

Education Matters

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Promoting New Standards of Professionalism & Educational Enrichment

MAKING THE GRADE

Is teacher certification irrelevant?



By David W. Kirkpatrick

A teaching certificate is acquired through a program that emphasizes process, not results, or in the jargon, inputs, not outputs. Certified and qualified are not interchangeable terms. Even the late Al Shanker, longtime president of the American Federation of Teachers, said that at least a quarter of the nation's teachers are not qualified to be in the classroom.

Nationally about 1,200 schools of education prepare teachers. Less than half are accredited, assuming that accreditation has more validity than certification. In addition, if certification is valid, shouldn't education professors have to be certified? Why should non-certified professors prepare certified teachers? As it is, many, perhaps most,

teachers are certified by an educational process presented by uncertified staff in unaccredited institutions.

Beyond that, large numbers of certified teachers in grades 9-12 have neither a major nor a minor in their subject. UCLA education professor Donald Erickson estimates that as many as 1,000,000 of the nation's teachers have no major or minor in their subject. He adds, "Hundreds of studies show that a certified teacher isn't more qualified than an uncertified teacher." Worse yet, in the poorest urban schools, 45 percent of their secondary math teachers lack a relevant major or minor.

A review of 113 studies found no relationship in 85 percent of them

between student achievement and a teacher's educational background. A positive relationship was reported in 7 percent, and a negative one in 5 percent.

What about educational school standards? In 1997 the combined SAT verbal and math score for all college applicants was 1,013 out of a potential maximum of 1,600. The average for education schools was 964, and some students had scores as low as 642.

Richard Mitchell, who taught English at a New Jersey teachers college, said the last question in an education course there required drawing letters of the alphabet in both upper and lower case. It counted for 52 percent of the grade.

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New Jersey began an alternative certification program in the mid-1980s. Former New Jersey Governor Tom Kean noted that, in the first year, the state's public schools hired a Fulbright scholar, five Harvard graduates, and a scientist holding two patents. Further, alternative candidates scored higher on the National Teachers Exam than those trained by conventional methods.

By 1994, forty-one states and the District of Columbia had adopted alternative teacher training programs, although only fourteen were regarded as "true" alternatives. For example, Pennsylvania was said to have an alternative program. This "alternative" was available to someone with no education degree but a "strong knowledge in a specific subject matter." He can enroll in a college or university program, "taking the same education and subject courses required of all certification candidates," which could take up to three years to complete. Some alternative!

The trend is away from conventional approaches.

One national survey found 73 percent of classroom teachers support expanding alternative certification options. Michigan has discontinued certifying administrators, and a number of states, again including New Jersey, have successfully allowed noncertified administrators, including superintendents, in some instances.

The certification process, while going back to the early 19th century for a precedent, is relatively recent. In 1920 not a single state required even a college degree for elementary teachers, most of whom didn't have one. Only ten states required one of secondary teachers. As late as 1948, almost 60 percent of the nation's teachers still lacked a degree. Were teachers less able then? Did students achieve less? Admittedly, the public school dropout rate was higher then, but as one who was educated prior to 1948, of my classmates who dropped out prior to graduation, I can't recall even one who wasn't literate.

During a 1978 Kentucky court case, when the state was challenged to produce scholarly research proving that certification equates to teacher competence, or to educational excellence, it could not do so.

Defenders of the certification status quo should be required to prove two things: (1) present certification procedures work; and (2) proposed alternatives won't work. They won't be able to do either. ■



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POOR RESEARCH LEADS TO FLAWED POLICIES

Excerpted from "Teacher Certification Reconsidered," from the Abell Foundation

The academic research attempting to link teacher certification with student achievement is astonishingly deficient. To reach this conclusion, we reviewed every published study or paper—along with many unpublished dissertations—cited by prominent national advocates of teacher certification. We found roughly 150 studies, going back 50 years, that explored or purported to explore the relationship between teacher preparation and student achievement. To our knowledge, no comparable effort by analysts has been made to drill systematically down through these layers of evidence in order to determine what value lies at the core.

This process, known as teacher certification, is neither an efficient nor an effective means by which to ensure a competent teaching force. Worse, it is often counterproductive.

