

# Student Teaching in the United States

## Executive Summary

Student teaching serves as the real-world classroom trial for nearly 200,000 teacher candidates each year. During a typical semester-long clinical experience, student teachers must synthesize everything they have learned about collecting or developing instructional materials, teaching a lesson, guiding small-group activities, establishing and maintaining classroom order, interacting with faculty and parents and even taking on lunchroom and playground duties. Passing (or failing) student teaching determines whether an individual will be recommended for certification as a licensed teacher.

Few dispute the potential value of student teaching. Even alternate pathways to the profession, often criticized for taking too many shortcuts, generally try to provide their teaching candidates with some kind of student teaching experience, however abbreviated. Surveys of new teachers suggest that student teaching is the most important part of their teacher training experience.

The stakes in student teaching are high. Student teaching will color teachers' perceptions of students' capacity to learn, shape their expectations for their own performance and help determine the type of school in which they will choose to teach. A mediocre student teaching experience, let alone a disastrous one, can never be undone. Conversely, strong student teaching experiences have the power to dramatically improve the overall quality of the profession, allowing student teachers to thrive under the wings of exceptional classroom teachers and flattening the sharp learning curve of the first year teacher.

### NCTQ standards for student teaching

In an effort to understand what makes a student teaching experience strong, the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) has undertaken this comprehensive review. Over a period of two years, we examined the student teaching programs of a stratified random sample of 134 higher education institutions across the United States, with at least one institution in each state. We began by collecting an extensive range of documents that would inform the structure of these programs, amplified by several stages of feedback from officials in the institutions themselves, a survey of local school principals who receive student teachers from the selected programs and five case studies based on campus visits. Together, these research strategies provide a comprehensive policy and on-the-ground picture of the student teaching landscape.

An advisory group comprising exemplary teachers and administrators, teacher trainers, researchers and academics helped us to synthesize characteristics that are common to strong student teaching programs. Having reviewed the existing standards for evaluating the quality of a teacher preparation program and how they fell short, we made it a priority to develop 19 new standards that were more specific and objectively measurable. [See the full complement of standards on page 7.]

## Model Designs

Ten of the institutions\* in our sample of 134 institutions have “model” designs because they require that cooperating teachers are fully qualified and also actively participate in the selection of cooperating teachers.



\* The University of Minnesota at Morris declined NCTQ's invitation to display its logo.

The application of our standards to the 134 institutions provides an in-depth preview of NCTQ's national review, which is currently being conducted in partnership with *U.S. News & World Report* and which devotes substantial attention to the quality of student teaching programs. The goal of that larger review is to provide future teachers, district superintendents and policy makers with information about how well institutions are preparing teachers for success in the classroom, and, accordingly, evaluation of practice teaching will be a critical piece of that review.

## Key Findings

In our review of student teaching we found evidence of some strong programs, including: **Bridgewater College**, **Cardinal Stritch University**, **Colorado Christian University**, **Florida Gulf Coast University**, **Furman University**, **Lake Superior State University**, **Oklahoma State University**, the **University of Hawaii at Manoa**, the **University of Minnesota at Morris** and **Wheelock College**. However most of the institutions we reviewed were generally weak, with fully 25 percent falling into the most deficient category.

Overall, our analysis raises some serious concerns about whether student teaching, examined in the aggregate, is adding nearly the value that it can and should. Looking at student teaching practices across institutions, four findings stand out:

### 1. There are neither enough qualified cooperating teachers nor is there the need for new elementary teachers to justify the high numbers of student teachers that institutions insist on placing each year.

Institutions are placing too many student teachers each year and consequently recommending far too many new candidates for certification, *more than twice as many as will be hired upon graduation*. Many students who go through teacher preparation programs have no intention of ever becoming a teacher, change their minds about teaching at some point or cannot get hired. This attrition rate might not be considered of public consequence except for the deleterious impact overproduction likely has on the quality of the all-important student teaching experience.

### 2. Institutions lack clear, rigorous criteria for the selection of cooperating teachers—either on paper or in practice.

While nearly all of the institutions we reviewed set various criteria for the selection of cooperating teachers, most often these criteria do not adequately address either the need for the teachers to be effective instructors or to be good at mentoring. *Three out of four institutions we reviewed fail to require cooperating teachers to be effective instructors. Nearly two out of three fail to assess the mentoring capacity of a teacher (or at least to require any mentoring training).*



By our conservative estimates, there just aren't enough elementary classroom teachers who possess the necessary qualifications to serve as cooperating teachers, that is: 1) they are themselves not brand new; 2) they are effective instructors; and 3) they have the capacity to mentor other adults. Therefore, instead of insisting that only the very best teachers train the next generation of teachers, institutions are routinely lowering their standards for placements within school districts. The problem is aggravated by institutions making it all too easy first to be admitted into a teacher preparation program and then to progress successfully through coursework, leading scarce qualified teachers, and their principals, to be reluctant to take on unacceptably weak student teachers who might imperil their students' progress.

