

Title II of the Higher Education Act Revisited and Reconsidered*

An Analysis of the Secretary of Education's 2002 Report on Teacher Quality

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Introduction

The 1998 amendments to the Higher Education Act (HEA) included new provisions in Title II of that law to gather data on institutions of higher education with teacher education programs and on state laws and policies related to standards for teacher preparation and licensure. Data collected in 2001 and submitted to the U.S. Department of Education were reported to the Congress in June 2002 in *Meeting The Highly Qualified Teacher Challenge, The Secretary's Report on Teacher Quality* (U.S. Department of Education 2002). However, the 66-page document devotes as much space to the recently enacted No Child Left Behind legislation as it does to information gathered through HEA, Title II.

This analysis first reviews the policy context during which the Higher Education Amendments of 1998 were debated and enacted. The requirements in HEA, Title II and the accompanying House and Senate Conference report are then detailed, followed by consideration of how the U.S. Department of Education attempted to create a consistent data set from the Title II reports. From this analysis, problems with the law and its subsequent interpretation are put forward as explanations for the lack of useful data to inform national policy. Finally, data from Title II reports submitted to the U.S. Department by 32 states (www.title2.org) are reviewed.

Context

The Higher Education Act (HEA) is the federal government's primary vehicle to provide financial support for low and middle-income individuals to pursue postsecondary education. This law, like many large government programs, is periodically examined by Congress and updated through amendments. The process, referred to as reauthorization, occurs approximately every five years. In 1996 Congress began one of these reviews, which culminated in November 1998 when President Clinton signed the Higher Education Amendments of 1998 (P.L. 105-422).

Concern about the quality of teacher education emerged as a policy issue during the 1996-1998 review of the Higher Education Act (Earley, 2000). Although federal

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programs to strengthen the teaching force through teacher preparation and professional development grants existed for over 15 years in Title V of HEA, Congress used the 1996-1998 amendment process as an opportunity to make major revisions in that portion of the law. This was done by abolishing Title V and creating a new Teacher Quality section in HEA, Title II. The new Title II had two purposes: Sections 202-205 established grant programs for partnerships between K-12 schools and institutions of higher education and for states to improve teacher quality, while sections 206, 207, and 208 laid out new reporting requirements for states and institutions that prepare teachers (Higher Education Reauthorization, 1998).

Initial discussion of HEA reauthorization began in 1996. That also was the year that the National Commission on Teaching and American's Future (NCTAF) released its report *What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future*. The NCTAF report offered recommendations for institutions of higher education, state teacher licensing agencies, and local schools to improve the quality of K-12 teaching by developing and aligning more stringent teacher preparation and credentialing standards (National Commission, 1996). The NCTAF report received extensive media coverage (Applebome, 1996; Broder, 1996; Sanchez, 1996; Whitmier, 1996), but not all of it was positive. In general groups and individuals who distrusted state and professional control of teacher standards as quality measures and who endorsed as an alternative a free market approach to teacher recruitment and hiring were vocal in their criticism of NCTAF and the Commission's report (Ballou & Pordgursky, 1997).

Members of Congress and their staffs who were engaged in reauthorization of HEA could not miss the pro/con NCTAF debate in the media, and although most of the policy issues raised by NCTAF and its critics fell under the purview of states or institutions of higher learning members of Congress looked for ways national directives could leverage changes in the teacher preparation system. The federal government is limited in its ability to establish college-level curricula or to set state licensure standards for educators; however Congress may impose requirements on entities that receive federal funds. Thus, lawmakers approached what they felt were weaknesses in teacher preparation by mandating in HEA, Title II that states and institutions with teacher preparation programs receiving HEA funds submit to Congress annual reports on their efforts to improve teacher quality. As will be noted in the following section, the initial targets for congressional oversight were to be states and partnerships that received grants through Sec. 202 – Sec. 204 of Title II. The broader reporting provisions that applied to all colleges and universities preparing teachers were added to provide the public and school districts information on whether these institutions' graduates were well prepared to teach or not (Burd, 1998).

The Law's Purposes

The purposes of the Title II programs are spelled out in Sec. 201 and are to: (a) improve student achievement, (b) improve the quality of teacher preparation and professional development, (c) hold institutions of higher education accountable for preparing skilled teachers, and (d) recruit highly qualified persons into teaching.

