

8

Quality Teachers

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Florida needs to find thousands of new teachers, and fast. Part of its problem is due to simple demographics: its student population is rising at a rapid rate, and more students obviously call for more teachers. But the main culprit is the Class Size Amendment to the state constitution, which was passed by the voters in November of 2002.

The new law requires that classes be reduced to 18 students per class in grades K–3, 22 students per class in grades 4–8, and 25 students per class in grades 9–12 by the beginning of the 2010–11 school year. This mandate can only be carried out, state officials estimate, by expanding its teacher workforce by about 30,000 teachers. Because of the rules governing how the class reductions are phased in, moreover, about 10,000 of these teachers must be added to the workforce during the 2006–07 school year. As Florida would normally be hiring about 20,000 new teachers total in 2006–07 anyway—due to expected turnover and student population growth—this means that the state must hire 50 percent more teachers than it normally would. And even if

this jaw-dropping challenge is somehow handled (or dodged), future years will continue to present problems, as the state is faced with the ongoing annual hiring requirements of a much larger workforce.

Florida's challenge is not simply to find enough teachers to fill its classrooms, but also to make sure that these additional teachers (as well as all existing teachers, for that matter) are high in quality. Can both these objectives—greater quantity *and* greater quality—be accomplished at the same time? The answer is that they can be. Florida has developed some new programs that change the way teachers are trained and certified, and these are steps in the right direction, although they don't go far enough to promise real success. The solution calls for the state to take its teacher reforms to a still higher level by embracing a new model of training and certification.

In this chapter, I will describe how Florida has approached these issues up to now, what the new model looks like, and what the state can do to put it into action in increasing both the quantity and the quality of its classroom teachers.

For many decades now, the American states—including Florida—have employed a classic regulatory strategy in their efforts to hire qualified teachers. They require that teachers be certified, and they stipulate that, in order to get certified, candidates need to undergo certain types of formal training—in subject matter content, teacher-specific content (pedagogy, instruction, child development, education theory), and supervised classroom experience—and be able to pass various licensure exams. The formal training is typically obtained through approved teacher training programs, which are often found within education schools.

This regulatory approach is now deeply entrenched in the culture of the public school system, and there are strong political pressures—from the teachers unions, from the educational institutions that train teachers—to see that it survives and prospers. There are good reasons,

however, for thinking that its performance is inadequate. The evidence shows that:

- Any connection between certification and student achievement is weak at best. The characteristics of teachers that matter most are their cognitive abilities and their substantive knowledge, not whether they have a license and have been “trained.”¹
- Teacher training programs attract students disproportionately from the lower end of the achievement distribution within colleges and universities.²
- Many and perhaps most teacher training programs are of poor quality.³
- Teacher licensing exams and their passing bars are typically pitched at such low levels that they do little to guarantee the quality of those who are certified.⁴
- Many states and districts complain that, in the face of rising enrollments and reduced class sizes, the existing system of teacher

1. See Kate Walsh, *Teacher Certification Reconsidered: Stumbling for Quality* (Baltimore: Abell Foundation, 2001); Robert Gordon, Thomas J. Kane, and Douglas O. Staiger, “Identifying Effective Teachers Using Performance on the Job,” The Hamilton Project White Paper (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2006); and Dan D. Goldhaber and Dominic J. Brewer, “Does Teacher Certification Matter? High School Certification Status and Student Achievement,” *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 22: 129–45.

2. See Caroline Hoxby, “What Has Changed and What Has Not,” in Paul E. Peterson, ed., *Our Schools and Our Future* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Press, 2003).

3. See David L. Leal, “Assessing Traditional Teacher Preparation: Evidence from a Survey of Graduate and Undergraduate Programs,” in Frederick M. Hess, Andrew J. Rotherham, and Kate Walsh, eds., *A Qualified Teacher in Every Classroom?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2004); also in that same volume, David M. Steiner, “Preparing Tomorrow’s Teachers: An Analysis of Syllabi from a Sample of America’s Schools of Education.”

