

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**March 16th, 2016**

**Contact:**

Stephen Buckley  
National Council on Teacher Quality  
sbuckley@nctq.org  
(202) 393-0020 ext. 129

# Local View: New Teaching Standards Not Enough

Published in [Lincoln Journal Star](#) on 03/17/17.

By Nithya Joseph

The fact that many of Nebraska's schools lack enough teachers, particularly in fields like science, mathematics, and special education, is likely not news to most.

Year after year, nearly all states across the country face similar shortages such that they now seem the norm. But there are steps states can take to at least reduce these shortages.

Nebraska, through Legislative Bill 650, is currently considering one way it can address its shortage challenge, by improving nontraditional routes into the classroom so that they are a more viable tool for districts to recruit talented individuals into teaching.

While the bill is a step in the right direction -- and it would move Nebraska more in line with what most states require of their nontraditional teacher candidates -- there are still many ways Nebraska can improve what it requires of all its aspiring teachers, both those in traditional and nontraditional preparation programs.

Done right, nontraditional pathways -- like alternate routes and making it practical for someone to consider a part-time teaching arrangement -- can bring valuable new talent into classrooms. On the one hand, students can benefit from being taught by actual scientists, mathematicians and others with professional accomplishments and substantial subject-matter expertise.

On the other hand, when teaching is opened up to anyone, without sufficient guardrails in place to ensure that individual has sufficient knowledge and training, students suffer. Across the country, more than half of states require alternative certification candidates to pass a subject-matter test; unfortunately, Nebraska is not one of them. Its mandated basic skills test and coursework requirements are an inadequate substitute.

Nor does Nebraska maintain even minimal content requirements for part-time teachers. Nebraska now has the opportunity to improve this landscape. LB650 would increase Nebraska's content test requirements for alternatively-certified and part-time teachers to ensure they have sufficient command of the topics they will teach.

While this measure would be an important step forward, it doesn't go far enough. Although it is absolutely critical that these non-traditional candidates demonstrate a strong mastery of their content area, schools cannot assume that those with subject-matter expertise automatically know how to teach it.

A scientist who understands physics may not know how best to explain it to a teenager; a mathematician's deep knowledge of algebra may not help motivate students. These new teachers need training, support and meaningful evaluation feedback to help them hone their instructional skills. Preparation for these individuals probably does not need to focus on subject-matter content, but instead on how to teach.

Moreover, alternatively certified teachers are not the only ones who could benefit from a required subject-matter test. Students need the state to ensure that even those in traditional prep programs have mastered their subjects before attempting to teach them.

Currently, Nebraska does not require middle school teacher candidates to pass any subject-matter exam whatsoever, and the content test for elementary candidates allows candidates to fail some subject portions of the test, yet still pass the overall test and, ultimately, obtain a license. Teachers know that teaching requires a complex set of knowledge and skills.

Good teaching requires content mastery, such that teachers are able to answer students' questions, prepare students for the next level and convey their own enthusiasm for the subject. Additionally, good teachers must be competent in teaching methods, such that they can find different ways of explaining content, maintain control of the class and guide students to deep comprehension.

The Nebraska Legislature has the ability to help ensure that alternative and part-time teachers have both the content background and teaching techniques to help their students learn.

Lastly, all preparation programs — both traditional and non-traditional — should set a high bar for admission into their programs. Nebraska's students show up to school each morning expecting to be taught by talented educators with content and pedagogical expertise. Nebraska's Legislature has an opportunity and an obligation to ensure that this expectation is met by enacting legislation that requires sufficient preparation for all of Nebraska's teachers.

###

Nithya Joseph is [Director of State Policy](#) at the National Council on Teacher Quality.

**About the National Council on Teacher Quality:**

*The National Council on Teacher Quality is a nonpartisan research and policy group, committed to modernizing the teaching profession and based on the belief that all children deserve effective teachers. We recognize that it is not teachers who bear responsibility for their profession's many challenges, but the institutions with the greatest authority and influence over teachers. More information about NCTQ can be found on our website, [www.nctq.org](http://www.nctq.org)*