Discretionary program in Sections 202, 203 and 204 provide awards to states and institutions for program reform and educator recruitment, while the accountability and reporting provisions are found in Sections 206 and 207.

Congressional expectations for Title II may be further understood by referring to comments by House and Senate leaders during the reauthorization process. Representative George Miller (D-CA), a strong advocate of the Title II provisions, noted in April 1998 that he felt public reporting of teacher licensure exam scores could help prevent poor children from getting bad teachers by giving citizens more information about teacher quality (Burd, 1998). Affluent school districts, Miller argued, can offer better salaries and compete for the best teachers but poor school districts can't. Essentially using a school choice line of reasoning, he asserted that by making public the test scores of graduates of various teacher education programs, parents and administrators will know more about the quality of teachers from these colleges and universities. Parents and the general public would then know if a school is not recruiting the best teachers and administrators could make more informed hiring decisions. Moreover, Miller argued, Title II should force college presidents to direct necessary resources to their education schools (Miller, 2001). On the Senate side, James Jeffords (I-VT) who was then a Republican and chair of what then was the Committee on Labor and Human Resources, indicated in a May 7, 1998 hearing that a new Title II would "provide a framework for local and state innovations" (Jeffords, 1998).

The intent of Title II is further amplified in the House and Senate Conference Agreement (Higher Education Amendments of 1998 Conference Report), which was passed as part of HEA reauthorization and is considered part of the law. The conference report notes that Title II includes strong accountability measures for states and partnerships receiving grants through Secs. 202-204 and that, "*in addition* (emphasis added), each institution of higher education receiving federal assistance will be held accountable for disseminating information on the quality of their program based upon criteria such as the pass rates of their graduates on teacher assessment, where appropriate (p. 289)." Thus, as clarified in report language, Title II imposed two levels of accountability: (a) entities receiving funds through Secs. 202-204 were to report to the federal government very specific indicators of teacher quality improvement efforts and (b) institutions with teacher preparation programs were expected to make public information on their teacher education program and the performance of their graduates. This report may include pass rates on teacher licensure exams.

Reporting Requirements for Institutions

The reporting requirements in Title II that cover colleges and universities are relatively short and include: (a) The pass rate of the institution's graduates on the state teacher certification or licensure assessments, but only for those students who took those assessments within three years of completing the program. Acknowledging the importance of protecting student records, if fewer than 10 graduates took any single initial teacher certification or licensure assessment during an academic year, the institution may only collect and report information regarding average pass rates taken over a three year period. (b) The

program's pass rates on all assessments along with the average pass rates for all other programs in the state. (c) The number of students in the program. (d) The average number of hours of supervised practice teacher required for those in the program. (e) The faculty-student ratio in supervised practice teaching. And, (f) the names of institutions with what the state has designated as low-performing teacher education units. The law requires that this information be made public by colleges and universities through catalogues, promotional material, and the like (HEA, Sec. 207(f)).

Reporting Requirements for States

Title II also imposes a reporting burden on state governments. In addition to providing extensive information on teacher licensure standards and the types of teaching credentials issued, the state must calculate “the percentage of teaching candidates who passed each of the assessments used by that State for teacher certification and licensure disaggregated and ranked by the teacher preparation program in the State from which the teacher candidate received the candidate's most recent degree, which shall be made available widely and publicly” (Sec. 207 (5)). These data must be sent to the U.S. Department of Education as part of the accountability provisions imposed on states. Thus, the requirements for institutions are to provide statistics and other information for decision making purposes by teacher education consumers in the state (school personnel officers, future students, and citizens), whereas, each state is responsible for reporting pass rates on teacher licensure assessments to the federal government as one measure of that state's responsibility for oversight of teacher education.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) was charged with developing “key definitions” and “uniform reporting requirements” for the state and institutional reports required under Sec. 207. Thus, we see the nexus of four powerful and competing policy expectations: (a) The requirement that institutions make certain data about their teacher education program public (b) The expectation that states and partnerships receiving grants through Sec. 202 – Sec. 204 will be held accountable for using those funds appropriately. (c) The obligation of states to describe how they regulate teacher education programs. And (d) the overlay of a need for uniform definitions and reporting methods. It will be shown that the convergence of inconsistent expectations became the source of many of the problems and confusion associated with the Title II data.

