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Push for Quality Faces Uphill Climb for the District of Columbia’s Teacher Preparation Programs

National Council on Teacher Quality Releases Second Annual Review of Teacher Preparation Programs

No District of Columbia Program Earns ‘Top Ranked’ Status

Washington, DC—The National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) released its [2014 Teacher Prep Review](#), with a much expanded and more comprehensive evaluation of 1,612 teacher preparation programs across the United States, and for the first time, a numeric ranking of programs. No program in the District of Columbia earned national ‘Top Ranked’ status—a distinction awarded to 107 programs in the nation for overall strong performance—leaving Catholic University of America with the highest ranked elementary and secondary programs in the District.

The more positive news for the District of Columbia is that among the eight programs that were fully evaluated, one elementary and two secondary programs were strong enough to receive a national ranking. Five programs in the District of Columbia did not receive a numeric rank because their performance was in the bottom half of the national sample.

The District of Columbia joins 17 states without a single program making the national ‘Top Ranked’ list. To ensure that all teachers are well prepared, state leaders and local school districts need to demand that programs improve and, if necessary, look across their state lines for the best sources of well-trained teachers. Districts are also advised to dig deeper into the NCTQ findings to identify programs which may not do well overall but do well on particular standards to meet specific district needs, such as teachers with strong preparation in reading instruction.

“Given the increasing knowledge and skills expected of teachers, it is indeed disappointing that we could not identify an exemplary program in the District of Columbia. However, it is by no means unique,” noted Kate Walsh, President of the National Council on Teacher Quality. “The dearth of high-quality programs is a national problem that public school educators, state policymakers and advocates, working alongside higher education, must solve together.”

NCTQ fully evaluated eight undergraduate and graduate programs housed in four District of Columbia institutions—the same number as in 2013. In addition to elementary and secondary programs, NCTQ examined one special education program in the nation’s capitol.

Teacher Prep Review Results for the District of Columbia

Highest ranked elementary program (national rank):

- Catholic University of America – Undergraduate (203)

Highest ranked secondary programs (national rank):

- Catholic University of America – Graduate (368)
- American University – Undergraduate (380)

A [complete list of the District of Columbia rankings](#) is available on the NCTQ website.

NCTQ was unable to evaluate Howard University and Trinity University, both private institutions housing publicly-approved teacher preparation programs. These institutions declined NCTQ's invitation to participate and did not turn over course materials for the *Teacher Prep Review*. Nevertheless, the *Review* does provide some limited findings on these programs, including whether they are adequately selective about who is admitted to the program and the quality of content preparation they provide. A [complete list of non-cooperating institutions](#) is available online.

NCTQ's review of teacher preparation programs focuses on the knowledge, skills, and academic attributes new teachers need to be classroom ready when they graduate. Drawing from a set of 18 standards, NCTQ applies the relevant standards to elementary, secondary or special education programs. Findings for the District of Columbia include:

Selectivity: 14 percent of programs in the District of Columbia fully meet this standard, significantly less than the national average of 28 percent. Only the graduate elementary and undergraduate secondary programs at American University select candidates above the 50th percentile in the population of college-attending high school graduates, a relatively modest bar compared to what other high-performing nations require.

Early reading instruction: 67 percent of evaluated elementary programs in the District of Columbia meet or nearly meet this standard by preparing teacher candidates in effective, scientifically-based reading instruction, compared to 34 percent of programs nationally.

Student teaching: No programs in the District of Columbia were found to ensure a high-quality student teaching experience, in which candidates are assigned only to highly skilled teachers and receive frequent concrete feedback. Five percent of programs nationally require such an experience.

Classroom management: No District of Columbia programs fully meet the standard by providing feedback to teacher candidates on specific classroom management strategies to improve classroom behavior. The national average is 15 percent.

Elementary content preparation: None of the District of Columbia's elementary programs were found to meet this standard. Nationally, 11 percent of all elementary programs either meet or nearly meet this standard.

Secondary content preparation: The results were not much better for subject matter preparation of secondary teacher candidates, with only 14 percent of programs fully meeting the standard, compared to the national average of 35 percent.

In addition to analyzing colleges and universities providing traditional teacher preparation, NCTQ [reviewed a sample of secondary alternative certification providers](#) not managed by a university or college. The results for these 85 providers, including two programs in the District of Columbia, were even weaker than for traditional programs. NCTQ found their admissions standards to be too low, efforts to assess subject matter knowledge inadequate, and too little training or support provided to candidates who are asked to hit the ground running in the classroom. Only one provider out of 85 earned high marks (Teach For America, Massachusetts).

The widespread attention surrounding the *Review* has helped to precipitate considerable activity by policymakers to strengthen teacher preparation. Over the last two years, 32 states and the District of Columbia have made *significant* changes to laws and regulations to improve teacher preparation, and another seven states have taken steps forward. The District of Columbia has adopted a more rigorous licensure content test for elementary teachers.

In April of this year, the federal government also made an important move to improve teacher preparation by announcing its intention to strengthen accountability measures for teacher preparation programs and restrict millions in grants to only high-performing programs.

“While we are encouraged by the action that has been taken by the District of Columbia and many states, we have a lot more work to do to provide future teachers with the world-class training that both they and students deserve,” added Walsh. “We urge policymakers and higher ed leaders to make this issue priority number one so that teachers in this country get the best possible training for the classroom.”

The full [2014 Teacher Prep Review report](#) is available on NCTQ’s website. NCTQ has identified [steps the District of Columbia can take to make meaningful improvements to teacher prep](#) and has provided [guidance to districts](#) on how to identify the best trained teachers.

About NCTQ

The National Council on Teacher Quality is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research and policy organization located in Washington DC. Founded in 2000, NCTQ is committed to restructuring the teaching profession, led by our vision that every child deserves effective teachers. NCTQ is committed to lending transparency and increasing public awareness of the four institutions having the greatest impact on teacher quality: states, teacher preparation programs, school districts, and teachers unions.

Funding for the second edition of the *Review* is provided by 54 foundations, located in 22 states.

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