Standards Alignment and Government Policy
Unresolved Policy Dilemmas

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Federal, state and local government officials have pledged fidelity to the idea of “standards alignment.” But, do teachers, principals, superintendents, school board members, state policy makers, teacher educators, members of the U.S. Congress, officials in the Bush Administration, and others mean the same thing? Probably not. Clashes of meaning and expectations between and among education decision makers and stakeholders have created a series of as yet unresolved policy dilemmas. Because these dilemmas have not been carefully addressed, attempts to manage standards alignment through the establishment of local, state, or federal policies have resulted in confusion and frustration in the education community and to some extent in the general public. A review of the literature, current federal policy, pending federal legislation, and reports in the media offers little in terms of a common definition of standards alignment. In fact, the term has a chameleon like quality, taking on the characteristics of who is writing about it and in what context.

Standards Alignment and the Research Literature. Ananda (2003) discusses the many alignment issues that have emerged as a result of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and supports a definition of standards alignment originally posed by Web (1997) as “the degree to which standards, assessments, and other important elements of an education system are complimentary and work together to effectively guide student learning” (pg. 7). Since this definition is offered in an article about NCLB, and that law is explicit that states will decide what examinations they will use to meet the law’s accountability provisions for K-12 schools, one might argue that Ananda’s definition would be useful to describe all state alignment policies. But, akey issue is whether this definition can be applied similarly in all states.

Gayler, Chudowsky, Hamilton, Kober, and Yeager (2004) looked at policies in 25 states and found that in 19 of them studies of the alignment of K-12 content and exit exams were either under way or had been completed. Their comprehensive policy review offers interesting anecdotal information on state efforts to link their K-12 standards with the state’s examinations, including observations on variations in state expectations, whether tests are aligned to standards at too low a grade level, or whether the education system expects too little from students. While this is interesting information, the authors cautioned that absent detailed data on each state’s historical and policy context, the data have limited utility and specifically should not be used to either grade states or for comparative purposes.

Capturing an agreed upon understanding of standards alignment is further complicated by differences in meaning at the state and local levels. Dutro and Valencia
(2004) studied the relationship between state and local content standards in reading in four states and in their local school districts. They found that, “…alignment had multiple meanings and that state standards had different utility to districts, ranging from helpful to benign to nuisance” (pg. 31). There seemed to be agreement within the states in this study that local and state standards should be linked. Yet, alignment meant different things and assumed different forms from place to place. The authors note that this variance may be a consequence of differing levels of local control in each state, a point that is explored later in this paper in the discussion of local/state/federal government roles. Dutro and Valencia conclude that, “The evidence here points to multiple meanings of alignment and differential influence of state content standards on district reform” (pg. 35).

Much of the research on standards alignment focuses on the nexus of state standards, state examinations, and the K-12 curriculum. Other than descriptions of efforts in some individual institutions of higher education to align their teacher preparation programs with state requirements, for the most part the role of colleges and universities in K-12 standards alignment policy is not clearly articulated. It is interesting that the Gayler et al. (2004) study of 25 states touched on higher education only within the context of whether secondary school exit examinations are significant factors in college admissions decisions. When higher education officials were asked about K-12 alignment and assessments, they were most concerned about the extent to which the exit exam was a useful measure of a student’s potential for success at an institution of postsecondary education. Speaking at the CATO Institute in 2001, the then Under Secretary of Education Eugene Hickok observed “…you have to pay attention to the teaching profession. Math teachers, certainly secondary school math teachers, should be taking the same courses that math majors take in math departments. I’m not saying pedagogy doesn’t matter, but I am saying that content matters and it matters a lot in a standards-based environment” (National testing a debate pg. 7). Thus, one perspective on K-16 standards alignment suggests that the K-12 curriculum should be, if not aligned with the higher education curriculum, at least linked to it in a deliberate manner.