4. See Education Trust, “Not Good Enough: A Content Analysis of Teacher Licensing Examinations” (New York: Education Trust, 1999); and Dale Ballou and Michael Podgursky, *Teacher Pay and Teacher Quality* (Kalamazoo, MI: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, 1997).

preparation and certification is not giving them enough certified teachers to fill their classrooms.⁵

The current system is more than merely ineffectual. It also drives people away from teaching—and thus drastically limits the supply of teachers, including high quality teachers—because its burdensome certification requirements serve as barriers to entry. A retired engineer or an unfulfilled accountant cannot simply decide to give teaching a try—and possibly find themselves a new career in the public schools—without committing to huge investments (mainly in time and effort, but also in money) to satisfy all the requirements that go along with certification. Staring at these costs *ex ante*, most people who might consider changing careers from some other profession to teaching can only be discouraged from going that route. State policies should be designed to *attract* these types of candidates, not to repel them, and to see that the districts have a much larger supply of potential teachers to choose from.

Crafting a new model would not be difficult. The standard barriers to entry are not justified on performance grounds, and they lead to unwarranted restrictions on supply, so the best approach would simply be to scrap most of them entirely and build a system around the fewest requirements possible. Anyone with a bachelor's degree who can demonstrate substantive competence—either by having a college major in the relevant subject or by passing a rigorous test of substantive competence—should be certified to teach in the public schools, subject to background checks. Newly hired teachers should be provided with mentors and on-the-job assistance. But these components should simply be aids to their actual work—in managing a classroom, for example, or preparing lessons—and should not constitute an onerous,

5. See Patrick J. Murphy and Michael M. DeArmond, *From the Headlines to the Frontlines: The Teacher Shortage and Its Implications for Recruitment Policy* (Seattle, WA: Center on Reinventing Public Education, University of Washington, 2003).

time-consuming program of study that must be completed after hours. They should learn on the job.⁶

Under this new model, the emphasis would be on having quality requirements that are serious and rigorous, but also *easy to satisfy* for candidates who are truly competent in their fields. This opens the door wide to capable people of all ages and in all careers who might consider teaching in the public schools, and who would be eager to try it out if the barriers to entry were purposely kept low. The supply of capable candidates would therefore increase dramatically under the new model. Not all of these people would actually have what it takes to be good classroom teachers, as more than substantive competence is necessary if they are to work well with kids. But this is to be expected. The key point is that the districts would have a much larger pool of candidates to choose from—and if they were to screen and choose candidates wisely, give them appropriate mentoring and on-the-job training, and be careful to weed out new hires who don't prove their worth, they would have much greater opportunities over the long run to put together high quality cadres of teachers. They would be best able to do this if the usual time period for teacher tenure were extended—from two or three years, which is common, to (say) five years—thus giving the districts more time to evaluate teacher performance and to work with the new hires.

Teacher training programs would still exist under this model. And they would be free to organize their offerings in any way they wanted. But no one would have to attend one of these programs in order to get certified, and the districts would only hire their graduates if they saw a performance advantage in doing so. The programs would thus

6. For discussions of barriers to entry under the standard regulatory model, as well as more detailed arguments favoring the new model I am proposing here, see Frederick Hess, *Tear Down This Wall* (Washington, D.C.: Progressive Policy Institute, 2001); and U.S. Department of Education, *Meeting the Highly Qualified Teachers Challenge: The Secretary's Annual Report on Teacher Quality* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, 2002).

need to demonstrate their value-added in order to attract clients, and they would have strong incentives to develop offerings that really do promote the academic achievement of children. Competition of this sort is precisely what these programs need in order to force them to separate the wheat from the chaff—and improve.