The following deficiencies characterize the work advocating teacher certification:

- Research that is seen as helping the case for certification is cited selectively, while research that does not is overlooked.
- The lack of evidence for certification is concealed by the practice of padding analyses with multiple references that appear to provide support but, once read, do not.
- Research is cited that is too old to be reliable or retrievable.
- Research that has not been subjected to peer review is given unmerited weight, with particular reliance on unpublished dissertations.
- Instead of using standardized measures of student achievement, advocates design their own assessment measures to prove certification's value.
- Basic principles of sound statistical analysis, which are taken for granted in other academic disciplines, are violated routinely. Examples include failing to control for key variables such as poverty and prior student achievement; using sample sizes that are too small to allow generalization or reliable statistical inference; and relying on inappropriately aggregated data.

For the complete report, visit www.abell.org.



Loan Forgiveness Available

The U.S. Department of Education would like you to know that you may be eligible for new loan forgiveness limits recently signed into law by President Bush.

The Taxpayer-Teacher Protection Act (P.L. 108-409) authorizes up to \$17,500 in loan forgiveness to “highly qualified” math, science, and special education teachers who have taught for five years in a Title I school.

This Act will provide an incentive for “highly qualified” individuals to

enter the teaching field in these high-need subject areas.

If you do not currently meet the “highly qualified” teacher designation in NCLB, earning a *Passport to Teaching* certification from the American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence (ABCTE) will grant you this status. (Visit www.abcte.org)

For more information on loan forgiveness, call the Department’s Federal Student Aid Customer Service hotline at (800) 433-7327.

Feds Enforce NCLB

Officials from the U.S. Department of Education traveled to North Dakota in November and told state education officials that their criteria for anointing teachers with highly qualified teacher status aren’t up to snuff—or at least not up to NCLB requirements. The state had decided that its current process for certifying elementary teachers (which, in North Dakota, means earning a degree in elementary education)

could also serve double duty for highly qualified teacher status. Not so fast, said the Feds, directing the state to also address these teachers’ subject matter knowledge.

State officials are investigating the legal implications of a challenge to the USDOE ruling. At the same time they’ll also look into improving the elementary standards.

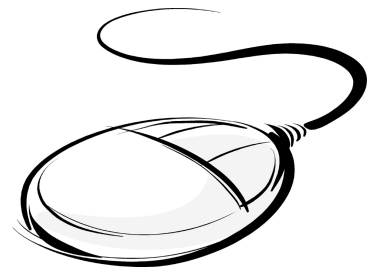
Source: Sheena Dooley, The Bismarck Tribune, December 10, 2004.

Free Tool for Busy Teachers

In your busy schedule, you have a new tool to help manage your day. Grade Connect is an easy-to-use course management system designed by teachers packed with an impressive array of features proven to help teachers manage their courses more easily.

The online grade book allows you to post up-to-the-day grades and keep students continuously informed about their academic standing, so there are fewer questions. It will automatically calculate quarter grades. You can post homework and project assignments along with due dates—the students’ personal calendar feature constantly reminds them of upcoming deadlines.

“It’s a valuable time saver,” says teacher Charlie Gallagher. “I



estimate I have saved hours each and every day I’ve used Grade Connect.”

It is completely free to use for teachers and their students.

Grade Connect was selected as “Site of the Week” at 4teachers.org at the University of Kansas. It has been reviewed and is now noted on the website of *USA Today* “Education” section as a “Best Bet.” As of October 22, 2004, the U.S. Department of Education selected Grade Connect for EROD (Education Resource Organizations Directory).

For more information visit www.gradeconnect.com or call (215) 780-1772.



Tax Tip

Teachers, instructors, counselors, principals, or aides in a school for at least 900 hours during a school year may deduct up

to \$250 of eligible out-of-pocket expenses in 2004 and 2005 without having to itemize and without being subject to the limitation on “miscellaneous itemized deductions.”

Previous legislation permitted teachers and other “eligible educators” in grades kindergarten through 12 to take an “above-the-line” deduction in 2002 and 2003 of up to \$250 for certain unreimbursed classroom expenses. The new law extends this provision through 2005, effective retroactively to the beginning of 2004.

