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The Case That Won't Go Away: Besieged Institutions and the Massachusetts Teacher Tests

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Abstract

Teacher testing was inaugurated in Massachusetts in 1998 and a 59% failure rate among test-takers led to public shaming of the teacher candidates and their colleges and universities in the media. Within a two-year time period, low-performing teacher education programs in Massachusetts initiated a wide range of test preparatory activities which

led to a dramatic increase in their students' pass rates. The authors separate colleges and universities into three categories and examine their differentiated responses to teacher testing. Their finding that institutions of higher education have responded effectively to teacher testing does not preclude critique of teacher testing as currently practiced in Massachusetts.

Teacher testing has emerged as one of the most widely disseminated educational practices related to the improvement of teacher quality in the United States in the last twenty years. What was once a state concern, however, has now become federal. With the reauthorization of Title II of the Higher Education Act (Public Law 105-244) in 1998, states are now required to report to the United States Department of Education on how well their teacher education program completers fared on teacher tests. This legislation, in effect, federalized teacher testing.

Under this legislation, colleges and universities with failing teacher education programs stand to lose federal funding for professional development programs, research and student financial aid. Institutions of higher education (IHEs) with low passing rates risk the humiliation of being publicly designated as "low-performing" by their states (United States Department of Education, 2000). Teacher education programs whose students fail to meet minimum pass rates face sanctions and, ultimately, closure by state departments of education (Massachusetts Department of Education, 1998).

A variety of concerns have been raised about teacher testing as a new federal policy in the United States (National Research Council, 2001). Some critics have worried that the tests filter competent teachers, especially minorities, out of the profession (Melnick and Pullin, 2000); others question whether the tests measure the most critical attributes of teachers (Flippo and Riccards, 2001); and others have raised technical questions about the tests (Haney, Fowler and Wheelock, 1999; Ludlow, 2001). Many of these concerns are legitimate and require further clarification and debate among teachers, policymakers, and the public at large.

Regardless of the concerns that have been raised, however, colleges and universities with teacher education programs are currently held "accountable" for the results of their candidates on the tests. Institutions across the country have considered a variety of options for responding to this new testing regimen, of which three are most salient. They can (i) change their teacher education curricula to align them with the test; (ii) restrict their applicant pool to exclude applicants who they believe might not be able to pass the test; or (iii) develop test preparation workshops to address areas of students' academic weakness.

Thus far, we have little data on transformations in teacher education curricula or restrictions on applicants. In their research at five colleges and universities in Massachusetts conducted during the first year after the test was implemented, our colleagues Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Curt Dudley-Marling found little evidence of changes in teacher education coursework relevant to the test (2001). Furthermore, even though there has been some speculation that there have been restrictions in the applicant pool, we do not have any quantitative evidence to test this hypothesis at this point in time.

We take it for granted that teacher testing is now an established part of the American educational landscape, and we are skeptical that any social movements or political coalitions will arise which will have sufficient power to terminate teacher testing. The testing movement has been firmly embraced by the current administration in Washington, DC, and while there are some opponents, they do not seem to enjoy broad public support. Given that these tests are here to stay, we seek to pose and answer an educational question: *what is it that teacher education programs are doing to ensure that their students' pass rates meet state standards?*

Three Core Questions

To answer this question, we gathered data from our home state, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. We asked faculty and staff at all 59 different teacher preparatory institutions to answer three essential questions. These institutions ranged from small private colleges graduating no more than a dozen teacher candidates each year to large state colleges and universities with hundreds of future teachers completing their course work annually.

First, we asked *what efforts are currently underway at your institution to prepare students to take the Massachusetts Test for Educator Licensure (MTEL)?* For example, has your institution (a) recommended that students not take all three tests on the same day, (b) advised students to take tests earlier in their undergraduate programs to allow repeat opportunities to take the test, (c) offered "test taking skills" sessions and, if so, what is the purpose, format, and content of those sessions, (d) coordinated with arts and sciences departments to ensure coverage of subject matter tests, or (e) changed curricula to add or drop subject coverage?

