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FOUR ARKANSAS TEACHER PREP PROGRAMS RANK IN TOP TIER, REPORTS NATIONAL COUNCIL ON TEACHER QUALITY

ARKANSAS' PROGRAMS EARN GRADES ABOVE NATIONAL AVERAGE IN SELECTIVITY AND CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Washington DC – Today, the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) released new ratings for 875 undergraduate elementary teacher preparation programs. The latest *Teacher Prep Review* found evidence that the nation's top programs--those that graduate teachers well versed in both evidence-based content and methods of teaching--are not all the nation's best known elite universities, but include the University of Arkansas.

Of the seven undergraduate elementary teacher preparation programs evaluated in Arkansas, four rank in the 90th percentile or above: Harding University, Henderson State University, University of Arkansas, and University of Central Arkansas. The University of Arkansas stands out with top grades in all evaluated areas except Student Teaching and Early Reading. Early Reading is the weakest area across programs in Arkansas, while Selection Criteria is strong, with five of the seven programs earning As or Bs in this area. Programs' grades on Classroom Management are above the national average, with two thirds of programs earning an A or B.

Having last released ratings in 2014, NCTQ is able to report strong nationwide progress in some areas:

- **Programs are doing a better job teaching reading instruction.** Since 2006, NCTQ has focused on early reading instruction more than any other issue. Now we found the number of programs teaching research-based reading instruction is up to 39 percent, a sharp rise from 29 percent in 2014.
- **Half of all selective programs also report diverse enrollments,** showing that diversity and selectivity can go hand in hand. These [113 programs](#) are recruiting new cohorts of teacher candidates who are more racially diverse than the institution at large or the state's teacher workforce.

NCTQ President Kate Walsh stated that, "When programs improve, the big winners are of course future teachers and the children they will one day teach, but also the programs themselves. They are showing a willingness to change to better meet the needs of public schools. Programs who adopt an evidence-based model of teacher preparation are leading the way for others to follow."

Despite these gains, undergraduate elementary teacher prep programs still have far to go, particularly in preparing elementary teachers in mathematics. The weak preparation of teachers may help to explain the low performance of the US in the latest round of PISA testing announced this Tuesday, with 36 nations ranking higher in math. Only 13 percent of the teacher prep programs have coursework covering the essential math topics every elementary teacher is expected to teach.

The new findings do little to quell the notion that teaching is an “easy major,” open to anyone who applies in many institutions. Only one quarter of the programs (26 percent) are sufficiently selective, generally admitting only the top half of college goers. However, a number of programs are taking it upon themselves to adopt tougher standards. At institutions lacking strong admissions requirements, the number of undergraduate elementary teacher prep programs which independently require at least a 3.0 GPA for admission has increased from 44 in 2014 to 71 today.

“So much of what teachers do in their first years relies on what they learned in their preparation programs,” said Arne Duncan, former Secretary of Education. “I am quite happy to see signs of movement being made by programs and hope they use the results of this *Review* to guide their further improvement.”

Other areas where programs can improve include:

- **Elementary Content** - Only a tiny percent of programs (5 percent) require aspiring teachers to be exposed to the full breadth of content needed to teach the elementary curriculum, including literature, history, geography, and science. For the most part, programs either fail to require any courses in the content or allow candidates to select courses from a long list of electives, many bearing no connection to the content taught in elementary grades.
- **Student Teaching** - Student teaching serves as a capstone experience, offering teacher candidates a chance to learn and practice under the guidance of a veteran teacher. However, only 5 percent of programs incorporate the elements of a quality student teaching experience. The vast majority of programs (around 93 percent) accept cooperating teachers suggested by a school district, without knowing much about that teacher’s effectiveness or mentoring ability.
- **Classroom Management** - New teachers, in particular, find classroom management consistently challenging. But still less than half of all programs (42 percent) give candidates sufficient feedback on their classroom performance.

Another former Secretary of Education, Margaret Spellings, now President of the University of North Carolina system, also commented, “These findings serve as reminder to me and my colleagues in higher education that we have a tremendous obligation to our public schools and future teachers. We must and can do better.”

This *Review* only analyzed undergraduate programs preparing elementary school teachers. Over the next two years, NCTQ will release updated ratings for undergraduate secondary, graduate and nontraditional elementary, graduate and nontraditional secondary, and undergraduate and graduate special education programs.

To read the *Landscape* report, click [here](#). To schedule an interview with Ms. Walsh, please contact Stephen Buckley at (202) 393-0020 ext. 129.

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About the National Council on Teacher Quality:

The National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) is a nonpartisan research and policy group, committed to modernizing the teaching profession and based on the belief that all children deserve effective teachers. NCTQ is the nation's expert on the quality of teacher preparation programs and evaluates national teacher education against evidence-based criteria. More information about NCTQ can be found on our website, www.nctq.org

"As an educator, I know that one of the strongest in-school influences on students is the teacher in front of the classroom. As a nation, there is so much more we can do to help prepare our teachers and create a diverse educator workforce. Prospective teachers need good information to select the right program; school districts need access to the best trained professionals for every opening in every school; and preparation programs need feedback about their graduates' experiences in schools to refine their programs. These regulations will help strengthen teacher preparation so that prospective teachers get off to the best start they can, and preparation programs can meet the needs of students and schools for great educators."

--U.S. Secretary of Education, John B. King Jr.