Eligible expenses include books, certain supplies, computer equipment (including related software and services), other equipment, and supplementary materials that the taxpayer uses in the classroom.



Where Everyone Belongs

How one school's collaborative model for special education is improving the lives of every student

By Julie Fabrocini

When National Public Radio visited CHIME Charter Elementary School to do a story on inclusion, we marveled at the reporter's frustration as she tried to get first graders to identify each other by their differences. She tried desperately for a sound byte from students using words related to ability, but the students responded: "She's the one with glasses," "He's the one with red hair," or "She likes Sponge Bob." In essence, the kids have become so acclimated to each other that it's their similarities that define their relationships.

In celebrating diversity, the students' real life experiences make the difference. I watched a third grader ask a question of his friend who uses a voice output device to speak. Jose realized when he

asked Oliver a question that the device was over on Oli's desk. He didn't bat an eye—but simply walked over, retrieved Oli's "voice", and put it near him. Off went the conversation. Jose wanted to know what his friend had to say.

On occasion, visitors to our school seem interested in identifying students who have disabilities. This can be difficult. Twenty percent of our students have disabilities ranging from mild to multiple to severe. Most of our students are typically developing, and some are identified as gifted and talented. These demographics are not where CHIME stands apart – many public schools are varied in this way. For CHIME, this diversity in ability acts as the foundation of our philosophy. Our faculty was attracted to this model four years ago be-

cause of the commitment to high quality education for all students.

How many educators have thought, "There has got to be a better way." One of the killers for teaching professionals is the torment of waiting for systems to change. When I walk through the classrooms at our school, the commitment, community, and quality pervade the air. It's the charter process that has made this possible.

We don't question who belongs. We only debate how to support belonging. We have worked to remove the "mystery" surrounding disabilities. Children naturally do this much more readily than adults.

At the CHIME Charter Elementary School, 190 students are educated in collaboration with faculty and their families. CHIME stands for Community Honor-



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cial education

Julie Fabrocini,
Director of the CHIME
Charter School, with
some of the students

ing Inclusive Model Education. In many ways, the school looks traditional until you visit the classrooms. You will find a team of educators, related service providers, paraprofessionals, and families who are committed to the education of all children. You'll also find an amazing group of students who teach us everyday about diversity in ethnicity, language, culture, socioeconomic status, and ability.

CHIME has taken the layers that have been generated throughout special and general education, and has combined them for cohesive instruction that meets the unique needs of all students. The effects of pullout instruction have long been discussed in education. We do what we do not only because it is the right thing in accordance with IDEA, but also because it is the best practice.

Practices Specific to CHIME

Co-teaching. In a co-teaching model, special and general education teachers are partners in planning, teaching, and assessment. All children have two teachers, just as all faculty members have a responsibility to every student. This team brings a variety of strengths to the classroom and addresses curricular adaptations. While no one has all the answers, we remain available to each other. Together we are better. High quality instruction is based on scheduled planning, embedded at the beginning of each day. Teachers meet to share plans in advance of teaching to address curricular extension and modifications. It's never a surprise that those adaptations lend themselves to all students.

Related Services. By embedding supports in general education classrooms, related service staff provide targeted support for students with disabilities, which benefits all students. Picture a language and speech pathologist in a heterogeneous reading group, providing therapy in strengthening oral motor skills. What if that same therapist worked on social and pragmatic language during natural turn-taking events like a conversation over lunch or during a handball game? The results are targeted, less artificial, and provided with role models who themselves learn during these processes. These experts train our teachers how to provide customized therapeutic support throughout the school day. Again, the adults keep learning.

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Paraprofessionals. In segregated settings, we too often see that a hovering one-to-one assistant can isolate students from their peers and inadvertently foster a classroom within a classroom. When students are supported daily by different adults, we remove the perception that a peer is so disabled that he needs the same adult at all times. These valuable partners become a component of the team as a whole, and all children see them as a source for help with learning.