Haslam and Rubenstein (2000) explored the emergence of K-16 partnerships for the purpose of standards alignment as a way to connect high school and postsecondary education. Describing the education system in 2000, they reported that approximately 20 states were involved in K-16 initiatives but that many were small, fledgling efforts. For the most part, they found that in those states with clear K-12 standards these standards were unrelated to the college and university curriculum (pg. 4). Connecting K-12 and postsecondary curriculum is not easy work and they caution that, “Historically, America’s system of K-12 education and postsecondary education have operated independently of one another, with each having its own governance system and politics, its own goals and objectives and its own institutional culture. Indeed, in some cases, K-12 and postsecondary education have even operated at cross-purposes” (pg.1). Even in the face of this long history of different K-12 and higher education cultures, these authors assert that high standards for K-12 students require that teachers be prepared to teach to them. They go on to suggest that, “…improving preservice teacher education could be included on the postsecondary reform agenda. Improving these programs would entail aligning them with standards for student performance…in addition, preservice teacher
training would increasingly become a university-wide responsibility, involving faculty from the academic disciplines as well as from the colleges of education” (pg. 5).

The research literature provides little guidance on what we mean by standards alignment because in practice it means different things in different contexts. As Dutro and Valencia (2004) found, the degree of local control in a state impacts school districts’ adherence to state standards. Gayler et al. (2004) determined that state K-12 alignment policies varied to such an extent that they cautioned against any cross state comparisons. In the higher education arena, two points of view emerge: (a) K-12 standards should be used to prepare students for postsecondary and therefore be linked to the higher education curriculum or, (b) the higher education curriculum as it pertains to the preparation of teachers should be aligned with what is taught in K-12 schools. There are particular dilemmas for colleges and universities in the standards debate, such as: What are implications of standards alignment policy for arts and sciences departments and the curriculum they offer? Does K-16 standards alignment clash with university values associated with academic freedom? These and related issues are discussed in greater detail later in this paper.

Standards Alignment and Current Federal Policy. Given the emphasis on education standards and accountability over the past 14 years, one might expect that the U.S. Department of Education would provide clarity on the meaning of standards alignment. That has not been the case. Using the Department’s search engine and the term “standards alignment” produced 500 documents. The majority of these documents related to state, district, or institutional accountability or compliance with federal law (primarily NCLB or HEA, Title II). The next most frequent reference was in award guidelines where a required or allowable activity was aligning standards. These guidelines contain detailed information on how to submit a grant or contract proposal, and indicate whether awards are available for alignment between K-12 standards and assessments, or for revising teacher education programs to reflect K-12 standards and assessments, yet none offered a definition of alignment (U.S. Department of Education).

The lack of a federal definition notwithstanding, the connection of standards alignment with accountability is a strong theme in U.S. Department of Education materials. The Secretary of Education’s third annual report on teacher quality, Meeting the Highly Qualified Teacher Challenge, reports that each state has engaged in some level of K-12 standards alignment and that many have aligned teacher certification or licensure requirements with K-12 standards (pg.18). States are required under NCLB and Title II of the Higher Education Act (HEA) to report to the federal government each year on their attempts to align K-12 standards and assessments as well as how they have reformed teacher licensure requirements. Given this pressure for high stakes reporting, it is not surprising that all states offer a description of on-going or completed alignment efforts. But even the Secretary’s Report is not clear about what this means. When presenting evidence of alignment between K-12 standards and teachers’ preparation in content areas the Department relies on states’ reporting whether or not a teacher candidate must have a major or minor in the subjects they expect to teach or if they are required to pass a content-level examination – both requirements of NCLB.

In considering these requirements and their connection to standards alignment, it is important to recognize that a college academic major or minor is just that and may or may not parallel the state’s K-12 standards and curriculum. This raises again the question
of whether the curriculum developed and offered in arts and sciences departments should be revised to reflect what is taught in elementary and secondary schools or should the elementary and secondary curriculum prepare students for existing college courses? Similarly, the presence of a content-based exam for teachers does not necessarily mean that examination is aligned to the K-12 standards and content specific to, and defined by, that state. Assessing the degree of subject matter alignment between the K-12 curriculum and a state’s teacher licensure examination requires a separate analysis in each state, which the U.S. Department of Education did not attempt.