Second, we asked *what mechanisms does your institution have for keeping track of and analyzing student results?* Does your institution create data files containing student test results? If so, who maintains the files and conducts analyses upon them? What kinds of analyses are performed with the data? For example, are the test results statistically analyzed by degree level or program? Or, are test scores related to SATs and GPAs? What kinds of analyses of students who are potentially at-risk have been conducted—and have those analyses informed intervention strategies? What curricular decisions have resulted from analyses of the test scores?

Third, we asked *what improvements in MTEL pass rates can be directly linked to curricular changes and test preparation changes?* Specifically, is there any evidence to suggest that these changes or test preparation sessions improve the chances of passing the tests on the first time (or on subsequent test-taking)? What test areas have shown improvements in pass rates? How have pass rates, in general, changed over time?

Key Data Sources

These questions were sent to each Title II Coordinator at the 59 teacher preparation institutions in the Commonwealth. A follow-up request for participation was sent two weeks after the initial mailing and another was sent two weeks after that. Some of their email responses prompted follow-up questions from us. In addition, some Title II Coordinators participated in phone or face-to-face interviews. Thirty-nine institutions

ultimately provided descriptions of how they prepare students for the tests (Note 1). For the 1999-2000 Title II reporting period, these 39 institutions served 94% of the program completers tested in the state.

Before answering our first query about efforts currently underway to prepare teacher candidates for the MTEL, a reminder is warranted about the historical origins of teacher testing in Massachusetts. The first administration of the teacher test in 1998 resulted in a 59% failure rate and generated national news when the speaker of the House of Representatives condemned the failed candidates as "idiots" (Pressley, 1998). Colleges and universities with high failure rates suffered public condemnation. Chastened deans, provosts, and presidents found themselves in the unfamiliar role of apologists for their teacher preparatory programs. Critics within schools of education condemned the teacher tests as a set-up insofar as the candidates knew little about the content on the tests and were told consistently (until shortly before the tests) that the results would not count. Professors, staff, and students in schools of education took careful note of how their own institutions sized up in relationship to their competitors.

In this climate of intensive external scrutiny and criticism and self-reflection and analysis, IHEs were compelled to implement any strategy that appeared to not just improve their curriculums but also to show the public they were responding to this perceived failure in their programs to prepare teacher candidates. No guidance, however, was provided by the Massachusetts Department of Education about what curricular components should be changed, added, or eliminated. Nor were any test results available from the test contractor (National Evaluations Systems: NES) that provided useful diagnostic information to students and programs about specific test content deficiencies (Note 2). As a result, programs were left to their own devices to create survival strategies.

These strategies were largely uncoordinated and were implemented at the discretion of education deans, department chairs, and program coordinators. A number of institutions hired psychometricians to help them build data files to make sense of the test results. Another strategy consisted of the immediate implementation of test preparation sessions taught by testing faculty and academic development centers. Over time, word of these efforts spread and colleges and universities began sharing their strategies with one another. With the pressure of Title II reporting of teacher candidate test results, the need for a more systematic survey and appraisal of outcomes became apparent to all parties.

As a result of the expressed interest from colleges and universities to the Massachusetts Department of Education, the Department conducted a survey in the fall of 2001. The survey solicited data from IHEs relevant to new test preparation programs and addressed issues of intended audiences and expense. The survey did not inquire into the substance of the test preparation programs nor did it seek to gauge their successes.

First Question: Levels of Institutional Investment

Based on the extensive and enthusiastic responses we received we have organized our survey results around the theme of *institutional investment*. This theme draws on the work of Cochran-Smith and Dudley-Marling, who noted that "the speed and degree with which institutions shifted resources to test preparation was linked to the degree of urgency and crisis that participants perceived at their institutions" (2001). Our objective

was to document the extent and types of resource shifts and their real and apparent efficacy. We identified three levels of institutional investment; those heavily, moderately, or minimally invested in shifting institutional resources to immediately address the need to raise teacher test pass rates.