Family Partnerships. We look to families to provide leadership as the experts on their children. Families provide love and are the keepers of hopes and dreams. They look to us to provide leadership in instruction, to assess individual student's learning needs, and to develop students' long-term educational careers. CHIME families not only trust us with their children's education, but they also help us make it happen.

Schools Attuned Methodologies. In partnership with the Center for Teaching and Learning at California State Uni-

versity at Northridge (CSUN), and All Kinds of Minds, developed by world-renowned learning expert Dr. Mel Levine, CHIME teachers have been trained in the Schools Attuned program. Schools Attuned helps struggling students measurably improve their performance by providing training for teachers that integrates our understanding of variation in learning with a model for promoting student success.

Special education models are not changed overnight. As educational leaders, we need to begin this process with a commitment to all students. We look to our charter colleagues and to models that are equitable for everyone. This discussion about whether children belong in our school communities has gone on long enough. If we are calling ourselves the best available in public education, then we need to be this for all kids, not just a select group.

Administration is critical, and as school leaders, it is up to us to set the tone about who belongs in our schools. Walk through your school; look at the supports in place for all children. Ask

yourself: Is special education a place or a service? Isn't every child's education supposed to be special? What happens when we educate students separately from peers with whom they are expected to share the community as adults? Do we as educators acknowledge through practice that our population represents diversity in ability?

Often I am asked, "What about disturbances to the classroom from children with behavioral challenges?" I inquire, "Whose learning is expendable: the kids in the special day class where we send those students?" It makes much more sense to simply address behavioral needs in natural environments by identifying what a student's behavior is communicating. Solve the problem where it's happening. Develop a plan to teach more effective ways for students to communicate. Ask: Are we fulfilling our obligation as teachers to be on top of a lesson design that is meaningful and motivating? Ask again: Are curricular adaptations implemented consistently to provide accessibility to content and to state tests and other assessments?

Chester E. Finn, Jr.

Stunning Report on Special Education



After nine months of labor, the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education has given birth to a stunning report: The Commission estimates 80 percent of children in special education are there "simply because they haven't learned how to read." Worse, once in special education, they are unlikely to catch up with their peers in reading or other core skills.

The Commission found "a system in need of fundamental rethinking, a shift in priorities and a new commitment to individual needs." Its key assumption

is that, in special as in "regular" education, "accountability for results matters, parents desire maximum input and educators want to see efficiency melded with compassion and improved outcomes."

Tucked away on page 25 of its report is this bombshell: "[T]he Commission finds that many children who are placed into special education are essentially instructional casualties and not students with disabilities."

It proposes three broad reforms: (1) shift the focus from process to results; (2) embrace "a model of prevention not a model of failure;" and (3) instead of segregating special-education

kids and isolating their funding, meld special education with general education into a single delivery system tailored to the learning needs of every youngster.

The Commission's main message: Start to view special ed chiefly in terms of preventing and remedying education gaps rather than as a system for coping with children who were born with problems that schooling can do little about. ■

Chester E. Finn, Jr. is president of the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation in Washington, D.C..

The Commission's report is available on the Internet at www.ed.gov/inits/commissionsboards/whspecialeducation.

As our school changes, we better our practice everyday. Our students thrive in academics, in developing social consciousness, and in understanding diversity. In 2003, again in collaboration with CSUN and LAUSD, the CHIME Middle School opened. In 2004, CHIME Charter Elementary School made one of the largest test score gains in all of Los Angeles. The message that all children belong and cannot learn what they need to learn from each other unless they are together is a powerful one. We communicate the importance of understanding diversity to children when we as adults work together to see that everyone belongs and gets what they need to learn. ■

Julie Fabrocini has been a special and general education teacher in a variety of instructional settings in elementary and secondary schools. She is currently the principal of the CHIME Charter Elementary School as well as a part-time faculty member in teacher preparation programs in the College of Education at California State University Northridge. Visit Chime Charter at www.chimeinstitute.org



CHIME's History

The development of CHIME (Community Honoring Inclusive Model Education), in many ways, reflects California's charter movement. We knew we could make a difference, given the removal of large bureaucratic constraints. A CHIME teacher, who taught for nineteen years with our local district, put it well when she left, saying: "How could I not come along? This school is my dream."