### 3. Institutions convey a strong sense of powerlessness in their relationships with school districts.

The dependence of institutions on school districts to provide student teaching placements creates an imbalance of power between school districts and institutions. Nowhere is the sense of institutions' powerlessness more apparent than in the fact that *less than half of the institutions in the review assert their proper role in the selection of cooperating teachers*, being unwilling to put demands on local school districts. Only 7 percent of institutions in our sample insist that the bar be set high for determining who is qualified to serve as a cooperating teacher and then play a role sufficient to ensure that the bar is met.

### 4. Institutions do not take advantage of important opportunities to provide guidance and feedback to student teachers.

First-year teachers are notoriously and almost uniformly ineffective. It therefore stands to reason that student teachers are even weaker. The process of helping these teacher candidates become stronger instructors can be hastened with ample and expert advice both from cooperating teachers and from supervisors who periodically visit, observe and conference with the student teacher. But our analysis found little evidence that student teachers get this level of support. In most institutions supervisors are not expected to observe and evaluate student teachers with sufficient frequency, and about a third do not require both conferencing and written feedback after each visit. Most instruments for evaluation lack clear organizing principles and consistency and cannot provide adequate feedback.

## NCTQ recommendations

A combination of strong coursework and clinical practice should deliver competent and confident novice teachers. However, given the weaknesses documented in this study, simply doing more of the same, particularly in the area of clinical practice, is not a solution. For that reason, suggestions ranging from lengthening the student teaching experience to making clinical practice the centerpiece of the entire teacher preparation curriculum

## Q: What criteria are used to select cooperating teachers?

### Responses from four principals:

- *They let me choose who I want.*
- *Teacher candidates come to the building and request placements ... Sometimes it is like they are begging for a placement.*
- *I don't select. Our central office personnel keep track of who has taken the required coursework for this and they assign on the basis of grade level requests by student teachers and availability of supervising teachers.*
- *We really run the show. The university doesn't give us any information beyond what placement they are looking for.*



are in themselves insufficient. Rather than leveraging real improvement in candidates' professional capacities, these ideas could simply mean that more preparation time is spent unproductively.

Instead, institutions need to substantially improve student teaching within its current structure, primarily by ensuring that smaller cohorts of more qualified teacher candidates are mentored by higher-quality cooperating teachers and aligning their programs with measurable standards such as those offered here.

The results of this study show that while many institutions aim for quality, something is often missing in the way in which student teaching programs are carried out. A university may make significant efforts to recruit a group of highly-qualified cooperating teachers, but also accept a number of unscreened volunteers. Placing large numbers of student teachers can be an obstacle to improvement, and we therefore offer the following strategies to reduce this problem.

### **1. Teacher preparation programs need to shrink the pipeline of elementary teachers into the profession.**

We pay a heavy price for producing many more elementary teachers each year than the nation's public schools actually need. There are simply not enough high-quality classroom teachers willing to serve as appropriate mentors to the next generation of teachers. In addition to the need for institutions to raise their admission standards and more actively screen out inadequate candidates before they are permitted to student teach, the student teaching experience itself should be managed by a far more coherent evaluation process, certifying that a candidate is truly ready for the classroom.

### **2. Teacher preparation programs need to focus the student teaching placement process on the selection of exemplary cooperating teachers.**

A teacher who is only average is simply not good enough to serve as a cooperating teacher. Only strong teachers should be allowed to mentor student teachers. We recommend that student teachers are placed with only those teachers in the top quartile of performance, as assessed by their school principals and objective measures of student learning, and all institutions should explicitly communicate that message. Currently, **Florida** is the only state that explicitly requires that student performance be considered when assessing whether a teacher is qualified to be a cooperating teacher.



### 3. Districts need to place limits on the number of student teachers districts can reasonably prepare each year.

School districts need to calculate their “clinical capacity,” that is, the numbers of teacher candidates they can responsibly train each year. To do so, they need to quantify the number of teachers who have at least three years of experience, are high performers (roughly the top 25 percent of teachers as judged by principal evaluations and student learning measures) and either have strong mentoring skills or can be trained in how to be a good adult mentor.

