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**Report Faults States' Oversight of Teacher Education and Questions Accreditation as a Gauge of Quality**

By [PAUL BASKEN](#)

Washington

American schoolteachers, and the colleges that educate them, are getting whacked in yet another study.

The latest, issued on Wednesday by the National Council on Teacher Quality, a Washington-based advocacy group, argues that state policy makers are more important than their better-publicized federal counterparts in determining teacher quality. And the states, according to the report, are doing a pretty bad job.

Among its criticisms, the [report](#), "State Teacher Policy Yearbook 2007," says that in most states, teachers, unlike members of many other professions, are not required to receive annual performance reviews. Also, states are failing to hold schools of education accountable on such measures as the quality of their graduates, it says.

The result, says the teacher-quality council's president, Kate Walsh, is that American students lag behind on international comparisons in subjects such as mathematics and reading. And despite the national focus on federal requirements under the No Child Left Behind Act, the states actually "have the greatest impact" on teacher performance, Ms. Walsh said.

The council's study follows similar findings by Arthur E. Levine, former president of Teachers College at Columbia University, who has criticized a system in which public schools give higher salaries to teachers who take additional courses. Schools of education at American universities respond to that market demand by offering high-volume, low-quality programs, Mr. Levine has argued.

In a report released last September ([The Chronicle](#), September 19, 2006), Mr. Levine said he found no significant difference in student math or reading achievement, based on whether the test takers' teachers had studied at an accredited institution.

Ms. Walsh, of the teacher-quality council, said her group also saw no solid evidence that accredited teacher-preparation programs produced better teachers than unaccredited programs. States therefore should not let the accreditation of an institution serve as a substitute for their own program-approval systems, she said.

That suggestion alarms the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, which has been accrediting colleges of teacher education since 1954, and increasingly sees states as its partners.

A representative of the accrediting organization, which is known as NCATE, handed out statements at a briefing held by the advocacy group in conjunction with the report's release. The statements argued that the report's diagnosis stood in contrast with the judgment of at least 35 states, which have agreed to collaborate with NCATE on assessing the quality of schools of education.

"One by one, the states asked us if they could work with us," said NCATE's president, Arthur E. Wise.

The partnership saves cash-strapped states and colleges "time and expense by reducing duplication of effort in paperwork during the conduct of two processes -- state program approval and professional accreditation," NCATE said in the statement.

Ms. Walsh disagreed, saying the two processes should be separate, with accreditors evaluating the overall college program and state authorities concerning themselves solely with the quality of the teachers who graduate from those programs.

"It's an abdication of a state's responsibility to turn this over to a private body," she said, referring to NCATE.

There is also fundamental disagreement over the results to date. In the data table of Mr. Levine's report, reading results for students of teachers who attended NCATE-accredited colleges showed more than double the mean growth of other students. The mean growth in math scores was more than 60 percent higher.

Mr. Levine said those differences were "statistically insignificant" when factors including levels of teacher experience were considered. Mr. Wise rejected that interpretation as statistical manipulation, saying the numbers in Mr. Levine's own report showed "a remarkable difference" in favor of NCATE-accredited schools of education.

Ms. Walsh said data from other groups, including the American Educational Research Association, back Mr. Levine's interpretation. Either way, she said, her organization's report suggests only that states establish their own independent methods for ensuring teacher quality, then concentrate on improving them.

"We don't criticize it," she said of the accreditation system. "We say it's a separate process."

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