We describe institutions of higher education with high numbers of candidates who failed on the first administration of the test as "*besieged*." In general, fewer than forty percent of teacher candidates at these colleges and universities passed the first three administrations of the teacher tests in 1998. These besieged institutions have as an aggregate responded with an extensive, *heavy investment* to reduce their high initial failure rates. Of our responding institutions, 20 or 51% fall into this category.

Besieged institutions have developed a host of strategies to help their teacher candidates pass the MTEL. Administrators—usually deans—at these colleges and universities have hired consultants to teach staff how to conduct their preparatory workshops or they have hired consultants to conduct the workshops directly for future test-takers. Staff have created in-house test preparation workshops which extend across weeks and even months. Faculty and staff have designed and taught new one-credit courses to help students prepare for the test over the course of an entire semester. Administrators hired statisticians to create sophisticated longitudinal data bases for the purpose of tracking individual student performances. In addition, these statisticians built models to identify program strengths and weaknesses.

At many besieged institutions, we observed a university-wide response to the crisis of low test scores. Especially noteworthy in this regard is the manner in which collaboration between teacher education and academic content faculty was catalyzed by a mutual desire to raise the scores. At one IHE, the committee leading the drive to prepare students for the test included the Vice President for Academic Affairs (who chaired the committee), the Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences, the Dean of the School of Education, the Associate Vice President for Student Services, the Director of Academic Advisement, and the Title II Coordinator (who was a professor of education).

At another heavily invested institution an all-out effort was mounted to raise teacher test scores. Teacher candidates were offered a variety of test preparatory workshops, ranging from two to twenty-four hours in duration. These workshops included not only the communication and literacy segments of the test, but also content area sections, such as history, mathematics, or chemistry. Faculty received professional development assistance in redesigning their course curricula to include test-taking skills; individual tutors were hired to help struggling teacher candidates; and the results of students' writing outcomes on the MTEL were correlated with changes in expository writing classes as part of extensive program assessment. Some of the test preparation classes were offered for academic credit. Academic advising emphasized the importance of the tests and informed students of multiple opportunities to prepare for them.

Faculty familiar with the design of the MTEL have served as guest lecturers in classes taken by prospective teachers; IHEs have hired additional faculty to teach writing skills and to serve as part-time academic advisors; and the linkage between state curriculum frameworks and the teacher test has been taught explicitly in methods classes. Some institutions have developed entire new courses to help their students pass the test, and some have increased distributional requirements with the goal of helping the students to improve their English language capabilities.

Many institutions have concentrated on the early identification of at-risk students, often during the freshman year. For example, one institution requires its freshmen in their first undergraduate course to take the PRAXIS test so that faculty in the teacher education program can immediately identify a students' strengths and weaknesses in regards to communication and literacy. In this instance, PRAXIS serves as a kind of pre-test for the teacher candidates.

One of the more surprising innovations developed by these institutions concerns the use of middle and high school textbooks as test preparatory materials. As discussed by Ludlow (2002) at a recent regional workshop for teacher educators, a teacher candidate might be better served by studying a high school history or biology textbook in depth than to take specialized courses in social history or evolution that contain large bodies of information not measured on the test. (Whether the focus on high school texts diminishes teacher candidates' awareness of recent debates in history or discoveries in genetics is an open question.)

Many of these transformations have involved significant allocations of university resources in the form of time, money, and financial aid (for example, for doctoral students hired to serve as tutors for students who will be taking the MTEL). Deans and department chairs at besieged institutions appear to have been resourceful and inventive program advocates who effectively reallocated money to hire consultants, develop test workshops, and measure student outcomes. Some institutions with meager financial resources used grant funding to develop test preparatory activities; for example, one IHE allocated a portion of federal Eisenhower grant funds to help its students prepare for the communication and literacy sections of the test. The costs involved in faculty attending professional development sessions relevant to the MTEL and redesigning courses accordingly are important "hidden" costs entailed in the teacher testing enterprise. Test preparation has also entailed additional expenses for teacher candidates (at one private university, test preparation workshops cost \$150).