### 4. Districts and teacher preparation programs need to make the role of cooperating teacher a more attractive proposition to classroom teachers.

While some cooperating teachers may abuse the student teaching arrangement to reduce their own work, the responsibilities of hosting a student teacher generally add to a teacher’s workload. Yet if cooperating teachers are compensated at all for this additional work, it is with a tiny stipend, usually no more than \$250 and generally much less. It would be difficult to pay cooperating teachers what they are really worth, but institutions must direct both more resources and recognition to boost the quantity of qualified cooperating teachers.

Along with compensation and prestige, it also matters whether the cooperating teacher is confident that the incoming student teacher will be a positive addition to the classroom and is given any real say in whether a student teacher passes or fails the student teaching experience. *For the process to be worthwhile, effective mentor teachers need to be empowered to have meaningful input.*

## Conclusion

The teaching profession is in a period of change. With new Common Core state standards adopted by 40 states and a nationwide call for teachers’ performance to be evaluated—at least in part—based on the performance of their students, teachers are being held to increasingly rigorous standards. Teacher candidates deserve student teaching programs that prepare them. While we certainly identified some exemplary institutions, this review suggests that all too often, too many elements of student teaching are left to chance.

**Copies of the full report, including the full complement of NCTQ Student Teaching Standards, can be found at [www.nctq.org](http://www.nctq.org). Exemplar materials from institutions included in the study and additional materials developed by NCTQ can be found in the “Key Ingredients for Strong Student Teaching,” on our website.**



## Performance of institutions

| State                | Insitution                                        | Rating       |
|----------------------|---------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| Alabama              | Alabama A&M University                            | Weak         |
|                      | Concordia College Selma                           | Weak         |
| Alaska               | Alaska Pacific University                         | Weak         |
|                      | University of Alaska Anchorage                    | Weak         |
|                      | University of Alaska-Southeast                    | Poor         |
| Arizona              | University of Arizona                             | Good         |
|                      | Arizona State University West Campus              | Weak         |
|                      | University of Phoenix                             | Poor         |
| Arkansas             | Harding University                                | Good         |
|                      | Southern Arkansas University                      | Weak         |
|                      | Arkansas State University                         | Poor         |
| California           | California State University, Long Beach           | Good         |
| Colorado             | <b>Colorado Christian University</b>              | <b>Model</b> |
|                      | University of Northern Colorado                   | Poor         |
|                      | Western State College of Colorado                 | Poor         |
| Connecticut          | Eastern Connecticut State University              | Good         |
|                      | Sacred Heart University                           | Weak         |
|                      | Southern Connecticut State University             | Weak         |
| District of Columbia | University of the District of Columbia            | Weak         |
| Delaware             | Delaware State University                         | Good         |
|                      | University of Delaware                            | Weak         |
| Florida              | <b>Florida Gulf Coast University</b>              | <b>Model</b> |
|                      | Florida Southern College                          | Good         |
|                      | University of Central Florida                     | Good         |
| Georgia              | Brenau University                                 | Good         |
|                      | Georgia Southern University                       | Good         |
|                      | Columbus State University                         | Poor         |
| Hawaii               | <b>University of Hawaii at Manoa</b>              | <b>Model</b> |
| Idaho                | Chaminade University                              | Weak         |
|                      | Brigham Young University-Idaho                    | Weak         |
|                      | Idaho State University                            | Weak         |
| Illinois             | Boise State University                            | Poor         |
|                      | University of Illinois at Springfield             | Good         |
|                      | Northeastern Illinois University                  | Weak         |
| Indiana              | Chicago State University                          | Poor         |
|                      | National-Louis University*                        | Poor         |
|                      | Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis | Weak         |
| Iowa                 | Purdue University Calumet                         | Weak         |
|                      | Valparaiso University                             | Poor         |
|                      | Luther College                                    | Weak         |
| Kansas               | University of Northern Iowa                       | Weak         |
|                      | Iowa State University                             | Poor         |
|                      | Kansas State University                           | Weak         |
| Kentucky             | Washburn University                               | Weak         |
|                      | Tabor College                                     | Poor         |
|                      | Midway College                                    | Good         |
| Louisiana            | Kentucky State University                         | Weak         |
|                      | Murray State University                           | Weak         |
|                      | Louisiana State University                        | Weak         |
| Maine                | Northwestern State University of Louisiana        | Weak         |
|                      | Thomas College                                    | Weak         |
|                      | University of Maine at Machias                    | Weak         |
| Maryland             | University of Maine                               | Poor         |
|                      | University of Maryland, Baltimore County*         | Good         |
|                      | Mount St. Mary's University                       | Weak         |
| Massachusetts        | Salisbury University                              | Weak         |
|                      | <b>Wheelock College</b>                           | <b>Model</b> |
|                      | Bridgewater State University                      | Weak         |
| Michigan             | <b>Lake Superior State University</b>             | <b>Model</b> |
|                      | Western Michigan University                       | Weak         |
|                      | Hope College                                      | Poor         |
| Minnesota            | <b>University of Minnesota at Morris</b>          | <b>Model</b> |
|                      | St. Cloud State University                        | Weak         |
|                      | Crown College*                                    | Weak         |
| Mississippi          | Mississippi College                               | Good         |
|                      | University of Southern Mississippi                | Good         |
|                      | Mississippi Valley State University               | Poor         |

