

QUINNIPIAC UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

December 16, 2015

Dear Members of the Minority Teacher Recruitment Task Force,

My name is Dr. Anne Dichele and I am the Director of Teacher Preparation at Quinnipiac University and a long-time teacher and teacher educator. I thank this task force for the invitation to speak today, having addressed the State Board of Education in November as to the deep concerns I hold, as do the majority of other teacher educators nationally, as to the licensure testing of pre-service teachers in this state and in this country, and the severe, if perhaps unintended, consequences such testing requirements have on our profession.

Please do not misunderstand my passion about this topic. I am deeply in favor of holding teachers and the profession to the highest standards of performance and knowledge. I left the classroom as a successful and happy teacher because I realized how many of my teaching colleagues were well-intentioned teachers but poorly prepared, and hence unsuccessful with children in their classrooms. I have devoted my life and my career to putting quality teachers in classrooms.

But we are in a crisis. The very reason your task force exists is because the statistics are appalling – 80% of the teaching force are women, 82% are WHITE, 7.8% Hispanic, 6.8% African American, 1.8% Asian. And yet we KNOW from the research that race/ethnicity matches between students and teachers impact student achievement, with significant benefits to students who are taught by matched-race teachers. I invite you to read review the research by Goldhaber and Hansen on this work.

Licensure testing of the type and kind we now have in Connecticut and nationally has contributed significantly to jeopardizing the long-held goal of diversifying the teaching force so it more closely resembles the makeup of our country's student body. Moreover, our state's Educator Preparation Advisory Council (or EPAC) recently recommended that teacher preparation programs be evaluated, in large part, on their candidates' first time pass rates on these licensure exams. So now, not only are these poorly designed and inherently biased tests being used to deny teachers of color into our classrooms, they are purportedly indicators of the quality of the teacher preparation programs that prepare them! So Connecticut teacher preparation programs are being forced to "teach to the tests" to prove their value, while at the same time the entire nation is admitting that the high-stakes testing of the NCLB era was a disaster, ushering in the Common Core standards which summarily promote deep over breadth, creative and integrative thinking – all

cognitive processes which are NOT tested in most of these licensure tests for teachers.

Do not misunderstand my intent here. Once again, I will state for the record that I am deeply committed to high quality teacher candidates and ways of assessing that quality so that only those who are highly skilled are allowed to teach. But as Linda Darling-Hammond has stated, "we need to be clear about *what skills* are necessary in devising these tests, rather than just trying to eliminate people from the pool."

There is already a case in New York where Judge Kimba Wood of the Federal District Court of Manhattan ruled two teacher licensure exams as "discriminatory". But the deeper question is whether the skills measured by these tests are so crucial to the job of teaching that they outweigh the disparate impact on minority candidates – or for that matter, any of our candidates, whose current national pass rates are not even 65%.

These tests, rather than being made the foundation of teacher preparation, should be considered in light of the substantial research as to the limitations of standardized testing in general and teacher licensure testing in particular. The actual research indicates that standardized teacher licensure content tests hold correlations to teaching performance in secondary math only, with limited correlations in secondary science and little to no evidence in other areas of secondary education or elementary education. (See Carrol and Waggoner 2011)

The paradox here is clear. We want to diversify the teaching force while we make poorly correlated certification exams more difficult to pass, and now are recommending we use those scores to assess how well teacher prep programs are preparing teachers for the classroom.

This madness has to stop. Standardized tests have a racist history. See Diane Ravitch's *Left Back*, chapter 4. They measure family income and education. They are highly correlated with socio-economic status. Check out the SAT reports on test results and family income, on our state scores, NAEP scores, and international scores.

Again, I am not recommending that we not assess beginning teachers' readiness to teach. I am simply laying out the facts of the inadequacies of the testing as it now stands, the wrong-headedness of building the foundations of teacher preparation on such testing outcomes, and the truly devastating and unaccounted for effects of discrimination and bias these tests promote. I encourage you all to read *Jim Crow's Pink Slip* by Leslie Fenwick of Howard University.