At the opposite extreme of testing performance are those colleges and universities with high pass rates that have been maintained across all administrations of the teacher test. These IHEs have generally evidenced a *minimum* level of investment in test preparatory activities. Although they may have made modest efforts to adjust curriculum or share test-relevant information with other IHEs, they have, essentially, no formal test preparation for their students. Orientation sessions, if held at all, tend to be voluntary and focus on only the general test format. Review or study materials may be distributed to students but there are no formal assignments. Likewise, there tend to be no requirements for passing any components of the test prior to entering the program or prior to student teaching. Six or 15% of the institutions that responded to our survey fit into this category.

Institutions with minimal investment give evidence of virtually no discussion between teacher education faculty and their arts and sciences colleagues regarding subject matter competence. There appears to be no serious effort to identify at-risk students or students who flunked sections of the test. Nor do they feel compelled to maintain data files for statistical analysis of performance patterns. This tone of satisfaction with the status quo is captured well by one Title II coordinator at a small liberal arts college, who reported, "we have done nothing in the way of gate-keeping or special preparation of our students for the MTEL." In a similar vein another coordinator stated that "we feel that our

curriculum is the preparation for the MTEL."

IHEs with minimal investments do tend to advise students to split the tests into separate testing sessions and they may provide handouts with test-taking advice and materials to serve as general references for self-study. Responsibility for test information, record keeping, and interaction with the state and the test contractor tends to fall on the shoulders of a single person, typically the department chair. At more than one such institution, however, the secretary for the department of education in the college is designated the MTEL coordinator who is responsible for maintaining databases and testing materials.

What is particularly interesting about these institutions is the fact that some of them will be adversely affected when the next round of Title II results are released (for the 2000-2001 period). Specifically, some of them will lose their ranking in the top Title II reporting quartile. This shift in ranking will happen because many institutions have recently implemented policies that require prospective teachers to either pass the tests prior to admission to the teacher preparation program or as part of their student teaching component. Thus, there will be an increase in the number of programs that claim a one hundred percent pass rate on the test in the next round of Title II reports. Some institutions are concerned about this particular public relations aspect of the test. One Title II coordinator said that "We plan no special preparation programs, but perhaps we should be thinking of requiring the basic skills test as a teacher education prerequisite in order to join those institutions that now are reporting a one hundred percent pass rate."

Institutions with a *moderate* level of investment (typically, those below the state cut-score of 80% passing but not so low as to have been shocking) generally provide required orientation sessions or workshops where the format of the test and test-taking strategies are described by teacher educators or affiliated staff. Student performance data are gathered for systematic statistical analysis and test performance over time is tracked. At-risk students and those who failed a test are identified and tutoring sessions are provided. The administrative support network tends to be elaborate, involving program faculty, the practicum office, and usually a dean. Thirteen or 33% of the institutions or our responding institutions are in this category.

At some colleges and universities with moderate levels of investment, Saturday sessions are held for the two weeks immediately prior to the tests. Take-home exercises relevant to these sessions may be required and student advisors are encouraged to meet with each student individually before the test is administered. Teacher education faculty and affiliated staff explain test registration booklets to students; further, teacher educators design and share information in workshops to familiarize students with different types of test questions and to encourage time management strategies. Some Massachusetts teacher educators encourage teacher candidates to visit web site locations, such as that of the Texas Education Agency (<http://www.excet.nesinc.com/exceteststudyguid/>); this site provides sample test items on the ExCET test for Texas teacher candidates, which is in many ways analogous to the MTEL and is also designed by the NES.

