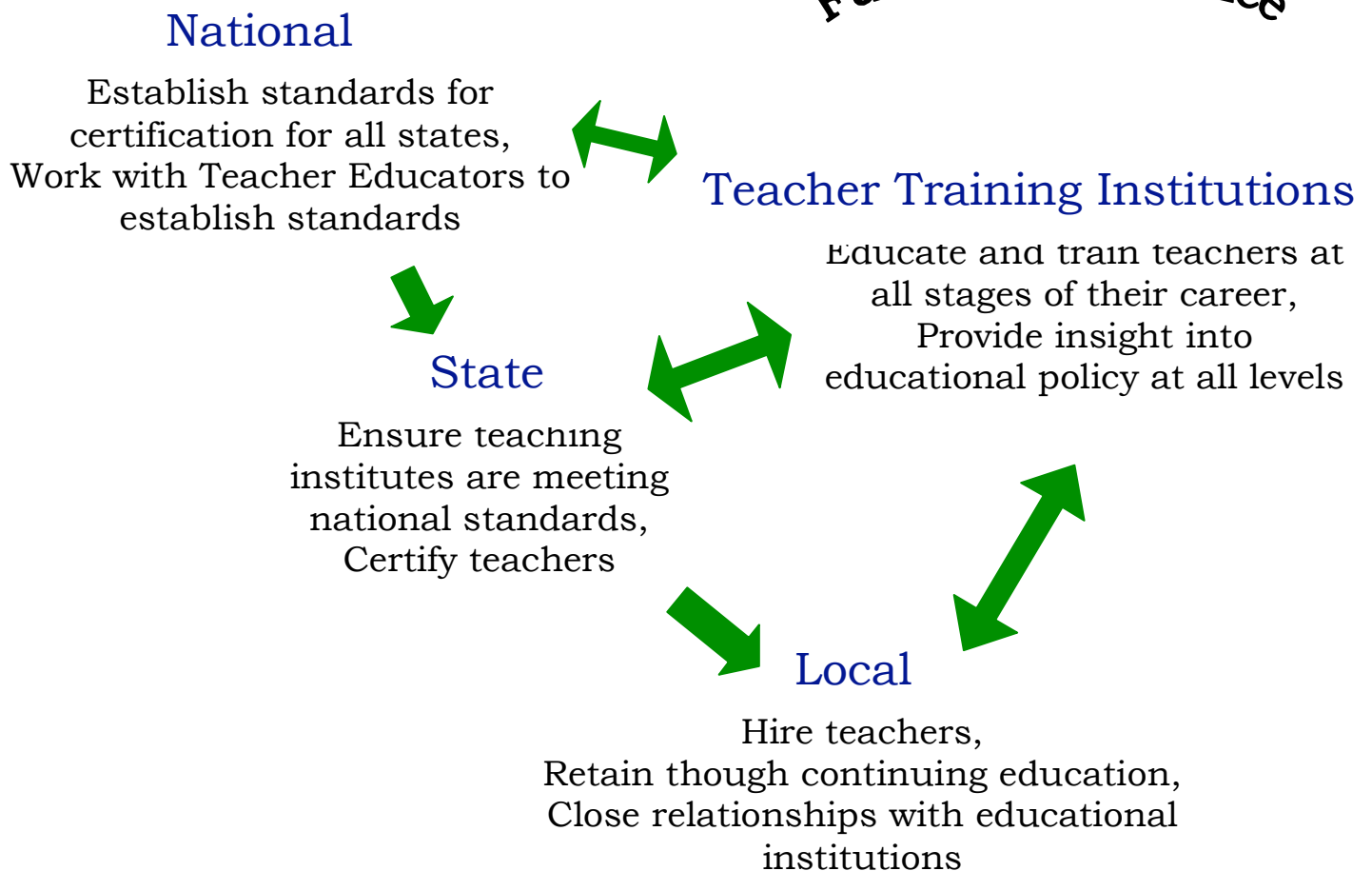
Support for Teachers



The Governance of Teacher Education



Future Governance



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Bruno, J. E. (1986). "Teacher Compensation and Incentive Programs for Large Urban School Districts." Elementary School Journal **86**(4): 441.