So what can we do? First of all, we need to be aware that testing, any testing, can be useful but also deeply harmful when poorly designed or used improperly. Our teacher candidates from Quinnipiac consistently score higher than other teacher

preparation programs in the state, but I would not promote that be the basis on which our program is defined as successful.

We need to begin to really look at the research on these tests – and consider better ways to assess our teacher candidates. My own suggestions would be simple – first, have pre-service teachers take the tests, ONCE, so that you have some statistical data to ultimately correlate against actual performance in the classroom. The validity of these tests has not been tested enough. Do they truly predict strong classroom teachers? Secondly, do not deny licensure on the basis of passing these tests. Rather, promote a staggered licensure procedure more aligned with practice – perhaps, like a driver's license, new teachers, whether or not they have passed these tests, are closely assessed under a "permit" to teach for two years, with a license granted after they are successful under the SEED evaluations and perhaps something like the EdTPA.

It is time to think out of the box. We will not resolve this problem of minority teacher candidates until we address the inherent bias of these high-stakes tests, their poor design, their lack of validity and reliability, and most importantly, questioning a State Department of Education that is building their entire assessment of teacher quality programming on the basis of what ETS and Pearson decide is important to teaching.

I will not let go of this issue. We are ostensibly segregating our teaching force through the promotion of these high stakes tests, and we are not only losing amazing teachers, we are losing teachers of color, and in doing that, we are losing equitable educational opportunities for the entire upcoming and highly diverse, next generation.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Anne Dichele", written in dark ink.

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Race, Gender, and Teacher Testing: How Informative a Tool Is Teacher Licensure Testing?

Dan Goldhaber
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Virtually all states require teachers to undergo licensure testing before participation in the public school labor market. This article analyzes the information these tests provide about teacher effectiveness. The authors find that licensure tests have different predicative validity for student achievement by teacher race. They also find that student achievement is impacted by the race/ethnicity match between teachers and their students, with Black students significantly benefitting from being matched with a Black teacher. As a consequence of these matching effects, the uniform application of licensure standards is likely to have differential impacts on the achievement of White and minority students.

KEYWORDS: licensure testing, teacher quality, student achievement, labor market discrimination

The role of teachers in education has long been identified as the most significant of all school factors that affect student learning, starting with the Coleman report, *Equality of Educational Opportunity* (Coleman, 1966). More recent research analyzing the relationship between teacher effectiveness and student achievement at the micro-level has confirmed these findings and further suggests that effectiveness varies considerably among teachers (Aaronson, Barrow, & Sander, 2007; Hanushek, 1992;

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MICHAEL HANSEN is a research associate in the Education Policy Center at the Urban Institute, Washington, D.C.; e-mail: mbansen@urban.org. His most current research projects investigate teacher contracts, behavioral responses to incentives, and value-added estimates of performance.

Evidence of the predictive validity of standardized content area tests on teacher efficacy is mixed and mostly weak. Ayers (1988), Carroll and Waggoner (2011), and D'Agostino and Powers (2009) all found weak correlations between tests scores and performance assessments completed while candidates were still in their teacher preparation programs. Darling-Hammond (2009) and Goe, Bell, and Little (2008) reviewed studies examining the relationship of standardized content area tests and in-service teaching and pointed to some evidence of stronger correlations in secondary math, less evidence of an association in secondary science, and little or no evidence of a relationship in other secondary areas or in elementary teaching. Darling-Hammond (2009) and Carroll and Waggoner (2011) discussed the difficulty of this analysis in that data are only used from candidates or teachers who have met minimum competency (cut scores) on these exams. Obviously, individuals who did not meet the minimum cut score were not admitted to teacher education programs, so there are no data on the relationship of low content area test scores and P-12 performance assessments.

Looking more closely at teacher performance tests as a possible key predictor of candidate competence, D'Agostino and Powers (2009) found preservice tests were not a good predictor of teaching performance, but preservice observations were a good predictor.

Diane Ravitch's blog

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New Teacher Tests Have Disparate Impact on Minority Teachers

By dianeravitch

June 21, 2015 //

It is indisputable that standardized tests have a disparate impact on members of minority groups. Asian students perform exceptionally well on math tests. White and Asian students have higher scores than black and Hispanic students.

