
Dr. Lorrie A. Shepard, Dean and Professor
249 UCB
Boulder, CO 80309-0249
303-492-6937
Fax: 303-492-7090
Lorrie.Shepard@Colorado.edu

Lynn K. Rhodes, Dean
1380 Lawrence Street, 1149
P.O. Box 173364
Campus Box 106
Denver, CO 80217-3364
Office: 303-315-6343
Office Fax: 303-315-6349

December 7, 2009

Denver Area School Superintendents' Council

Dear DASSC Colleagues:

In the coming days you will hear about a report from the National Council for Teacher Quality on the preparation of elementary teachers in Colorado. NCTQ is a self-appointed teacher-quality advocacy group. Its founder, Kate Walsh, is an avowed critic of college- and university-based teacher preparation programs. NCTQ has not been approved as an accrediting body by either the federal government or professional associations.

NCTQ has already issued reports on teacher preparation in several other states, including Indiana, New Mexico, Texas, Utah, and Wyoming, using a predictable template. Although NCTQ claims to provide "comprehensive research," their research methods and criteria are quite limited. Rather than focusing on teacher candidate performance outcomes as is expected in most present-day accountability and accreditation models, NCTQ bases its critiques on three narrow aspects of program inputs and standardized tests as outcomes.

1. **Admissions standards.** NCTQ's goal is to have future teachers come from the top half of college graduates. It acknowledges that the most selective universities in the state automatically meet this standard. In principle they also intend to allow open-access institutions to satisfy this criterion through selective admissions from among college students already admitted to the institution, but NCTQ requires that this selection be done by means of a standardized test. Unfortunately for Colorado colleges of education that require *college* GPAs of 2.75 or higher to make admissions decisions, NCTQ will not accept college GPA as the basis for candidate selection, no matter how stringent.
2. **Reading coursework.** NCTQ's evaluation of reading preparation is based on ratings of course syllabi to determine how well the set of required reading courses cover the five components of effective reading instruction identified by the National Reading Panel report – phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Of the four areas critiqued by NCTQ, their reading requirements come the closest to the criteria required by the Colorado Department of Education to approve teacher education programs. However, because NCTQ requires that syllabi

show adoption of specific textbooks along with a certain number of class sessions and assignments, tests or quizzes devoted to each reading component, some institutions that have been positively reviewed by CDE have nonetheless failed by NCTQ criteria.

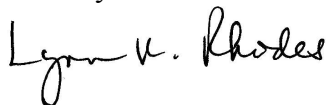
3. **Mathematics coursework.** NCTQ has decided that undergraduates becoming elementary teachers must have at least three mathematics courses taught in mathematics departments and focused on the specific mathematics topics taught in elementary school: numbers and operations, algebra, geometry & measurement, and data analysis and probability. These math courses must be taught exclusively for potential elementary teachers in the mathematics department or the institution will fail on this criterion. If the institution requires two high-quality courses of this type, it will not meet NCTQ's criteria.
4. **Exit standards.** NCTQ has concluded that most elementary teacher licensing examinations currently in use in the U.S. are insufficient to ensure that licensure candidates have adequate subject-matter knowledge. This includes the PLACE and Praxis II exams taken by Colorado teacher candidates. Therefore every Colorado institution fails on this criterion. When asked why institutions are faulted rather than the state board in each state, NCTQ has responded that "institutions should develop their own exit examinations." They do not accept end-of-course examinations, however, as legitimate subject-matter exams.

As summarized in our December 3 *Denver Post* editorial (see attached), Colorado's college- and university-based teacher preparation programs are a model for reforms in other states, thanks to major legislation in 1999 and significant collaborations among teacher preparation programs, the Colorado Department of Education, and the Department of Higher Education. Colorado ensures high levels of content knowledge by requiring content majors and degrees (not education degrees) and content licensure tests. Also, at 800 hours, Colorado has the highest requirement for clinical hours of any state in the country. We believe that content expertise, pedagogical expertise, and well-ground practical experience linking theory and practice are all three critically important to graduating new teacher candidates who are well prepared to ensure student learning.

Sincerely,



Lorrie A. Shepard, Dean and Professor
School of Education
University of Colorado at Boulder



Lynn K. Rhodes, Dean and Professor
School of Education and Human Development
University of Colorado Denver

Colorado prepares its teachers

By Lynn K. Rhodes

Posted: 12/03/2009 01:00:00 AM MST

As states compete for federal Race to the Top funding, by at least one measure Colorado leads the pack.

In large part due to state Senate action in 1999, Colorado's 18 college and university teacher preparation programs are indeed ahead of national efforts to reform both the content and classroom-based experience of new teachers. Major transformations undertaken in the last 10 years have helped the state progress in preparing and retaining highly effective teachers.

Unlike education programs in many other states, in Colorado's colleges of education, teacher licensure candidates do not receive education degrees. All candidates at the elementary and secondary levels must have an academic major in liberal arts and must meet the same core curriculum and major requirements as any other student earning a baccalaureate degree in that field. Teacher licensure candidates complete their teacher preparation coursework and 800 hours of clinical practice in schools as if they were earning a double major.

To be licensed by Colorado, they also must pass a state or national exam in their major, thereby doubly ensuring content knowledge.

Colorado teacher education programs have high admissions standards, requiring a minimum of a 2.75 GPA for admission, and most programs do not admit students until their junior year. It is not uncommon for teacher education students to have higher GPAs than others with the same major, typically exceeding 3.0. Students who cannot meet the performance-based standards set by the Colorado Department of Education are counseled to leave or are dismissed.

In all the state's teacher education programs, candidates must demonstrate competence in eight performance-based standards: literacy, math, democratic schooling, individualized instruction, standards and assessment, content knowledge, classroom management, and knowledge of technology.

Teaching performance is the determining factor for licensure recommendation, including completion of a teacher work sample that requires evidence of student learning in a lengthy unit of study developed and taught by the candidate.

In addition, Colorado's requirement that teacher candidates gain 800 hours of experience in schools prior to licensure is the highest clinical experience requirement in the nation. In comparison, Florida requires 270 hours and California 300.

Colorado teacher education programs are reauthorized every five years by the state Board of Education and the Colorado Commission on Higher Education. Programs that prepare

teachers responsible for literacy instruction are reviewed additionally by CDE's Colorado Literacy Council.

Colorado deans of education worked with policymakers to put forward the Educator ID bill, passed in 2009, which tracks the effectiveness of our graduates in terms of their impact on K-12 student learning.

In addition to achievement growth, we also are interested in tracking our graduates' persistence in the profession, classroom performance on the job, and commitment to working with students.

As part of Race to the Top funding, we are eager to work with districts to consider the development of a common set of teaching standards and a common assessment framework for teacher evaluation across districts and higher education.

The critical element in dramatically increasing K-12 student learning is teacher effectiveness. Preparation and district professional development opportunities are critical to the effectiveness of beginning teachers. Along with districts, state agencies and policymakers, colleges of education stand ready to shoulder their responsibility for increasing student learning through improving the effectiveness of teachers.

Lynn K. Rhodes is dean of the School of Education and Human Development at CU Denver. Education deans Sandra Haynes at Metro State College, Eugene Sheehan at UNC and Lorrie Shepard at CU Boulder contributed to this article, on behalf of the Colorado Council of Deans of Education.