Title II Implementation Guidelines

Federal laws rarely can be enforced exactly as written. The development of regulations or guidelines to implement bills passed by the Congress is a responsibility of the executive branch. Title II, Sec. 207 identified NCES as the responsible agency to design a Title II reporting system and to do so in consultation with interested parties, such as state officials and representatives of institutions of higher education. To do this, the U.S. Department of Education formed a Consultative Committee on Title II. The committee initially was composed of about 20 people representing state and institutional interests but new members were added as the information gathering process proceeded. It

should be noted that this committee was advisory only and that there were no requirements that NCES accept the group's recommendations.

As noted previously, Title II had four data gathering and accountability expectations:

- (1) The Congress expected that if institutional data were available for citizens and state policy makers they would make better and more informed decision. This requires that *institutions of higher education* be the unit of analysis and that performance evidence be linked to standards and regulations particular to the state in which the college or university is located.
- (2) The federal government wanted information on how grantees funded through Title II used the resources they received to improve teacher quality. This requires that *grantees* be the unit of analysis based on details of contractual obligations between the federal government and the entity receiving the grant.
- (3) The Congress expected information on how state governments were regulating teacher quality via licensure and other state policies. In this instance *each state* would be the appropriate unit of study. Because state laws regarding teacher education vary widely, to the extent that the federal government plans to document changes in state policies it could do so only after having each state establish an individual baseline.
- (4) The Congress, by directing NCES to come up with common definitions, anticipated that the federal government would build a common data set that would reflect indices of teacher quality from which there could be national policy observations and recommendations.

The fourth expectation is particularly problematic. Short of stepping back in time, eliminating the reserved powers clause of the U.S. Constitution and creating a national education system in the model of many European countries, the task of creating common definitions to apply to different sets of state laws and over a thousand colleges and universities that prepare teachers would seem virtually impossible.

Institutions have autonomy to determine how they will meet state standards for preparing teachers. As a result, within the same state, preparation programs may have different names, different expectations, and different time frames for program completion. Asking institutions to make these data public is a reasonable expectation and hoping that this activity will cause those in the college or university to reflect on the quality of their offerings is equally reasonable. However, once states are required to rank institutions using just one data point – student pass rates on licensure exams – other institutional characteristics that should be important to school districts that hire teachers and to students planning to enroll in a teacher education program are obscured. Moreover, the federal government's pressure on states to use a common system to report pass rate data is equally problematic because states require different examinations and have established different qualifying scores. Essentially the process of developing

implementation guidelines for Title II became an example of attempting to design a national repository for data that were generated for use at the institutional and state levels.

The method of devising a system to gather and report Title II data created considerable tension between institutions, states, and the federal government, with the federal government prevailing. The U.S. Department of Education's push for a common, national Title II framework had the effect of combining accountability provisions described in law that had been created for different purposes (public information vs, federal review of grantees' activities as an example) and in doing so compromised legislative purpose and confused units of analysis. This resulted in a data collection system that could not fulfill statutory expectations and that generated information of questionable use to policy makers. Three examples are presented to illustrate the complexity of attempting to create a national reporting system drawing upon information with unique state or institutional meanings:

- the requirement that states and institutions aggregate then summarize licensure exam scores;
- the creation of "adjusted quartiles" to rank institutions; and,
- the impact of imposing "last touch accountability" on colleges and universities.

Title II clearly asks institutions to report all licensure examination pass rates of students in their teacher education programs. That is, the pass rates of students in programs to become mathematics teachers, in programs to become English teachers, in programs to become elementary level teachers, and the like. Sec. 207 (b)(5) is unambiguous. The legislative language requires that states report the "percentage of teaching candidates who passed each of the assessments used by the state..." As federal officials were gathering input on implementation of Title II, they realized that many states use multiple examinations for individuals planning to teach different subjects and different levels of students. Consequently when a state received its institutions' Title II data it likely would find that some institutions would rank highly in certain areas and lower in others, making the determination of the overall top institutions difficult. To clear up the problem of potentially conflicting data, the U.S. Department of Education developed what became known as aggregate and summary pass rates (U.S. Department of Education, 2000).