The same disparate impact is found on teacher tests as on student tests. Occasionally, an African-American teacher will sue, claiming test bias. They usually win. New York State's teacher licensing exam attempted to be "more rigorous," but making them harder to pass cemented the gap between the pass rates of different racial groups.

"On a common licensing exam called Praxis Core, a new test given in 31 states or jurisdictions that was created to be more rigorous than its predecessor, 55 percent of white candidates taking the test since October 2013 passed the math portion on their first try, according to the preliminary data from the Educational Testing Service, which designed the exam. The passing rate for first-time African-American test takers was 21.5 percent, and for Hispanic test takers, 35 percent. A similar gap was seen on the reading and writing portions.

"In New York, which now has four separate licensing tests that candidates must pass, an analysis last year of the most difficult exam found that during a six-month period, only 41 percent of black and 46 percent of Hispanic candidates passed the test their first time, compared with 64 percent of their white counterparts."

This is a paradox, as two policy goals conflict: to diversify the teaching force and to make teacher certification exams more difficult to pass. It seems likely that aligning teacher exams with the Common Core will worsen the problem.

Read Alan Singer here on the uselessness of standized tests for teacher certification. He writes that such tests are notoriously unable to predict who will be a good teacher and who will be a bad teacher.

He recommends remedies, beginning with FIRE PEARSON.

He concludes:

ABSTRACT

Does Teacher Testing Raise Teacher Quality? Evidence from State Certification Requirements*

The education reform movement includes efforts to raise teacher quality through stricter certification and licensing provisions. Most US states now require public school teachers to pass a standardized test such as the Praxis. Although any barrier to entry is likely to raise wages in the affected occupation, the theoretical effects of such requirements on teacher quality are ambiguous. Teacher testing places a floor on whatever skills are measured by the required test, but testing is also costly for applicants. These costs shift teacher supply to the left and may be especially likely to deter high-quality applicants from teaching in public schools. Moreover, test requirements may disqualify some applicants that schools would otherwise want to hire. We use the Schools and Staffing Survey to estimate the effect of state teacher testing requirements on teacher wages and teacher quality as measured by educational background. The results suggest that state-mandated teacher testing increases teacher wages with no corresponding increase in quality.

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Tough Tests for Teachers, With Question of Bias

By **ELIZABETH A. HARRIS** JUNE 17, 2015

Students are not the only ones struggling to pass new standardized tests being rolled out around the country. So are those who want to be teachers.

Concerned that education schools were turning out too many middling graduates, states have been introducing more difficult teacher licensing exams. Perhaps not surprisingly, passing rates have fallen. But minority candidates have been doing especially poorly, jeopardizing a long-held goal of diversifying the teaching force so it more closely resembles the makeup of the country's student body.

"This is very serious," said David M. Steiner, dean of the School of Education at Hunter College and a former New York State education commissioner. "It reflects, of course, the tragic performance gap we see in just about every academic or aptitude test."

On a common licensing exam called Praxis Core, a new test given in 31 states or jurisdictions that was created to be more rigorous than its predecessor, 55 percent of white candidates taking the test since October 2013

passed the math portion on their first try, according to the preliminary data from the Educational Testing Service, which designed the exam. The passing rate for first-time African-American test takers was 21.5 percent, and for Hispanic test takers, 35 percent. A similar gap was seen on the reading and writing portions.

In New York, which now has four separate licensing tests that candidates must pass, an analysis last year of the most difficult exam found that during a six-month period, only 41 percent of black and 46 percent of Hispanic candidates passed the test their first time, compared with 64 percent of their white counterparts.

A federal judge is now weighing whether the test is discriminatory. Because of complaints from education schools that students have not had enough time to adjust, as well as concern about the impact on minorities, at least two states — New York and Illinois — have already postponed or loosened some of their new requirements.

Israel Ramos, who graduated from the education school at Lehman College in the Bronx, failed New York's toughest exam three times, once, he said, by just a few points. While working as a substitute, Mr. Ramos said, he was asked if he would be interested in staying on for at least six permanent teaching positions.