Darling-Hammond, L. (1986). "A Proposal for Evaluation in the Teaching Profession." The Elementary School Journal **86**(4): 530-51.

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Education, U. S. D. o. (2006). The Secretary's Fifth Annual Report On Teacher Quality: A Highly Qualified Teacher in Every Classroom. Washington D.C., Office of Postsecondary Education: 96.

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Imig, D. (1997). "Professionalization or Dispersal: A Case Study of American Teacher Education." Peabody Journal of Education **72**(1): 25-34.

Ingersoll, R. M. (2004). Four Myths About America's Teacher Quality Problem. Developing the Teacher Workforce. M. A. a. D. M. Smylie. Chicago, Illinois, The University of Chicago Press: 1-32.

Kelley, C. a. K. F. (2004). Teacher Compensation and Teacher Workforce Development. Developing the Teacher Workforce. M. A. a. D. M. Smylie. Chicago, Illinois, The University of Chicago Press: 253-73.

Richardson, V. a. D. R. (2004). Teacher Preparation and the Improvement of Teacher Education. Developing the Teacher Workforce. M. A. a. D. M. Smylie. Chicago, Illinois, The University of Chicago Press: 105-44.

Yinger, R. J. (1999). The Role of Standards in Teaching and Teacher Education. The Education of Teachers. G. A. Griffin. Chicago, Illinois, The University of Chicago Press. **98**: 85-113.

Work Cited: Annotated

Darling-Hammond, L. (2002). "Defining "Highly Qualified Teachers:" What Does "Scientifically-Based Research" Actually Tell Us?" Educational Researcher **31**(9): 13-25.

This article critiques the Secretary's Annual Report on Teacher Quality (below), specifically the conclusions drawn from data that Darling-Hammond finds to be of a questionable nature. She argues that the Report cites almost no research that would meet scientific standards, misrepresents findings from a large number of sources, and includes many unsupported statements about teachers education and teacher certification.

Education, U. S. D. o. (2006). The Secretary's Fifth Annual Report On Teacher Quality: A Highly Qualified Teach in Every Classroom. Washington D.C., Office of Postsecondary Education: 96.

This report is a compilation of data assessing the current quality of teachers in America's schools. The data shows that states have made considerable progress toward the nation's goal of a highly qualified teacher in every classroom, and describes areas where we must work harder to make improvements.

Howsam, R. B. (1985). Educating a Profession. Washington D.C., American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education.

This book begins with an examination of teaching as a profession, and moves to the governance of teacher preparation programs, specifically the relationships between national, state, and local authorities all hoping to ensure quality teaching.

Imig, D. (1997). "Professionalization or Dispersal: A Case Study of American Teacher Education." Peabody Journal of Education **72**(1): 25-34.

This article examines the threats to teacher training, and the resulting decline in quality of preparation. Specifically, the authors examine the negative effects of alternative preparation programs and the overall dispersal and deinstitutionalization of teacher education.

Lucas, C. J. (1997). Teacher Education in America: Reform Agendas for the Twenty-First Century. New York, St. Martin's Press.

This book provides a comprehensive history of teacher education in America, beginning with colonial school masters, and concluding with current certification standards. Much emphasis is placed on the structural set-up of education between the state and national levels, and their various delegated responsibilities.

Yinger, R. J. (1999). The Role of Standards in Teaching and Teacher Education. The Education of Teachers. G. A. Griffin. Chicago, Illinois, The University of Chicago Press. **98**: 85-113.

In his article, Yinger calls for the further standardization of areas of the teaching profession. He argues that such standards would improve teacher education, teacher licensure, and allow teaching to evolve into a profession.