Aggregate Pass Rates

The aggregate pass rate is the proportion of program completers who passed all of the tests they took in each of six content and professional knowledge areas: basic skills; professional knowledge and pedagogy; academic content areas (e.g., mathematics, social studies, science, and the arts); teaching special populations (e.g., special education, English as a Second Language); other content areas (e.g., agriculture, marketing, computer science); and performance assessments (U.S. Department of Education, 2000, p. 12). On its face, this seems straightforward. As an example, if 12 students at a given college or university take a mathematics content exam and six fail, the aggregate pass rate is 50 percent. The problem with aggregate pass rates is that in many states and for

some content areas, multiple exams are required. So the hypothetical 12 students might not take just one mathematics exam. They might need to take one in basic computation, one in algebra, and one in geometry. The Department of Education decided that if a student failed one component of the three mathematics exams she/he would be counted for Title II purposes as a fail. This made computing aggregate pass rates easier but obscured important data about whether there were issues of interest related to one part of the exam. Again using the 12 hypothetical students, assume that six passed all three mathematics exams and six passed only the algebra and geometry portions. Wouldn't it be important for state and institutional decision makers to be alerted that either the mathematics program isn't preparing students well in basic computation or that the test isn't a valid measure what students know?

Summary Pass Rates

All of this is further complicated with the addition of the summary pass rate requirement. The summary pass rate is "...based on all assessments that an individual needs to pass to become initially certified or licensed as a teacher in a given area of specialization in a state" (p. 12). This is computed by dividing the number of students who passed *any tests* in the six skill or knowledge areas by all who took any of the tests. As in the aggregate pass rate, if a student fails one exam, but passes all others she/he is counted for Title II purposes as a fail. Returning to the example of the six students who failed one component of the mathematics content exam. If the state also required that each teaching candidate pass a basic skills exam and a pedagogy exam the six students who failed the basic computation portion of the math exam would be counted as having failed all of the additional required licensure exams, even if they actually passed them.

Again, this system allows the U.S. Department of Education to collapse extensive test data into one final pass rate. Unfortunately, the summary pass rate gives decision makers no real information about how students are performing on various tests. Furthermore, it is the aggregate and summary pass rates that states must use to rank institutions according to "adjusted quartiles." It should be reiterated that this is an extra-statutory addition by the U.S. Department of Education. The law does not ask for nor require summary or aggregate pass rates, it requires pass rates by individual licensure examination which suggests it was the intent of Congress to determine whether students are competent in specific content components rather than a combination of them.

Adjusted Quartiles

As part of the state accountability provisions in Title II, state education agencies are to rank institutions according to their students' pass rates on all required teacher licensure examinations. As noted above, the U.S. Department of Education determined that licensure exam data should be aggregated, summarized, and then ranked on these composite numbers. This process not only obscures important data but by aggregating and summarizing them also makes the rankings more high stakes because there are fewer numbers upon which apparent institutional quality will be judged. Perhaps to soften the impact of this high stakes ranking, the Department of Education decided that institutions' aggregate and summary pass rates would be placed in quartiles. Because it is possible that more than one-fourth of the institutions in a state could have the same pass rate,

“adjusted quartiles” were established. This would allow institutional pass rate values that are tied to be in the same quartile (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). The summary rankings for Kentucky are useful for showing how the system works and also how it may distort an institution’s performance (www.title2.org). Kentucky has 25 teacher preparation institutions with the following summary pass rates:

- 1st quartile (8 institutions) – score range: 98 – 100%
- 2nd quartile (7 institutions) – score range: 95 – 96%
- 3rd quartile (5 institutions) – score range: 90 – 93%
- 4th quartile (5 institutions) – score range: 55 – 89%

Several points are of note. In this example, an institution with a respectable pass rate of 93 percent ended up in the third quartile, a placement that for the average reader would suggest less than adequate performance. Scores for institutions in the first three quartiles are tightly clustered, whereas there is a wide distribution in the fourth quartile where the summary pass rates are 89, 88, 85, 81, and 55 percent. The only potentially useful information from these rankings is that one institution has a summary pass rates well below the others in the state. Listing the institutions by pass rates would provide the same information without implying that the institutions in quartile 3 and quartile 4 are substandard. Like aggregate and summary pass rates, “adjusted quartile” rankings are not called for in law and do nothing to provide citizens and decision makers useful information about teacher education quality. To the contrary, this system implies a tiered system of teacher preparation quality that does not exist.