Standards Alignment and Federal Legislation. In addition to NCLB, federal legislation introduced in the 108th Congress to amend Title II of the Higher Education Act also addressed matters of alignment, specifically ways to hold institutions of higher education and teacher education units accountable for the alignment of their programs with state certification or licensure requirements based on K-12 standards and assessments. Four bills were introduced in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives and of these one was passed in the House, but none became law. They were the,

- Ready to Teach Act of 2003 (H.R. 2211) introduced by Ohio Congressman John Boehner;
- College Affordability, and Diversity Improvement Act of 2003 (S. 1793) introduced by Massachusetts Senator Edward Kennedy;
- Capacity to Learn for all Students and Schools Act of 2004 (S. 2340) introduced by New Mexico Senator Jeff Bingaman; and
- Preparing, Recruiting, and Retaining Education Professionals Act of 2004 (S. 2335) introduced by Rhode Island Senator Jack Reed.

H.R. 2211 passed the House of Representatives but went no further. Thus, this bill and its three companions expired at the end of the 108th Congress. Certainly the bills’ authors would quickly point to differences among them, yet, on the matter of standards and alignment they are quite similar. Although none of the bills specifically define alignment, each suggests ways to align teacher preparation programs and teacher licensure regulations/examinations with K-12 standards and assessments. Each proposes to hold institutions of higher education and their education school, college or department accountable for the academic preparation and performance of teaching candidates. Each suggests that an academic major or a high level of competence in a “relevant” content area would be evidence that K-16 alignment is in place. Each encourages partnerships that will include arts and sciences units in institutions of higher education but none of the bills holds those units accountable for linking their students’ academic major or minor to what is taught in K-12 schools. Thus, while none of the bills offer a definition of standards alignment that would explain what Congress expects of schools, institutions of higher education, and states, all pending bills offer strategies to accomplish a complicated and potentially illusive goal.

The amendments to HEA, Title II in 2004 reflect a blend of accountability/compliance or cajoling with the offer of federal funds to connect teacher preparation programs and K-12 standards. The difficulty is that the unit facing
compliance – the education school or college – has limited ability to leverage change in the subject matter preparation of teacher candidates since for the most part all of that is offered through colleges of arts and sciences, particularly if a major or minor in is required. Arts and sciences colleges may be enticed to enter into a partnership to think about curricular issues if enough federal dollars or grant funds are involved but that alone is scant incentive for them to make broad changes in their curriculum. In fact, the very powerful pressures of promotion and tenure within these departments and their colleges and universities, make alignment with what is taught in K-12 schools a possible professional liability for faculty members.

Standards Alignment and the Media. If the research literature, the U.S. Department of Education, and pending federal legislation do not offer coherent definitions of standards alignment, is there anything to be found in how the media report efforts to enact standards and assessments? Essentially, text and language used in local, state, regional or national newspapers are proxies for what reporters think readers already understand and what they need to know. If reporters believe a concept or phrase is commonly understood by the paper’s readers, they will not waste space in an article attempting to define it. To explore this line of inquiry, LexisNexis Academic was used to search United States news articles from April to September 2004. The search terms standards, alignment, and schools were used for full article searches. The following categories were used to organize the presence or absence of information in each of the articles:

- State or district officials were interviewed about student achievement scores (high or low) and indicated that the presence or absence of standards alignment was a factor in students’ performance at the state or local level.
- State or district officials were interviewed and suggested that prior efforts to align K-12 standards, assessments, and the school curriculum helped account for positive examination scores.
- State or local officials were interviewed and indicated that aligning state standards and assessments was a goal, was under consideration, or was needed.
- The article discussed standards alignment and offered the reader a definition of some sort to explain the concept.
- The article specifically addressed higher education and alignment.
- The article was about education but not really about standards alignment.
- The article was not related to education.