Some sections of the tests are required for admission to the teacher preparation program and some programs require the students to pass all sections of the test before student teaching. One example of an institution with a moderate level of investment is a private university which distributes test preparatory information from the Massachusetts Department of Education and refers students to test preparatory workshops at a nearby

state college. The university advises its students not to take all three sections of the MTEL on the same day and plans to require the teacher candidates to pass the communications and literacy sections of the test before they enter student teaching. An administrative assistant tracks student test scores and analyzes the results to ascertain any possible consequences for the teacher education program.

Cross-Institutional Collaborations

Across all three levels of institutional investment, faculty and staff shared some degree of confidence about their ability to prepare test-takers for the communication and literacy sections of the test. There was much less certainty about the academic content area portions. As one program coordinator confessed, "When it comes to subject matter tests, our students are on their own." Expressing similar sentiments, another respondent said, "It is interesting to me that with such emphasis being placed on the test results, no person from the Department of Education has offered to give us workshops with useful information on exactly how we can prepare the students. Most of the information and strategies have been developed through networking with other education program faculty."

Driven by this need to share information, colleges and universities with teacher preparatory programs in Massachusetts have sought forums to discuss the MTEL and to develop appropriate institutional responses. For example, Framingham State College convened a Conference on MTEL Test Preparation on 7 January 2002 to assist teacher educators in sharing and analyzing information relevant to the test. Likewise, a regional workshop funded by the Alliance for Education supported the Colleges of Worcester Consortium in their efforts to better understand test preparation practices (Ludlow, 2002). The Association of Independent Colleges and Universities in Massachusetts, led by Clare Cotton, has been instrumental in recognizing the need for IHEs to confer about the MTEL and to improve communication with National Evaluation Systems and the Massachusetts Department of Education. Finally, the Massachusetts Coalition for Teacher Quality and Student Achievement has made the preparation of teachers for urban schools a priority and focused on teacher tests at several of its conferences and institutes.

These are all voluntary efforts that institutions freely engage in at their own discretion. Perhaps not surprisingly, besieged institutions have been most visible in these broad-based networks. They report that sharing information across institutional lines has helped them to develop programs and to garner resources from their deans and presidents. Institutions with minimal investment generally do not participate in these forums, and those with moderate investment participate only intermittently.

Complicating these facets of preparing for the tests, is the fact that many teacher educators previously had little, and in some cases no, contact with their arts and sciences colleagues who teach academic content knowledge. Hence, one consequence of the teacher test has been to promote collaboration between teacher education and arts and sciences faculty. One problem is that in some areas, such as history, Massachusetts has been unable to establish state curriculum frameworks, so even those cannot be referred to as a point of reference.

One wide-spread approach to the subject matter tests has been for individual academic

departments to assume the responsibility for providing informal sessions on subject preparation for the tests. For example, at one institution faculty in both the English and History Departments offer optional workshops for students. These provide a review of sample subject matter questions that are provided by state and test contractor documents. Ironically, faculty who wanted to do a good job preparing their students for the tests were frustrated by the wide range of questions that could be posed to students. "You would basically have to know the history of the world to ace this exam," one professor at a well-regarded private college stated.

Second Question: Insights from Institutional Data Analyses

Our second research question addressed analyses of data relevant to the teacher tests. We were particularly interested in the extent to which IHEs tried to systematically organize and analyze their test results for the purpose of better understanding the strengths and weaknesses of their students and their own teacher preparation programs. Given the initial relatively high failure rates, what student and program variables might be useful for understanding students' poor performances? If such variables could be identified, then how might IHEs assist future test-takers to prepare for the tests?

The following examples illustrate the kinds of statistical analyses that have been performed as more colleges and universities realize the potential benefits to be derived from the test score data.