The distribution of pass scores described above is not unique to Kentucky. In fact, similar distribution patterns are found in 14 of 32 states that reported data (excluded from this analysis are states that indicated they required no licensure exam, that showed 100 percent pass rates on all exams, or that had fewer than four institutions reporting data). This is information state policy makers can easily access without quartile placements. It would appear that by establishing a national system of quartile rankings a subtle message is being sent that across the nation there are certain commonalities among all Quartile I or all Quartile IV institutions. That simply is not the case. While nearly half of the 32 states reporting data show a similar distribution pattern within the quartiles, differences in the examinations used, the qualifying score to pass the examinations, and the use of summary and aggregate pass rates make quartile comparisons meaningless. Thus, since the quartile system provides no new information to state policy makers or school districts that are recruiting teachers and since they cannot be used for cross state comparisons, what is its value?

The placement of institutions into “adjusted quartiles” based on a pass rate summary and then using that for purposes of evaluation is of questionable validity. According to Thorndike, Cunningham, and Hagen (1991) validity should “measure what we want to measure, all of what we want to measure, and nothing but what we want to measure” (p. 123). The summary pass rate fails on two counts. It clearly does not

measure all that is important to evaluate a teacher education program and quite possibly is compromised by issues of program size, a point discussed later in this paper.

Last Touch Accountability

The term “last touch accountability” does not appear in either the law or documents providing guidance on Title II by the U.S. Department of Education. Instead it is a term coined to describe how institutions are to handle transfer students who receive all or most of their content preparation at another college or university. During the development of guidelines to implement Title II, the question of where accountability begins and ends was discussed extensively. Representatives of colleges and universities wondered if, and how, they would be accountable for coursework (most often in an academic or teaching field) taken at other institutions. Department of Education officials determined that it would be cumbersome and unrealistic to track students’ coursework beyond the final institution attended by the teaching candidate. They asserted it is the responsibility of the institution that recommends the student for licensure to certify that the candidate is competent in subject matter taken at other institutions. That is, the institution that provides the final coursework assumes responsibility for any coursework, wherever it occurred: last touch accountability.

The concept of last touch accountability created unintended and far reaching consequences. If teacher education units are to be responsible for content preparation they did not offer, the most efficient way to be certain that teaching candidates who enter their program actually know the material they will teach is to test them upon entry or perhaps prior to beginning student teaching. Since evidence of content mastery is to be determined by how students perform on their licensure exam, it seems reasonable to use the actual exam required by the state. By doing so, the institution can ensure that all students know required subject matter at some point before they begin student teaching. A result of this approach is that institutions can identify students in need of additional preparation early in the program, and if necessary, they might be counseled out of teaching entirely. While one might consider these good outcomes, the political consequences have been different. Institutions that test students before they complete their teacher preparation program may have responded to the expectation of last touch accountability, but by doing so have been accused of inflating their licensure exam pass rates to avoid being held accountable for unsuccessful students (Ashby, 2002).

Reporting Title II Data

Limitations of the Title II data collection system are clearly reflected in the Secretary of Education’s report to the Congress on teacher quality. Mandated by HEA, and first issued in June 2002 the report presents several charts summarizing certain of the Title II data but relies more heavily on previous U.S. Department of Education reports and analyses by external groups. The Education Trust issued a sharp critique of the Secretary’s report that pointed out the limitations to it but tended to find fault with the pace at which states gathered and reported the data rather than the essence of the data themselves (Huang, 2002).

As discussed previously, there is a disconnect between the data required under HEA, Title II and the expected information to be drawn from the data. A particular college or university's pass rates on licensure examinations will have meaning for decision making at that institution. If disaggregated, test scores potentially will be of interest to school districts relative to teacher recruitment strategies and to state governments in terms of higher education policy decisions. Beyond those units, the data have limited application. Attempts to create some form of nationwide commonality by requiring pass rates to be aggregated and summarized then placed in quartiles merely obscures what useful information might have been gathered at the institutional and state levels.

Perhaps the most telling example of the disconnect between state and institutional policy and national expectations came from testimony presented in October 2002 to the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Education and the Workforce by an analyst for the General Accounting Office. This testimony outlined the GAO's preliminary findings of a study of Title II requested by the Congress. In the written statement submitted at the hearing, the GAO criticized Title II because "...[the U.S. Department of] Education allowed states to define some terms from the legislation in a way that was applicable to their state because of the variability in how states defined and collected information on some terms" and, "...because [the U.S. Department of] Education allowed each state to define initial certificate or license for itself, each state reported different information on its waiver count" (Ashby, 2002, p. 12) . Federal involvement in education has increased in the past fifty years, but nonetheless it is states and localities that provide most funding and enact the majority of laws governing education. It may be that a federalized system of education would be more efficient for data gathering than the decentralized system in the United States. However, the 10th Amendment to the Constitution and several hundred years of local and state authority over education cannot be set aside merely because this complicates Title II data collection. The tone of the GAO's testimony suggests the U.S. Department of Education has *the* responsibility to define terms found in state laws and if the Department had done this job better the data would be better. A different interpretation suggests that such a rigid set of definitions would further degrade the quality of information potentially available.