For fifteen years the nonprofit CHIME Institute has run an inclusive preschool program in collaboration with the Eisner College of Education at California State University Northridge. This program was the genesis for a strong movement of families of children of all abilities who knew the benefits of an inclusive education. These families tenaciously pursued a partnership with CSUN College of Education faculty until parents and faculty members were together developing CHIME's charter. During this process, representatives from our authorizing agency, Los Angeles Unified School District, joined us for the charter development.

Early on, we had much to learn. We struggled with operations and facilities, but our original design stayed strong. We sought help from charter school support organizations and seasoned charter operators who generously guided us.

New Harvard Study

Charter School Students Outperforming Others in Reading and Math

A new comprehensive, long-term study released by Harvard University found a higher percentage of students in charter schools are more proficient on state math and reading tests than their peers in the nearest traditional public schools.

"Charter schools are keeping the public education system on its toes, providing a dose of accountability and innovation that no government spending hike can ever duplicate."

John Boehner, U.S. House Education & the Workforce Committee Chairman

The nationwide report, entitled "Achievement in Charter Schools and Regular Public Schools in the United States: Understanding the Difference," shows the gap between schools.

For charter schools that have been open for nine or more years, 10 percent more of the students scored at or above proficient on state reading and math exams than in the nearest traditional public school.

For charter schools that have been open from five to eight years, 5 percent more students scored at or above proficient on state reading exams than their public school peers and 4 percent more charter school students performed at or above proficient on state math exams.

For charter school that have been in operation for one to four years, two and a half percent more of the charter

school students reached proficiency.

Overall, 5 percent of the students in charter schools are more likely to be proficient on state reading exams and 3 percent are more likely to be proficient on math exams than their counterparts at the nearest traditional public school.

Charter schools overall are more likely to raise the academic achievement of students who are poor or minority, and show a larger effect on reading and math proficiency when they operate in areas that have a high percentage of students who are poor, African American, or Hispanic. ■

A complete copy of the report is available at www.ksg.harvard.edu/pepg.

Protect Yourself

Five ways to guard against accusations of sexual misconduct

By La Rae G. Munk

With last year's release of Mary Kay LaTourneau from prison, the replay of the news of teachers and sexual misconduct hit the headlines, creating a cloud on the character of teachers all over again. This, and other such cases, has increased the frequency of sexual misconduct accusations against teachers.

All too frequently administrators are accepting the student's version of events. In too many situations, administrators are not even bothering to properly investigate an allegation before issuing a reprimand or placing a teacher on suspension. This is true whether the allegation is sexual misconduct, physical abuse, or even just using a word that a student doesn't appreciate. The result is that teachers are experiencing unnecessary discipline and damage to their reputation under a theory of "guilty before proven innocent."

How should you protect yourself from false accusations? Here are five practical steps you can take to limit the opportunities for false accusations of sexual misconduct.

1 Never be alone in a private area with a student. If a student comes into the classroom and you happen to be alone, immediately step into a



public area such as the hallway. When a student wants to speak about a confidential matter, you can do this while in a public area by speaking in a quiet voice.

2 Do not give students your home phone number. Should it be necessary for you to call a student at home, insist that a parent be on the phone during the conversation.

3 If it becomes necessary to give a student a ride in your vehicle, you should do this only if you have

another adult to accompany you, and you have notified the parent or an administrator that you are doing so.

4 Keep detailed notes of daily activities in class. This is particularly important for those comments by students that might be open to different interpretations. For example, a student's question about human anatomy in a science class should be documented. Teachers have faced situations where those "innocent" questions and the subsequent answers resulted in a reprimand because of the different interpretations that were passed along to others.

5 Teachers have learned the hard way that they must keep a professional perspective and style in talking with students. You shouldn't talk with students in the same manner as a parent.

Should you have any concern regarding your conduct towards students, remember the old adage, "When in doubt, don't." Act with caution and seek guidance and approval from administrators before taking unilateral action that might be open to unintended interpretations. ■

La Rae G. Munk is Director of Legal Services for the Association of American Educators.