- Correlational analyses have revealed positive relationships between the Communication and Literacy Skills Tests (CLST) and the subject matter tests and between the CLST and subject tests with SATs and GPAs.
- Analyses of test-retest effects on the CSLT and subject matter tests have indicated that students who fail the first time are likely to pass on the second administration.
- Longitudinal charts have revealed strengths and weaknesses in sub-areas over time.
- Ordinary least squares multiple regression models have been successfully constructed for the purpose of using GPAs and SATs as predictors of at-risk test-takers.
- Logistic regression models have been successfully employed with demographic and programmatic variables to predict success or failure on the tests.
- Independent means t-test analyses have not found significant differences in test scores based on gender but have found differences based on academic level (undergraduate versus graduate student).

These analyses were not usually performed for the purpose of hypothesis testing. They were usually conducted as exploratory analyses attempting to reveal any patterns or relationships among test results, student characteristics, and program structures that would shed light on why students either passed or failed and, more importantly, how student preparation for the tests could be strengthened.

There have been results, however, that were significant that have been shared between teacher preparatory programs in different colleges and universities. Some of the most significant findings are of potentially tremendous value to teacher candidates and teacher educators. For example, many students who took all three tests on the same day performed worse than those who took the third component of the tests (the subject

matter test) on a separate day. Accordingly, most institutions now advise students not to take all three sections at once. Another example is that graduate students have outperformed undergraduate students, so some institutions have focused their test preparatory activities on undergraduates. Students with low SAT scores have performed worse than those with high scores, and students with low GPAs have performed worse than those with high GPAs. Some colleges and universities have used this data to identify at-risk students and to develop appropriate interventions for them (Note 3).

One besieged institution has defined students at-risk of failing if they have an SAT verbal score below 420, did poorly in basic college writing or introduction to education courses, have English as a second language, or have a learning disability. These students are required by the university to take test preparatory workshops that range from fifteen to twenty-four hours in duration. The workshops last for several weeks, with multiple opportunities for workshop leaders to assess student progress over time.

One major problem that every IHE in Massachusetts has faced in performing these analyses is that the test scores are not available in electronic format. (Note 4) Thus, any statistical analysis first requires hand processing of the paper records from the testing contractor. This, in turn, forces each IHE which seeks to assist its teacher candidates to develop its own approach to building databases and performing analyses. It has been impossible thus far to perform any cross-institutional aggregation and analysis of data (Note 5). In some cases these data management problems have prevented institutions from analyzing their own data. As one Title II coordinator noted: "It takes too much time now for me to enter all the data and as soon as we train a graduate student to do data entry the student graduates. Unfortunately, we have not had a statistician or faculty member that has taken an interest."

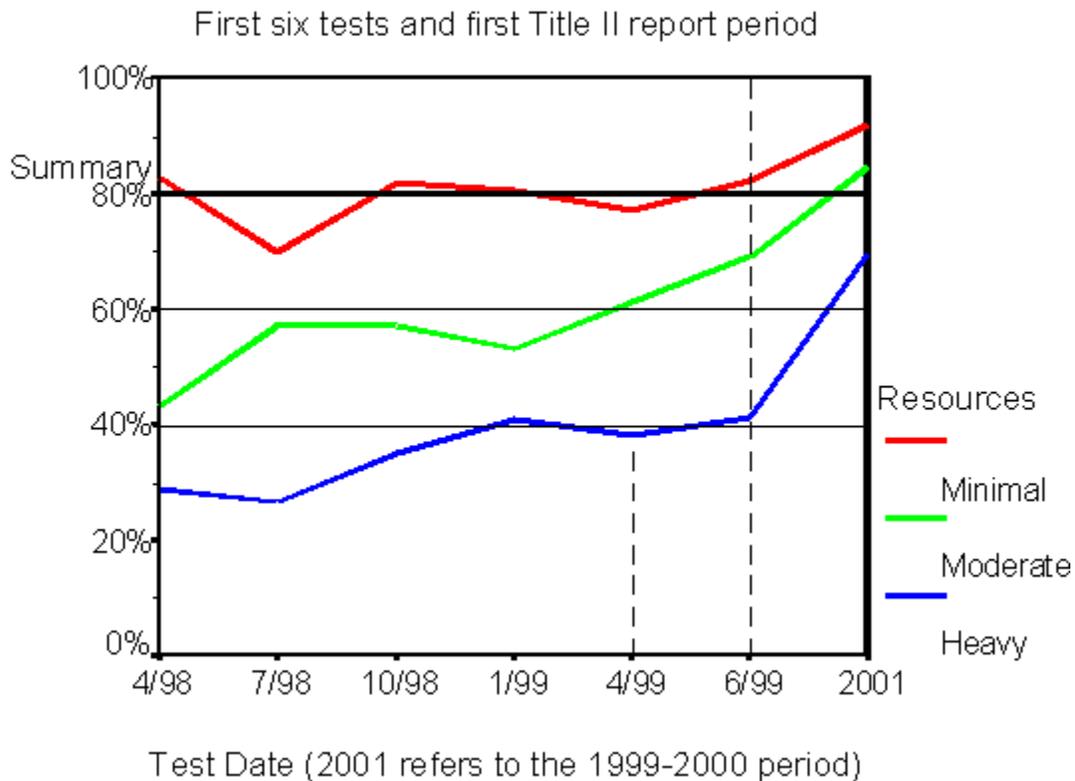
Third Question: Results of Test Preparatory Activities