Does Title II Offer Useful Data?

In terms of the four accountability expectations that frame this analysis—informing consumers, grant compliance, state policy development, and gathering national data--the information available to the public on the Title II web site (www.title2.org) is not illuminating.

Consumer Information

Listing institutions' summary pass rates would be of limited use to school districts for employment decisions. Rather, employers and citizens would find more evidence of teacher quality on measures such as disaggregated test score information, the length and type of future teachers' clinical experiences, and the number of graduates who are hired as teachers and remain in the profession.

Grant Compliance

Information on how states and institutions are using federal grant dollars is specific to the proposal accepted for funding. Even if an institution applied for and received an award to establish a new teacher education curriculum, government auditors would want more information about program refinements than the composite data submitted on the Title II report.

State Policy

Although states must report on their efforts to regulate teacher quality through such tools as licensure and program approval standards, this involves changing state laws and regulations and the impact of such interventions would not be reflected in Title II data for several years. At best, the Title II data might be useful in some states to inform future state policy decisions regarding teacher education.

National Data Set

Finally, in spite of months of deliberation, many meetings, and extensive public input, the U.S. Department of Education could only agree upon certain common definitions for Title II reporting. This is because state policies and terms differ more fundamentally than federal lawmakers realized and states remain unwilling to turnover their authority over teacher education policy to the Congress and U.S. Department of Education.

The Title II data used to rank institutions and posted on the Title II web site is not useful for the four accountability expectations outlined in the statute, but this does not mean that the data gathered by the Department of Education are meaningless. The question of interest is do the data on institutions of higher education submitted to the U.S. Department of Education by the states, provide any beneficial information to inform policy? In considering this question, data on institutional pass rates posted on the Title II web site (www.title2.org) were used. States with 100 percent pass rates, states that do not require a paper/pencil examination for licensure, and states with fewer than four institutions were excluded, leaving 32 states for the purpose of this analysis. The exclusion of states with 100 percent pass rates reflects no judgment on why this occurs but rather because there are no data to analyze. States with fewer than three institutions were excluded because it would take a minimum of four to fill the required quartiles.

A potentially useful piece of information for national policy is how states differ in terms of the qualifying scores used for teacher licensure exams (U.S. Department of Education, 2002, p. 26-27). Although no strong correlation has been established between states' licensure exam qualifying scores and teacher excellence (as measured by student learning), it could be argued that it is better to have higher rather than lower qualifying scores. If the federal government wanted to invest in creating a system whereby qualifications for teachers were similar across the nation, it could use grants or other mechanisms to encourage states to adopt common licensure exam qualifying scores. Discussions are underway within the U.S. Department of Education about requiring accreditation agencies to use Title II data when evaluating teacher education programs

(NCATE, 2002). If such a requirement were instated, the interest in common qualifying scores would surely increase. Interestingly, Title II isn't needed to get information on licensure exam qualifying scores in each state. This is available on most state education agency or licensure bureau web sites and also is compiled and published annually by the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Certification. Either source could provide an interested party with qualifying scores for teacher exams in all states with little effort.

The summary pass rates used to rank institutions by adjusted quartiles are not a valid evaluation measure, yet the data reveal an interesting distribution pattern. In nearly half the states (14 of 32) an outlier effect shows up in the fourth quartile. That is, in these 14 states most institutions' pass rates were clustered at or above 80 percent but in each there were one or two outlier institutions reporting pass rates below 60 percent. These outliers have the effect of creating a fourth quartile with extreme pass rate variance. Beyond documenting the problem of ranking institutions by quartiles, is there useful information about the outliers?