1 Two articles were in this category. One was about a principal accused of inflating achievement data so the school would appear in positive light when reporting adequate yearly progress under No Child Left Behind. The other involved criticism of a virtual school’s curriculum in a western state because it was too aligned with a “controversial” curriculum used in another state.
The article was a duplicate.

This search generated four findings. First, in spite of extraordinary attention to standards, examinations, and alignment by members of Congress, the Bush Administration, and many state officials, during the six-month period reviewed, there was little media coverage of the topic. Second, it is interesting that when student scores on the state examination improved, state and local officials tended to attribute the gain to having aligned the curriculum and the assessment. When scores remained constant or fell, officials were likely to say further standards alignment was needed. In each of these two situations, school officials noted the importance of professional development for teachers. One might wonder whether increased test scores were a function of better alignment between instruction and standards or pressure from school districts for teachers to “teach to the test.” That is, if standards and assessments are perfectly aligned, will student performance improve in equal measure irrelevant of the teacher’s skills? Or, conversely, will a highly skilled and knowledgeable teacher successfully improve student learning even if K-16 standards are not perfectly aligned? Third, no articles offered a definition of standards alignment. This suggests reporters assume the reader understands what it means. Perhaps a common level of understanding exists in some communities, but it may be more likely that meaning is whatever the reader believes it to be. Finally, there were only two stories that mentioned higher education. One was a commentary by a university system head discussing how the system was improving its teacher education program by linking candidate instruction to K-12 standards. The other was a news story in which a college president mentioned the need to align two-year and four-year college curricula.

**Summary and Themes.** Clearly, there is no nationally agreed upon definition of standards alignment. The term carries different meaning at different levels of government and how individuals use it depends on, as indicated by the review of news articles, the “spin” they want to put on reports of achievement gains or losses. It would seem that when there is an attempt to create policy based without consideration of individual or group practice, issues come to mean what people think they mean in particular circumstances. To make sure that the local school curriculum reflects the state’s K-12 assessments (which may or may not mean that the curriculum is perfectly aligned with state standards). This expectation implies that alignment is a significant variable in improved student learning.

**Is Consensus on National Standards Possible?** Wixon, Dutro, and Athan’s very thoughtful 2003 study of standards development points out that while content standards are intended to speak to what students should know in a particular discipline, “…[they] are also ideological, reflecting values and beliefs regarding the nature of teaching and learning, and more generally, the purposes of education” (pg. 69) and, as a result achieving consensus on standards is neither easily reached nor a straightforward process. Allington (2002) assembled a series of essays on the composition, role, and findings of the National Reading Panel and like Wixon et al. determined that politics, ideology, and beliefs were very powerful in framing the report of the Reading Panel and quieting opposition to its findings. Reading has become highly politicized because NCLB offers grants to states and localities to created reading improvement programs based on a specified approach. Scholars in reading and literacy are troubled because they contend...
non-experts are making political decisions of not just what, but how to teach children. They are also concerned that the federal government, through provisions in NCLB and findings of the National Reading Panel are making decisions about what scholarship is valid and what is not. This controversy is essentially about who identifies and holds control over knowledge. Returning to and reframing the comment referenced earlier by Strike, deciding whether to teach reading or something else is appropriately a political decision while how to teach reading is a professional matter. If the federal government decides directly or indirectly what constitutes knowledge in a particular K-12 level discipline and if future teachers are expected to be proficient in that content knowledge, what does this mean for arts and sciences faculty’s control of their curriculum and what are implications for academic freedom?

As discussed earlier, although there is no commonly accepted definition of standards alignment, for the most part those who reference it most frequently appear to mean the extent to which states’ K-12 curriculum and student assessments are linked. For NCLB this created a problem. Decision makers wanted to be able to compare student achievement from state to state but understood they had no authority to force any state to accept and use a particular examination. They came up with an intriguing, but less then ideal, solution: to require that states and localities receiving NCLB, Title I funds agree to participate in the biennial state National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) in reading and mathematics—and in that way provide decision makers a way to see if students are scoring roughly the same on their state examinations at grade levels and in subjects as on NAEP. NAEP has been in existence since 1969 and is known as “the Nation’s Report Card” because it tests a representative sample of students in various subjects at grades four, eight, and 12. There are no real consequences associated with achievement on NAEP so critics note that the scores may not actually reflect student knowledge. Nevertheless, NAEP data are used extensively to inform research and policy.

