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More Rigorous Requirements for Teacher Education Will Encourage Programs To Emphasize Clinical Training, Focus on Critical Needs of P-12 Schools

New Accreditation Requirements Seek To Transform Teacher Education Programs, Build Evidence of What Works in the Field and Strengthen Focus on P-12 Student Needs

WASHINGTON, DC – June 23, 2009 –Beginning this year, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), the national organization that ensures quality in teacher education, will introduce a new approach to accrediting nearly 700 teacher education programs that prepare a majority of the nation’s teachers.

As part of the first major revision of teacher education requirements in 10 years, institutions seeking the NCATE seal of approval must either demonstrate that they are on track to reach an “excellent” level of performance, rather than remain at an “acceptable level,” or make transformative changes in key areas, such as:

- strengthening the clinical focus of their programs to better prepare educators to meet the needs of today’s P-12 students and foster increases in student learning
- demonstrating the impact of their programs and graduates on P-12 student learning
- increasing knowledge about what works in teacher education to improve P-12 student learning, using a research and development strategy to build better knowledge and help institutions use that knowledge to improve programs, and
- addressing critical needs of schools, such as recruiting talented teachers and bolstering teacher retention.

The new accreditation strategy, approved by the NCATE Executive Board last month, creates two alternative pathways to accreditation. The *Continuous Improvement* track raises the target level of performance beyond the “acceptable” level. The second pathway, the *Transformation Initiative* track, encourages institutions to build the base of evidence in the field about what works in teacher preparation and help the P-12 schools they serve address major challenges, from raising student achievement to retaining teachers.

“The new focus will help close the gap between theory and practice, and assure that teacher education program candidates are able to help diverse students be successful learners,” says NCATE president James G. Cibulka. “In the past, accreditation wrapped clinical experience

around coursework. This approach reverses the priority, encouraging institutions to place teacher candidates in year-long training programs and wrap coursework around clinical practice.” The focus on clinical experience is in line with efforts by the Obama administration. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act provides \$100 million for the Teacher Quality Partnership which, among other things, seeks to improve teaching in high-need schools and early childhood education by improving teacher preparation programs and professional development.

“States have a mandate to change the status quo in educator preparation, and the NCATE requirements call for new ways of doing business,” says Peter McWalters, the Rhode Island Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education, and former NCATE Executive Board member. “These levers will encourage current delivery models to change so that preparation will be integrated with induction and will become a school-support structure, rather than a totally separate activity located only within higher education. The NCATE redesign will help the field move to new models of teacher preparation and development that are better suited to meet the needs of 21st-century education.”

NCATE supports the development of delivery models to create multiple pathways that are of high quality, says Cibulka. “However, regardless of pathway, all candidates should meet the same set of high standards.”

In making these changes, the NCATE Executive Board also sought to streamline program monitoring and paperwork. To make accreditation a cost-effective and cost-efficient enterprise that monitors desired outcomes, the new regulations will demand less gathering of less significant institutional data and instead seek more regular reporting and greater transparency of crucial candidate performance data.

Hilda Rosselli, chair of American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education’s (AACTE) Committee on Professional Preparation and Accountability and dean, school of education at Western Oregon University, applauds NCATE’s extensive efforts to re-envision the accreditation process. “The changes encourage institutions to focus more on continuous improvement and address P-12 school needs through partnerships and research,” says Rosselli.

Model Programs Under Way

As part of the development of the new process, NCATE has identified several efforts (e.g. in Tennessee and Connecticut) now under way which exemplify the types of initiatives that NCATE is seeking under the redesigned accreditation system and which can serve as national models for transforming teacher preparation and P-12 schools. In other cases, NCATE is helping institutions design ambitious initiatives that transform education programs and help turn the corner on improving student performance.

For example, the Tennessee Board of Regents is currently in the process of integrating educator preparation into the state’s P-12 system. By 2013, the Board of Regents expects all undergraduate candidates to be placed in senior year-long residencies in P-12 schools using problem-based learning modules focusing on specific P-12 school needs. Significant changes to the teacher education curricula will be necessary as part of this transition.

Paula Myrick Short, vice chancellor of the Tennessee Board of Regents, says that two institutions piloted the residency this year, and lessons from the pilot will be integrated into next year's efforts. "The sustained senior year clinical residency will equip graduates to succeed in challenging urban and rural public schools, and that the close partnership between university and P-12 faculty will promote innovation and development among all participants."

"The NCATE redesign dovetails with what our state is doing, and we will be pleased to be a resource to other states and institutions as they move along a similar path," Short says. The Tennessee redesign effort, she notes, will be "a centerpiece of our institutions' NCATE reaccreditation and the state will share results with the field."

Another promising redesign effort is the CommPACT Schools initiative, a partnership among the University of Connecticut's Neag School of Education, school administrator professional associations, teachers unions, and urban districts. CommPACT Schools is being piloted at eight high-need urban schools in Connecticut to improve P-12 student learning and help change learning environments in those schools.

"The CommPACT Schools initiative serves as a real-world laboratory for helping us prepare well-grounded educators who understand the causes of the achievement gap and the solutions for eliminating it," says Richard Schwab, dean of the Neag School. Faculty work directly with CommPACT schools to provide school-based support in data-gathering and analysis, priority-setting, and professional development to support research-based practices. Faculty are also working with CommPACT Schools as action research sites, investigating key topics such as urban school improvement, literacy development among urban youth, and how best to promote positive academic cultures. The initiative is funded in part by the state of Connecticut and by the NEA Foundation.

Schwab says that "the Neag School's future reaccreditation effort will be focused on evaluating and presenting data from the CommPACT effort to raise P-12 student achievement," and believes that "accreditation will now serve as an even stronger lever to help transform teacher preparation."

An initiative planned by the University of Cincinnati, Transformational Educator Preparation, focuses on ensuring teacher candidates "are full participants within the professional community of practice in high needs urban schools. The transformation of our preparation programs will help transform the education of underserved students," says Holly Johnson, director, school of education. In order to increase positive outcomes for children and for the urban communities served, candidates in the School of Education are utilizing evidence-based practice and documenting effective practices in urban education. Johnson adds, "We've always had a moral imperative to address the needs of all children. Our coursework, our field experiences, and our teacher professional development must respond to 21st century needs of a diverse population and be grounded in a system of accountability and continuous improvement."

The University of San Diego is investigating the effectiveness of all aspects of current field experiences for prospective teachers. The results will inform a comprehensive, best practices sequence of teacher candidate field experiences. Teacher candidates will be even better equipped to provide optimal learning environments for PK-12 students, and be better prepared to set and achieve high learning expectations for the students they teach.

The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) is a professional accrediting organization for schools, colleges, and departments of education, and other organizations preparing P-12 educators, in the United States. NCATE provides leadership in assuring quality and encouraging improvement and innovation in educator preparation to advance professional educator effectiveness in enhancing all dimensions of P-12 student learning. NCATE's nearly 700 accredited institutions prepare approximately two-thirds of the nation's teacher preparation candidates annually in over 10,000 programs.

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