In the 14 states, 16 institutions reported pass rates below 60 percent. These institutions come from the ranks of both state supported and independent colleges and universities. All but two are in states east of the Mississippi, but it should be noted that in general there are more teacher preparation institutions in the eastern US than in the west. Although several have unique missions such as educating the deaf, music education, or a historically and predominately African-American student body, these are not characteristics common to all of them. Perhaps the most interesting attribute is that they have relatively small numbers of students taking the licensure exams. Twelve of the 16 institutions had 50 or fewer students take a licensure examination and only one reported over 100 candidates. This should not be interpreted as evidence that institutions with few graduates have weak programs. In each of the 14 states with outliers, there were multiple small programs with pass rates over 80 percent and several that reported 100 percent pass rates, so no claim of correlation between small numbers of test takers and low pass rates can be asserted. It is of interest that, with only one exception, institutions with large numbers of test takers did not report pass rates below 60 percent

Rather than providing additional data for policy makers, the matter of small programs illustrates another potential problem with the Title II reporting system: the disparate impact of an unsuccessful student on the pass rate of a small program. As an example, consider the impact of two students not passing a component of the licensure exam on four institutions. In an institution with 200 program completers if two do not pass, the institution has a 99 percent pass rate. An institution with 100 test takers, 98 of whom passed the exam would have a 98 percent pass rate. However in an institution of 20 program completers, two failures would result in a 90 percent pass rate and a college with 13 of 15 completers passing the exam would have an 86 percent pass rate. In several states, pass rates of 90 and below place institutions in the third or fourth quartile. As constructed, the Title II reporting system does not consider the influence of institutional differences such as size, mission, geographic location, or existing state regulations.

Drawing conclusions about program quality from the Title II data is problematic, but the reports may provide a potential check on information about the teaching fields of students who have passed the licensure exams. The federal government collects extensive information from colleges and universities regarding the majors and fields of study of their graduates. From this, some general observations may be made about the pool of new teachers by teaching field and level. Unlike some other data sets, Title II includes within the definition of program completer individuals who have finished coursework necessary for a teaching license but are not in a degree program (both in traditional and “alternative” routes). Thus, the data may be useful to confirm the number of individuals who have completed coursework and examinations to teach in particular fields. This information could be useful to decision makers at the state and national levels as they consider teacher recruitment and retention strategies.

Conclusion

It is reasonable for citizens, state policy makers, and federal officials to be interested in the quality of new teachers. It is not clear that the Title II requirements serve to meet these expectations. State teacher licensure examinations were developed to assure hiring school districts and the public that teaching candidates have met certain requirements essential for a beginning teacher. If the licensure exam is reliable and valid, a student successfully passing it can be assumed to be adequately prepared irrelevant of how other students from the same institution perform. While aggregate pass rates may be of interest for institutional decision making, they are not a proxy for the academic merit of teaching candidates overall and should not be used for high stakes judgments about teacher quality.

If the purpose of Title II is to assure citizens that teaching candidates are well qualified to enter the profession, the unit of evaluation should be the individual college or university programs. It is important, however, that the evaluation design take into account laws and regulations in that state. Attempting to create a national evaluation system by manipulating 50 state laws to fit federal definitions has been found unworkable. When Title II is reauthorized decision makers should carefully link accountability expectations and measures with appropriate units and levels. Information on institutions’ teacher preparation programs should be available to school districts and the general public, but it should be broader and richer than a licensure exam pass rate. In particular, use of the summary pass rate as an indicator of teacher education program quality should be avoided.

Governance of K-12 education is the responsibility of states and localities. Over time this has come to include standards for entering teachers and for their preparation. Attempts to federalize or nationalize this system is not a small issue, particularly if new federal regulations are in addition to those already in state law. One option for a revised Title II would be to require states to establish a baseline for teacher preparation quality then demonstrate progress by periodic reports to the federal government. Because each state would have a different starting point and would use different metrics to measure changes in the quality of teacher preparation, receiving state reports would be a federal

responsibility but aggregating them would not be possible. This proposal mirrors the requirements for school districts under No Child Left Behind.

Consideration of these issues is a serious matter. The decision to gather data on state licensure exams for teachers seemed on its face to be a reasonable way to measure teacher quality, yet this is a flawed approach in a system where control of teacher education is regulated by 50 different sets of state laws. Review of the Title II institutional data reported to the federal government indicate that they provided only limited information for federal or national policy. Using the argument that having good teacher for public elementary and secondary schools is a common good that promotes the general welfare, it may be that it is time to discuss appropriate federal role. However, this is a decision with implications for the entire PreK-16 education system and not one to be made lightly.

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