The use of NAEP to make value judgments about state examinations (a purpose, incidentally, for which it was never intended) and the fact that it is referred to as the Nation’s Report Card has led to some interesting observations regarding NCLB and whether or not it is mandating a national examination through some sort of back door policy. Two conservative sets of views are found on the web sites for the National Anxiety Center (http://www.nationalanxeity.com) and the Heartland Institute (www.heartland.org). The National Anxiety Center exists to debunk untruths in the liberal press and generally to criticize big government so it is not entirely surprising that comments on the web site alert citizens about suspicions that NCLB and the use of NAEP are the front guard of policies to impose national testing for students and by implication a national curriculum. Similarly, the Heartland Institute cautioned readers about government intervention in schools through NCLB and NAEP and observed “…government schools are islands of socialism in a sea of competition and choice.”

Concern that NCLB was the next step toward federal or national control of schools emerged from sources other than social conservatives. Discussing NCLB’s provisions and accountability, Elmore (2002) points out that states and localities have differing

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2 NAEP relies on a random sample of students in grade and subject, so participation in NAEP means that a state or school district agrees to be part of the pool from which test subjects are drawn. NAEP assessments levels and areas are proposed by the federal government. The examinations are administered and scored across all states by a federal contractor.
capacity to engage in school reform and that “…school personnel must share a coherent, explicit set of norms and expectations about what a good school looks like before they can use signals from the outside to improve student learning” (pg. 35). When considering how to improve student learning he concludes, “The history of federal involvement in that long endeavor is at best mixed and at worst a failure. The current law [NCLB] repeats all of the strategic errors of the previous ESEA reauthorization, only this time at a higher level of federal intervention. The prognosis is not good” (pg. 35).

K-12 Standards Alignment and Teacher Education. All aspects of education policy are connected to and influence other parts of it. It is short sighted to believe that what happens in local schools is unrelated to what happens in higher education. The relationship between K-12 standards alignment and teacher preparation is at the same time direct and intricate. State and federal decision makers understand that teachers need to be well versed in the subject matter that is taught in schools. There is agreement that teachers must also appreciate how the local school’s curriculum relates to state standards and assessments. Manipulating state requirements for a teaching license remains the most common policy tool to offer a level of assurance that teachers have those skills. Yet, as noted previously, the Secretary of Education’s Third Annual Report on Teacher Quality equated teaching content expertise with requiring a college subject matter major or minor for a teaching credential. Given differences in states’ standards and curriculum, as well as some degree of variation in how localities use state standards, is a college major or minor actually assurance that a teaching candidate is well versed in the subject she or he will teach? Is an individual who majored in history with a concentration in European history prepared to teach American history? Conversely, is a history major who specialized in the Colonial America ready to teach world history?

Standards Alignment and Academic Freedom. Academic freedom has a strong tradition in colleges and universities in the United States. Although academic freedom does not give faculty unfettered rights, it assures that institutions of higher education remain a marketplace of ideas (Pullin, 2004). Standards alignment relates to academic freedom primarily when alignment is understood to mean accountability. Accountability of faculty and colleges to the state or federal government is a potential threat to autonomy and autonomy is central to academic freedom. Thus, “…the recent press to reform teacher preparation programs presents a challenge to faculty members’ views that they should have autonomy to make independent determinations about curriculum, course content, and grading with limited interference by their employing institutions or by the government. Many faculty also are concerned about what appears to be a new quest for orthodoxy in research, theory, and practice in the field” (Pullin, 2004, pg. 302).