This new model can be interpreted as a radically simplified and far more powerful version of what is usually called an “alternative certification program.” Over the past decade or so, Florida and most other states have established such programs in response to teacher shortages. While the programs themselves take many forms from one state to the next, the commonality is that they typically allow individuals who have not graduated from a teacher training program to be hired as classroom teachers, and they offer these individuals a program of study, mentoring, and training that ultimately leads to full certification. The advantage for districts is that, when faced with spot shortages, they can hire people who are not fully certified, put them on a track toward certification—and get warm bodies into the classroom quickly.⁷

The evidence indicates that these warm bodies actually perform just as well as the warm bodies who are fully certified, so the states are better off in allowing for these alternative paths.⁸ But as innovations, alternative certification programs are little more than baby steps in the right direction. The reason is that, from the standpoint of the job candidates themselves, these programs typically impose study and training burdens that are about the same as those entailed by the regular teacher training programs. Yes, the districts have more hiring flexibility on the front end. But the barriers to entry—which potential teachers can see quite clearly, looking ahead—are not reduced in any substantial way. Indeed, the burdens may sometimes be worse, because teachers need to complete the requirements while they are work-

7. See Emily Feistritzer, *Alternative Teacher Certification: A State-by-State Analysis 2006* (Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Information, 2006).

8. See footnote 1, above.

ing, and this means taking courses at night, on weekends, or during summers. On the whole, then, these programs are not well designed to create big increases in the supply of teacher candidates—and they haven't. Most states get only small percentages of their new hires through alternative certification. Predictably, moreover, there are political pressures from the usual vested interests that favor keeping the percentages small.

In light of its severe teacher shortage, Florida is hoping things will work out differently. It has been a national leader in education reform, particularly in its innovative pursuit of accountability and choice to transform incentives, boost productivity, and promote student achievement. No state, it is fair to say, has been more innovative than Florida. On the surface, its alternative certification system—a beefed-up version of which went into effect with the 2002–03 school year—appears to be a bold and promising break from traditional arrangements as well. The state's hope is that this new system can attract significant numbers of new people into teaching, dramatically supplement the numbers coming in from traditional teacher training programs, and go a long way toward solving the looming teacher shortage.

Under the new system, all Florida districts are required to offer their own alternative certification programs, and this is currently the main alternative path by which new teachers get certified. These programs must meet state criteria, and they contain a state-mandated common core, but the districts have a degree of flexibility in adapting the specifics to meet local conditions and concerns. In general, prospective teachers who already have a bachelor's degree—and are often coming from other careers and backgrounds—are provided with initial training prior to their entry into the classroom, they are assisted by mentors during the school year, and they undergo a competency-based program of training designed to assure that they master a comprehensive list of professional knowledge-areas and skills. The latter are referred to as "Educator Accomplished Practices," and there are 12 of them:

assessment, communication, continuous improvement, critical thinking, diversity, ethics, human development and learning, knowledge of subject matter, learning environments, planning the role of the teacher, and technology. Over time, trainers assess the new teachers along all these dimensions and determine whether they have mastered them. To be certified, candidates must ultimately receive satisfactory evaluations on these professional practices, and they must pass the Professional Education Test required of all teachers. They must also pass the state's test of basic skills by the end of the first year, and at some point pass the appropriate subject area exam.

Still more recently, Florida has created another alternative path to certification by allowing community colleges, as well as four-year colleges and universities, to set up Educator Preparation Institutes (EPIs). These EPIs have their own programs, consistent with state standards, that are designed to provide career-changers with the professional knowledge and skills to enter teaching. Training is carried out through modules—for example, on classroom management or instructional methods—that cover the essentials of what teachers are expected to know. Because the participants typically have (non-teaching) jobs, these modules are offered on Saturdays, at nights, or during the summer to allow them to attend in their off-time. There are (at this writing) 30 EPIs up and running, and more will follow.

While the EPIs are too new to assess, experience with the district programs has been quite positive. Surveys indicate that they are indeed attracting nontraditional teaching candidates. Almost half are older than 36; more than half have majors in business, the physical sciences, or the social sciences; and 29 percent have college majors in math or science. Principals and mentors who observe these new teachers on the job, moreover, say that they are at least as high in quality as the new hires who come from the traditional training route.