Our third research question concerned the efficacy of test preparation efforts in relation to improved test scores. We know little to date about the impact of the new teacher test preparation approaches, in spite of the national wave of innovations in this area in recent years. The impact of a teacher test preparation program in Arizona was examined by Fierros (2002) but his effort was specific to a single institution and explored candidates' sentiments about the program rather than their actual test score results. Consistent with Fierros' positive findings, we also received many favorable comments about the test preparatory programs in Massachusetts. For example, one Title II program coordinator said that "students feel more confident and tend to do better on the first try if they attend the one-credit test prep course ... students benefited greatly from the one-on-one tutoring ... the students really feel it helps." Another coordinator commented, "Everyone benefits from some MTEL test preparation. It is very helpful for even the most skilled test takers to attend a two to three hour orientation/test readiness course."

Although anecdotal evidence is useful, it is also possible to establish a statistical relationship between increased test preparation and test performance on the teacher tests. Starting in April 1998, the Massachusetts Department of Education began releasing institutional test results after each administration of the teacher test. This practice continued through June 1999, at which point the Department ceased making public reports on the data (with the exception of the Title II test results in April 2001).

Recall that we disaggregated our teacher preparatory institutions into three categories: those with a *minimal* investment in improving scores, those with a *moderate* investment; and those which are *heavily* invested. The latter group we labeled *besieged* institutions because failure to increase pass rates above 80% by 2004 could result in the Department of Education closing their teacher education programs.

MTEL Pass Rates:



The chart represents the summary pass rate for each of our resource investment categories across each of the MTEL testing dates. "Summary pass rate" is defined as "the proportion of program completers who passed all tests they took for their areas of specialization among those who took one or more tests in their specialization areas" (United States Department of Education, 2000). The bold horizontal line at 80% pass rate represents the Massachusetts Department of Education criterion for institutional approval for the continuation of a teacher preparatory program (Massachusetts Department of Education, 1998). The last test date (2001) refers to the September 1, 1999-August 31, 2000 Title II reporting period. Those results were submitted to the Department in April 2001.

The minimally invested institutions started off with high pass rates and have maintained a relatively constant high level of success on the tests. In essence, they were not threatened by the test and did not need to exert any additional efforts to meet the state standards, although several of them have recently made some efforts in this direction.