For teacher education, state pressures of program approval, licensure requirements for teachers, and accreditation (in particular if is a requirement for state recognition of a college or university’s teacher preparation program) have already eroded a measure of academic freedom. Although this has not been challenged in the courts, Pullin observes that courts have found in other cases that freedom of speech is not absolute and at times the interest of the state in supporting a broader common good takes precedent (pg. 306). Extending this line of reasoning, a faculty member hired to teach science methods in a teacher licensure program may not automatically have the right to only include creationism in her syllabus unless that is all future science teachers would be expected to teach in the state’s public schools. However, as noted previously, most of the
subject-matter content for new teachers comes from arts and sciences colleges where there is an expectation that they will earn academic majors or minors in subjects taught in K-12 schools. Does this mean that science department faculty at a university with a teacher preparation program in a state that has adopted creationism in their science curriculum may find their scholarship on evolution curtailed because a future teacher may end up taking a science course from one of them? In this extreme example, the answer probably would be no because the argument could be made that the science curriculum in the university would be helpful for teachers planning to move to other states where evolution is taught. Pushing this issue even further, what would be the impact on academic freedom of a national K-12 curriculum in science that was developed through political consensus at the national level?

One option is to offer separate science, mathematics, language arts, or history courses for future teachers. This, of course, is even more controversial. Questions about the academic pedigrees of teachers have been raised and debated in the research literature (Monk, 1994; Wilson et al. 2001) for some time. Clearly decisions by state governments to require academic majors for future teachers were a response by policy makers to concerns that teachers may not have deep understanding of the content they will teach. Creating a separate collegiate academic track for persons who plan to teach would be counter to the current policy tide. Moreover, creating a separate content curriculum for teachers does not alleviate potential anxiety among arts and sciences faculty over academic freedom as it pertains to decisions about collegiate-level course content. At the center of these debates is who controls knowledge. Is it the result of professional research and consensus or an outcome of decisions made in the political realm?

Summary and Themes. For the most part, local, state, and federal decision makers want a form of standards alignment that ultimately results in increased student test performance. The challenge is also the frustration posed by my colleague—the curriculum director for a Virginia school district—finding teachers not just who have academic majors, but teachers who actually know the Virginia K-12 curriculum well enough to teach it. Given the hesitancy among many in the policy world to equate standards alignment with a national curriculum for K-12 schools, can there really be a political and professional foundation to promote national standards and assessments for teacher licensure? In terms of teacher quality, is the issue whether candidates have broad knowledge of content taught across the United States or whether they have skills and dispositions to teach diverse learners within the context of the school and state in which they work? Moreover, efforts to centralize teacher education need to be considered within the context of whether such actions would clash with the very strong university values associated with academic freedom.

Unresolved Policy Dilemmas

Reviewing the murky area of standards alignment has unearthed more policy dilemmas than it has resolved. All are in some measure the result of attempting to put into place a system to manage standards alignment without first attending to how alignment can and should work in practice and what are core values and beliefs about the purpose of education and role of local, state, and federal governments in overseeing it. The dilemmas that follow are offered as issues worthy of further debate and discussion.
The Nation Does not Agree on the Purpose of Education and How Local Schools Serve That Purpose. As education became solidified as the responsibility of localities and states, different purposes for schools emerged from place to place. These purposes may include preparing individuals for the workforce, helping children understand their responsibilities as citizens, promoting certain cultural values and the like. Without agreement on national purpose, do attempts to align standards across the states bump into differing expectations and values?

Lack of Agreement on Meaning. As Spolsky (2004) suggests, meaning is based on individual or group circumstances or practice. When NCLB was being written, insufficient attention was given to how key provisions would have different meanings in different situations. This is an example of attempting to manage an issue before assuring there was a level of common understanding about it. To have a common definition of standards alignment would require political compromise at the national or federal level and as such might not capture nuances of meaning for teachers, superintendents, governors, education deans, or citizens.