The downside is that the district alternative certification programs are not attracting and training enough new teachers. In 2002–03, 385 new teachers gained certification by this path, and the numbers in-

creased to 645 in 2003–04 and 847 in 2004–05, but these additions to the supply of teachers are not nearly enough to satisfy Florida’s needs. The good news is that the upward trajectory is likely to continue within the district programs; and as more EPIs are established and begin to attract teaching candidates, the overall numbers could improve significantly. The traditional teacher training programs graduate in the neighborhood of 5000 prospective teachers who get certified each year, and the alternative programs could reach and ultimately exceed this level within five years or so. Even this expanded level of supply, however, is unlikely to meet the state’s needs. This is especially true in light of the substitution effect that is sure to occur, as prospective teachers shift from traditional training programs to alternative certification programs and the numbers in the former actually drop as the numbers in the latter rise.

Florida deserves great credit for its aggressive use of alternative certification to increase the supply of teachers. It has not been aggressive enough, however. The district programs look as though they have been designed by the same people who design and run the traditional teacher training programs. In many respects, they are built around the same sorts of pedagogical material and skills—as embodied in the Educator Accomplished Practices—that one finds in the traditional programs, and they impose substantial requirements that take much time to satisfy. Some teachers can get through the district programs and achieve full certification in one year, but the average is about two years—which is a sign of the burdens they impose on the typical candidate.

A prime objective of these programs should be to drastically reduce barriers to entry. The Florida district programs do not do that. They give the districts greater flexibility in hiring, because they can hire people who are not fully certified and thus have a larger pool to choose from. This is good. But because the programs still impose significant burdens, many people who might otherwise be attracted to teaching are almost surely turned off at the outset by the investments

in time and effort they are being asked to make to get certified. Virtually all of these additional burdens—which arise from the training and assessment associated with the Educator Accomplished Practices—are unnecessary and, in a truly streamlined program, could be dramatically reduced. As it is, from the standpoint of new teachers, the major difference between the district alternative certification programs and the traditional teacher training programs is that the former costs less—anywhere from \$300 to \$1500, compared to thousands in tuition for the traditional programs. This is a big plus. But the time and effort burdens are not dramatically reduced. And for Florida, this is a major opportunity missed.

The EPIs may turn out to be better designed. While they too are built around the Educator Accomplished Practices, their modules are offered in such a way that they might be completed rather quickly. Indian River Community College, for example, has an EPI whose program can be completed in seven weeks of all-day (Monday through Friday) training courses. Although many career-changers have regular jobs during the week and cannot do this, they can spend an equivalent amount of time taking the modules on Saturdays and complete the program that way. Thus, when it comes to the investment of time and effort (and money), the EPIs have the right idea—and may prove, once well established, to be a great success in increasing the supply of teachers. The problem is that there is no evidence that this kind of pedagogical program of study—a condensed version of what education schools do—has an impact on student performance, and thus is actually necessary. So the EPIs may be a very efficient way of doing something that does not need to be done (assuming teachers are being mentored and being given practical, on-the-job training at their schools).

Florida's alternative certification programs have been developed in order to deal with supply issues. The state's hope is that it can expand teacher supply without sacrificing teacher quality. Clearly, it can do this, and it can do it even more effectively if its programs are

better designed. Indeed, with well designed programs that vastly expand teacher supply, the districts will have more highly capable individuals to choose from (even if they are not a bigger percentage of the pool), and new hires should be higher in quality on average. The state also has an important opportunity, however, to increase the quality of its teachers much more directly. This opportunity arises from the federal No Child Left Behind legislation, and is not necessarily related to alternative certification strategies—but the two can usefully be combined.

The “highly qualified teacher” provision of No Child Left Behind requires that all teachers in academic classes be highly qualified, and specifies that, in order to be so classified, a teacher must have a bachelor’s degree, be certified, and be able to demonstrate competence in the relevant subject matter. New teachers must demonstrate competence either by taking a rigorous subject matter exam or by having the appropriate college major. Veteran teachers can demonstrate competence in these ways as well, or they can meet a set of standards devised for this purpose by each state, called the High Objective Uniform State Standard of Evaluation (HOUSSE).