| State          | Insitution                               | Rating       |
|----------------|------------------------------------------|--------------|
| Missouri       | College of the Ozarks                    | Good         |
|                | Missouri Western State University*       | Weak         |
|                | Missouri State University                | Poor         |
| Montana        | Rocky Mountain College                   | Weak         |
|                | Montana State University                 | Poor         |
|                | University of Montana Western            | Poor         |
| Nebraska       | Creighton University                     | Poor         |
|                | University of Nebraska-Lincoln           | Poor         |
|                | Wayne State College                      | Poor         |
| Nevada         | Great Basin College                      | Weak         |
|                | University of Nevada, Las Vegas          | Poor         |
| New Hampshire  | <b>Plymouth State University</b>         | Good         |
| New Jersey     | Keene State College                      | Weak         |
|                | Montclair State University*              | Weak         |
|                | New Jersey City University               | Weak         |
| New Mexico     | Caldwell College                         | Poor         |
|                | New Mexico State University              | Weak         |
| New York       | CUNY Lehman                              | Weak         |
|                | New York University*                     | Weak         |
|                | SUNY Cortland                            | Weak         |
| North Carolina | University of North Carolina-Charlotte   | Good         |
|                | Wake Forest University                   | Good         |
| North Dakota   | Mayville State University                | Good         |
|                | University of Mary                       | Weak         |
|                | University of North Dakota               | Weak         |
| Ohio           | Youngstown State University              | Weak         |
|                | Ohio University                          | Poor         |
| Oklahoma       | <b>Oklahoma State University</b>         | <b>Model</b> |
|                | Northwestern Oklahoma State University   | Poor         |
|                | Oral Roberts University                  | Poor         |
| Oregon         | Linfield College                         | Weak         |
|                | Eastern Oregon University                | Poor         |
| Pennsylvania   | Drexel University*                       | Weak         |
|                | Mansfield University of Pennsylvania     | Poor         |
|                | West Chester University                  | Poor         |
| Rhode Island   | University of Rhode Island               | Good         |
|                | Rhode Island College                     | Weak         |
|                | Roger Williams University                | Weak         |
| South Carolina | <b>Furman University</b>                 | <b>Model</b> |
|                | South Carolina State University          | Good         |
|                | Clemson University                       | Weak         |
| South Dakota   | Black Hills State University*            | Weak         |
|                | Dakota State University                  | Weak         |
|                | Augustana College                        | Poor         |
| Tennessee      | Peabody College of Vanderbilt University | Weak         |
|                | Tennessee Technological University       | Weak         |
| Texas          | University of Texas-Austin               | Good         |
|                | LeTourneau University*                   | Weak         |
|                | Texas State University-San Marcos        | Weak         |
| Utah           | Texas State University-San Marcos        | Weak         |
|                | Dixie State College of Utah              | Weak         |
|                | Utah Valley University*                  | Weak         |
| Vermont        | Western Governors University             | Poor         |
|                | Castleton State College                  | Weak         |
|                | Champlain College                        | Weak         |
| Virginia       | University of Vermont                    | Poor         |
|                | <b>Bridgewater College</b>               | <b>Model</b> |
|                | College of William and Mary              | Weak         |
| Washington     | Longwood University                      | Poor         |
|                | <b>Eastern Washington University</b>     | Good         |
|                | Western Washington University            | Weak         |
| West Virginia  | West Virginia Wesleyan College           | Good         |
|                | Marshall University                      | Weak         |
|                | Fairmont State University                | Poor         |
| Wisconsin      | <b>Cardinal Stritch University</b>       | <b>Model</b> |
|                | University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire       | Weak         |
|                | University of Wisconsin-Green Bay        | Weak         |
| Wyoming        | University of Wyoming                    | Weak         |

\* We were unable to determine ratings for some standards for this institution.