"And on all those occasions, I had to turn them down because I lacked certification," he said.

On the fourth try, he passed the test, and he is interviewing for several teaching positions.

Racial disparities have been seen on teacher licensing exams for years. They have become more pressing as states add tests or make them harder to pass, part of a national effort to weed out the least able candidates, who often wind up teaching the poorest students.

“Teachers who are not themselves well educated are not going to go on to educate their future students to the levels that we need,” said Kate Walsh, the president of the National Council on Teacher Quality.

But while the number of minority teachers has doubled since the late 1980s, according to an analysis of federal data by Richard M. Ingersoll, a professor of education and sociology at the University of Pennsylvania, the teaching force remains almost monochromatic: The federal Education Department has said that more than 80 percent of public school teachers are white.

For the first time, minorities accounted for more than 50 percent of the nation’s public school student population this academic year, according to government estimates. Though evidence is still sparse, some studies suggest that having a teacher of the same race may be beneficial for students.

Thomas S. Dee, a professor of education at Stanford who has studied the issue, said such advantages might come because students perceived teachers who looked like themselves, or who came from their own communities, as role models. There may also be unintentional racial bias at play in how teachers perceive students who are different from themselves, Dr. Dee said.

Linda Darling-Hammond, who is also a professor of education at Stanford, said that in devising new tests, “we need to be clear about what skills are necessary, rather than just trying to eliminate people from the pool.” Dr. Darling-Hammond helped design a new performance-based test for teachers, called the edTPA, which requires a portfolio of work including a video of the candidate in front of a classroom, but she is skeptical of the increase in testing over all.

“We’re kind of in a testing era in the United States,” she said. “If you have a problem, throw a test at it.”

The edTPA is one of the tests that teaching candidates in New York must

now pass. Another one, the Academic Literacy Skills Test, or ALST, is being scrutinized in court. That test was designed to evaluate reading and evidence-based writing, to show the “teacher is capable of proficient, close, and critical reading that reflects wide, deep and thoughtful engagement with a range of high-quality, complex informational and literary texts,” preparation materials say. It was developed to ensure teachers can master the new Common Core standards for English; sample questions provided on a testing website include passages about energy policy and Gertrude Stein’s life in Paris.

Licensing tests have been challenged in the last couple of decades in several states, with varying degrees of success. In the New York case, Judge Kimba M. Wood of Federal District Court in Manhattan has already ruled that two exams previously used in the state were discriminatory. The central question in these cases is whether the skills measured by the test are so crucial to the job of being a teacher that they outweigh the disparate impact on minority candidates.

But many public education officials view rigorous entrance requirements as crucial to improving student performance and ensuring a qualified teaching force in the face of uneven preparation programs. In a court document, an expert defending the ALST on behalf of the state is quoted as saying, “The purpose of a teacher licensure test is to protect the public from incompetent teachers.”

Leslie T. Fenwick, the dean of the Howard University School of Education, says that while she supports licensure assessments, she makes a case in her coming book, “Jim Crow’s Pink Slip,” that they have a sinister history. She says that certification exams, particularly in the Southeast, were part of a tool kit used to force black teachers out of the profession after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision mandated desegregated schools.

Versions of licensing tests have, in fact, been around for better than a century. The education historian Diane Ravitch said New York City began

teacher examinations in the early 20th century. As part of those tests, she said, an oral exam was included, in part, to weed out speakers with accents.

Students at the education school Mr. Ramos attended, at Lehman College, have not fared well on the new tests.

Harriet R. Fayne, the dean of Lehman's School of Education, noted that English is not the first language of many Lehman students, who often come from less rigorous high schools with a high poverty rate — the kinds of schools that are difficult to staff, and where Lehman-educated teachers themselves often end up.

Dr. Fayne said that though the school was providing increased coaching and advising, “students are still asking themselves the question — and I think particularly students from underrepresented groups in the teaching profession — is this a path that I can take that’s likely to lead to success?”

“My worst fear,” she added, “is that these people will just disappear on us.”

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