Anyone familiar with the teaching profession knows that, while most teachers in most districts are surely competent, a nontrivial portion of the workforce is not—and should not be in the classroom. To take an egregious example: Philadelphia recently tested its middle school math teachers and found that two-thirds of them could not pass the appropriate math test for the material they were supposed to be teaching to their students.⁹ The “highly qualified teacher” provision of NCLB offers the states a golden opportunity to require teacher competency and significantly upgrade the quality of their teachers.

But here is the problem. The states are under political pressure, mainly from the teachers unions, to design their HOUSSE criteria in

9. Bess Keller, “Rigor Disputed in Standards for Teachers,” *Education Week* (January 14, 2004): 1.

such a way that any veteran teacher can easily satisfy them and be declared highly qualified. State policymakers have also been concerned that, if lots of veteran teachers failed to make the grade, shortages would be created. As a result, virtually all states have made a mockery of the “highly qualified teacher” provision as it applies to veteran teachers, treating the HOUSSE option as a gigantic loophole for driving all their veteran teachers through.¹⁰

Florida has been a national leader in education reform, and one might have expected it to seize upon NCLB’s “highly qualified teacher” provision as a major opportunity to upgrade the quality of its veteran teachers. But instead it reacted like most other states, designing its HOUSSE standards to ensure that every single veteran teacher is declared highly qualified. In Florida, the charade works as follows. To be declared highly qualified, a veteran teacher needs to accumulate 100 points. She gets 10 points for each year of teaching experience in the relevant subject, up to a maximum of 50 points. She gets another 30 points simply for having received a satisfactory evaluation during the past year. She gets points for participating in professional development activities, which all teachers engage in, up to a maximum of 60 points. She also gets 10 points each, to a maximum of 50, for assorted professional activities, such as giving a presentation to a district meeting, supervising an intern, being an officer in a teacher organization, participating on curriculum committees, and doing other things that are judged “appropriate.” And there are additional ways to get points as well. Clearly, it is easy for any veteran teacher to accumulate 100 points for meeting criteria that do *not* demonstrate their substantive competence. Anyone who has taught a given subject for five years and received a satisfactory evaluation automatically has 80 points, and the rest are easily acquired through professional development or other activities.

10. Terry M. Moe, “A Highly Qualified Teacher in Every Classroom,” in John E. Chubb, ed., *Within Our Reach* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005).

Florida has dropped the ball on this one, and missed out on a tremendous opportunity for educational improvement.

Recommendations

Florida can dramatically expand the supply of teachers *and* increase their quality if it takes innovative actions of the right kind.

1. The state should pursue a much more streamlined approach to alternative certification, one that is dedicated to drastically reducing barriers to entry and making it as easy as possible for capable people to enter the teaching force. Virtually all after-hours requirements—particularly those having to do with the “Educator Accomplished Practices”—should be jettisoned, as should the Professional Education Test. Any new teacher who has a bachelor’s degree, can demonstrate substantive competence (by having the relevant college degree or passing a rigorous test of substantive competence), and can pass a background check should be *fully certified* to teach in Florida’s schools. The districts should provide them with mentoring and on-the-job training to enhance their performance, and should be careful and vigilant about removing new teachers who are not performing adequately after a sufficient period of time.
2. To complement a system that reduces barriers to entry, actively seeks out career-changers, and gives the districts the largest possible pool of candidates to choose from, the state should increase the probationary period for teachers from three (the current norm) to five years—thus allowing the districts a reasonable length of time to observe the performance of new teachers and make good decisions about whom to keep.
3. Were barriers to entry drastically reduced as suggested here, the state should launch an advertising campaign to let all potential teachers—in and out of Florida—know that anyone with a bach-

elor's degree who can demonstrate competence can immediately get fully certified and begin teaching, with no bureaucratic requirements down the road. Getting the word out is crucial to the expansion of supply.

4. The state should drop its HOUSSE standards entirely, and replace them with a simple requirement that all veteran teachers demonstrate their competence by having a college degree in the relevant subject or taking a rigorous test of substantive competence. (Another possibility: they might demonstrate their competence by means of student test scores, showing that the students in their classrooms are making adequate achievement gains). Veteran teachers who cannot demonstrate their competence should not be allowed to teach.