## NCTQ Standards for Student Teaching

|                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Length of placement;<br>nature of commitment                                              | 1. The 10-week student teaching experience should last at least five weeks at a single local school site and represent a full-time commitment.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Role of teacher preparation<br>program in selection of<br>cooperating teacher             | 2. The teacher preparation program must select the cooperating teacher for each student teacher placement.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Qualifications of<br>cooperating teacher                                                  | 3. The cooperating teacher candidate must have at least three years of teaching experience.<br>4. The cooperating teacher candidate must have the capacity to have a positive impact on student learning.<br>5. The cooperating teacher candidate must have the capacity to mentor an adult, with skills in observation, providing feedback, holding professional conversations and working collaboratively.                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Qualifications of<br>teacher candidates for<br>student teaching                           | 6. Student teaching is part of a rational sequence of coursework that ensures that all methods coursework and practica precede student teaching.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Expectations for student<br>teaching experience                                           | 7. Written expectations for competencies on which student teachers will be evaluated are clearly communicated to student teachers, cooperating teachers and supervisors.<br>8. Written expectations for competencies include the student teacher's analysis of student achievement using informal and formal assessments.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Schedule for observations<br>by supervisor                                                | 9. The university supervisor should observe the student teacher's delivery of instruction at least five times at regular intervals throughout a semester-long experience.<br>10. Each observation should be followed by time for conferencing with written feedback aligned with identified competencies.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Culminating<br>projects                                                                   | 11. The student teaching experience should include a graded, culminating project that explicitly documents the student teacher's gains on the performance expectations that were communicated at the onset of the experience.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Alignment of student<br>teaching placement with<br>elementary school calendar             | 12. Particularly for student teaching during the fall academic term, the schedule for student teaching should align with the elementary school calendar, not the calendar of the teacher preparation program.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Activities during student<br>teaching placement                                           | 13. The student teaching experience should include a gradual increase of student teacher responsibilities, with the student teacher first closely shadowing the cooperating teacher in all professional activities and then transitioning to a more independent instructional role with daily monitoring and feedback. This expectation should be laid out explicitly in guidelines provided to the cooperating teacher, the student teacher and the supervisor.<br>14. The student teacher should be involved in a full range of instructional and professional activities. |
| Selection of supervisors                                                                  | 15. The process for selection of the university supervisor should consider the supervisor's instructional knowledge.<br>16. The university supervisor candidate must have the capacity to mentor an adult, with skills in observation, providing feedback, holding professional conversations and working collaboratively.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Evaluation for continuous<br>improvement of cooper-<br>ating teacher selection<br>process | 17. Cooperating teachers' adequacy should be evaluated by student teachers and university supervisors at the end of each semester. Data from these evaluations should be part of an established and regular review process to ensure that multiple perspectives on the student teaching experience are used to refine it and discontinue placements, if necessary.                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Evaluation for continuous<br>improvement of school<br>selection process                   | 18. Schools in which student teachers are placed should be evaluated by student teachers and university supervisors at the end of each semester to determine their functionality—that is, whether the school is high-performing, safe, stable, supportive and collegial. Data from this evaluation should be part of an established and regular review process to ensure that multiple perspectives on the student teaching experience are used to refine it and discontinue placements, if necessary.                                                                       |
| Selection of placements                                                                   | 19. Recognizing possible geographical constraints, the teacher preparation program should have criteria favoring placement of student teachers in elementary schools in which 1) they have an opportunity to teach children from low-income families and 2) there is an orderly learning environment.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |

**This report is available online at  
[www.nctq.org/edschoolreports/studentteaching/executiveSummary.jsp](http://www.nctq.org/edschoolreports/studentteaching/executiveSummary.jsp)**



## National Council on Teacher Quality

1420 New York Avenue, Suite 800  
Washington, D.C. 20005  
Tel: 202 393-0020 Fax: 202 393-0095  
Web: [www.nctq.org](http://www.nctq.org)

*The National Council on Teacher Quality advocates for reforms in a broad range of teacher policies at the federal, state and local levels in order to increase the number of effective teachers.*

Subscribe to NCTQ's free monthly electronic newsletter, *Teacher Quality Bulletin*, ([www.nctq.org/p/tqb/subscribe.jsp](http://www.nctq.org/p/tqb/subscribe.jsp)), visit our *Pretty Darn Quick* blog at [www.nctq.org/p/tqb/pdq.jsp](http://www.nctq.org/p/tqb/pdq.jsp) or follow us on Facebook or Twitter to stay abreast of trends in federal, state and local teacher policies and the events that help to shape them.

