

Rating the teacher education rating systems: New study finds leading programs fall short

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State and federal regulators use a variety of evaluation systems intended to improve teacher quality by "holding teacher education accountable" through assessments and ratings or rankings - of states, institutions, programs and teacher candidates themselves.

A new Boston College study of four leading systems used to evaluate teacher preparation programs has found the systems lack evidence-based policies in their core designs, which questions the validity of methods used to assess tens of thousands of prospective teachers and thousands of college and university programs that prepare them to teach.

"We found that although these accountability policies demand that [teacher education](#) programs make decisions based on evidence, the policies themselves are not evidence-based," said Boston College Cawthorne Professor of Teacher Education for Urban Schools Marilyn Cochran-Smith, the study's lead author, who will present the findings today at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association in Washington, D.C.

"We concluded there is good reason to question their validity as policy instruments that will improve teacher education quality and [teacher quality](#)," said Cochran-Smith, whose study, *Holding Teacher Preparation Accountable: A Review of Claims and Evidence*, was published by the National Education Policy Center.

In all, there are more than 2,200 teacher education program providers in

the U.S., each reporting to state officials, who in turn report to the U.S. Department of Education.

The Boston College team evaluated the U.S. Department of Education's annual state and institutional reporting requirements; the accreditation process of the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP); the National Council for Teacher Quality's (NCTQ) Teacher Prep Review; and the edTPA, a performance assessment for teacher candidates required for licensure in multiple states.

"The four initiatives are governed by different institutions and agencies, including governmental offices, professional associations, and private advocacy organizations," said Cochran-Smith. "All of them set out standards or evaluation criteria and then see how providers of pre-professional preparation measure up. The intention is eventually to close down preparation programs that don't measure up."

But across three of the four initiatives (HEA regulations, CAEP accreditation, and NCTQ's reviews), there is only thin evidence to support the claims proponents make about how the assumed policy mechanisms will actually operate to improve programs, the researchers found.

The fourth initiative, edTPA, has more evidentiary support, but widespread implementation and professional acceptance may be challenging to accomplish, they concluded.

In addition, while all four evaluation programs are trying to reduce educational inequality, they wrongly assume that school factors, particularly teachers, are the major source of that inequality. In fact, persistent out-of-school factors play a much greater role.

The researchers say the systems are grounded in "thin equity."

"'Thin equity' refers to the equity goals of the initiatives and policies like the ones we analyzed," said Cochran-Smith. "They are intended to create equity in students' opportunities to be taught by high-quality teachers who know how to get good results on standardized achievement tests. But they assume that teachers are the primary, or even the sole solution to the equity problem. This viewpoint ignores the fact that teachers account for a relatively limited portion of the overall variance in student achievement, and it does not acknowledge that inequality is rooted in and sustained by much larger, long-standing, and systemic societal inequalities.

Cochran-Smith was joined on the study by Lynch School of Education researchers Rebecca Stern, Juan Gabriel Sánchez, Andrew Miller, Elizabeth Stringer Keefe, M. Beatriz Fernández, Wen-Chia Chang, Molly Cummings Carney, Stephani Burton, and Megina Baker

Cochran-Smith said the team will expand their analysis in a forthcoming book, folding in other accountability initiatives, and proposing new, evidence-based approaches to improving teacher education quality.

Provided by Boston College

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