States and Local Differences. Attempts to document standards alignment as well as implementation of NCLB have shown that local and state differences may be greater than expected. Smoothing out these differences would lead to certain efficiencies in data collection, textbook adoption, measuring teacher qualifications and the like. But efforts to make school, district, and education systems the same must confront values and beliefs about where authority for education resides. Moreover, each state has established through its constitution and/or legal code processes for determining what will be included in the K-12 curriculum and how it will be measured. The fact that a common text book may be approved for use in multiple states, does not mean that book is used in the same manner in every classroom and school. Nationalizing the K-12 curriculum—and by extension teacher preparation requirements—would require states to change not only their education statutes but in many cases their constitutions.

Even within states there is substantial diversity from community to community. In October, the Washington Post reported that membership in local Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) was declining and in their place parents were forming local parent and teacher organizations (Paley, 2004). When interviewed for the article, parents who were involved in these alternative organizations noted that they were unhappy that a portion of their PTA dues were being used to advance state or national policy agendas and that they would rather have their dues used to support activities in their local school or community.

Accountability and Alignment are used Interchangeably. It is appropriate for governments to impose expectations when they provide funding through grants of one kind or another, such as grants to state education agencies or partnerships to implement revisions in teacher preparation standards and programs. It is equally reasonable for a unit of government that has governance authority to expect accountability from those over whom they are charged to provide oversight. The difficulty arises when alignment and accountability are used interchangeably. Although accountability and alignment may be connected, alignment requires that multiple parties modify behavior and/or policy. In reality, alignment is a collective responsibility rather than an activity of an individual unit (government or other). As such, alignment needs to include all relevant parties and provide a mechanism to easily adjust the system when any one part changes. The real
conundrum is whether a system of standards alignment can work when only one of the parties involved in the alignment system (the teacher education program) is subject to sanctions-based accountability.

**Will Standards Alignment Collide with Academic Freedom?** Arguably challenges to academic freedom as they relate to state program approval of teacher education haven’t been taken too seriously within universities. The right of the state to impose standards on education schools or departments has a certain logic because for the most part, people who take education courses plan to teach in the state’s public schools. However, it becomes a very different matter when the state attempts to leverage change in the arts and sciences curriculum and a much bigger issues, indeed, if there is a push for centralizing or nationalizing teacher preparation and licensure.

**Leveraging Changes in the Arts and Sciences Curriculum.** There are very powerful academic norms and beliefs in colleges and universities about how knowledge is developed and disseminated. Faculty in arts and sciences colleges are rarely rewarded for adjusting their curriculum so potential teachers will have academic majors or minors aligned with K-12 standards. To the contrary, the promotion and tenure system for those faculty is grounded in creating and refining knowledge in a specific field or sub-field. There is the option, of course, of developing English, history, science, or mathematics courses in arts and sciences colleges just for future teachers. However, there would be little incentive for faculty to teach them and may open the institution to criticisms that it is providing future teachers with watered down instruction.

**Political vs Professional Consensus.** As decisions move from localities to states to the national level, it is more likely that decisions will be made by political consensus. The problem is not when issues that belong in the political world are handled in this manner, but rather when what should be professional decisions—such as the appropriate way to teach reading to 5th graders in rural South Dakota—are moved out of the professional and into the political realm.

**Conclusion**

Policy decisions about standards alignment are speeding down the policy superhighway and no one is wearing a seat belt. Very fundamental issues of government role, purpose of schools, locus of control, what alignment is to accomplish, and how this relates to teacher preparation in their teaching field and pedagogy have not been carefully considered. It may be time to pull over to a rest area and before moving forward take out the map and make sure we know where we are headed.

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**Online Resources**


Heartland Institute. [www.heartland.org](http://www.heartland.org)


National Anxiety Center. [http://www.anxietycenter.com](http://www.anxietycenter.com)

National Assessment of Educational Progress. [http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/about/](http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/about/)

National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education [www.ncate.org](http://www.ncate.org)

STEP. [http://www.aacte.org/Other_Professional_Issues/standard_activities.html](http://www.aacte.org/Other_Professional_Issues/standard_activities.html)

Teacher Education Accreditation Council [www.teac.org](http://www.teac.org)

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