In contrast to their situation, institutions which are moderately or heavily invested in improving their pass rates have shown a steady improvement over time. The moderate category institutions show a sharp rise ending the 1999 academic year and, as a group,

exceeded the 80% threshold for the Title II reporting period. Besieged institutions started off about fifteen percentage points below the moderate group and have stayed roughly at a fifteen to twenty point difference across time. For the first Title II reporting period the besieged institutions were below the 80% threshold. Not only have they have dramatically narrowed the performance gap (Note 6) but, based on their trajectory, we anticipate that they will meet the state standard as a group when the next round of test score results are released. (Note 7)

There is no question that the improvement of test scores is correlated with the rise of test preparatory activities in the besieged colleges and universities. The extent to which the rise in test scores was caused by those activities is, however, unclear because there are confounding variables for which we have no controls. For example, the extent to which teacher education curricula have changed to conform with MTEL content is unknown. Another variable is the extent to which admission selectivity (e.g. high school GPA and SAT scores) has become more rigorous.

We do not believe that these confounding variables should be given much weight. Teacher educators had little information about the teacher test during the first administrations and could only rely on test-takers to learn about the nature of the test. Anita Page, the director of the early childhood and elementary programs at Mount Holyoke College, asked "Well, what is it that I have to improve?," reflecting a widespread sentiment of concern about the lack of clarity in Department of Education guidelines (Tantraphol, 2002). Regarding student selectivity, it seems implausible that any increase in teacher preparatory program admission criteria could affect test results, in the aggregate, in such a narrow span of time.

Conclusion

As we have seen, besieged institutions responded rapidly with innovative strategies to enhance the content knowledge of prospective teachers as well as their writing and reading skills. In addition, some institutions changed their admission criteria, student teaching requirements, and program completer definitions to include passing the MTEL. Subsequently, test takers' scores in the besieged institutions improved dramatically in the years following the initial administration of the teacher test. At present, it is impossible to disentangle to what extent specific factors led to the rise in test scores.

Based on the results described here, the faculty, administrators, staff, and students at many institutions may feel pleased that their strategies improved teacher test results—and, by implication, the skills and competencies required of all teachers. Furthermore, advocates of teacher testing might claim that state and federal teacher testing policies are working effectively to upgrade the teaching profession.

We, however, wish to advance several caveats because we share with critics of teacher testing concerns about how the tests are being used and the manner in which they are transforming teacher education. First, many of the besieged institutions recently changed the time of their testing so that students take sections of the teacher test before even being admitted to a teacher education program. In these cases, the institutions are guaranteeing a high pass rate from their program completers. Second, we do not know if valuable facets of teacher education have been sacrificed in the effort to improve test scores. Cochran-Smith and Dudley-Marling (2001) found that significant institutional

resources were devoted to test preparatory activities and some of these resource allocations detracted from socially critical parts of a university's mission, such as recruiting students of color into teaching. Finally, the test may screen promising teachers out of the profession who could be quite effective in classes yet do not perform well on standardized tests.

Teacher testing—virtually unknown two decades ago—has now become ubiquitous in the United States. As a result of this far-reaching transformation, teacher educators are now able to use test data to review, analyze and strengthen their programs. When combined with other innovations in the field of teacher education—such as portfolio assessment, exhibitions, and teaching demonstrations—teacher testing can play an important role as one strand of holistic assessment. Professional approval programs, such as the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), require schools, colleges, and departments of education to document their self-study efforts, and teacher test results provide additional information on teacher candidates' academic competencies.

Critics, however, have raised serious concerns about unintended consequences of teacher testing. These critics will not, and should not, be silenced simply because there are positive trends in teacher test results. Even as we applaud the progress made by besieged institutions in improving test score results, we must continue to inquire into deleterious results of testing that detract from essential components of teacher preparation.

Notes

1. Anna Maria College, Becker College, Berklee College of Music, Boston College, Boston University, Brandeis University, Bridgewater State College, Cambridge College, Clark University, College of the Holy Cross, Curry College, Eastern Nazarene College, Elms College, Emerson College, Emmanuel College, Endicott College, Fitchburg State College, Framingham State College, Gordon College, Harvard Graduate School of Education, Lesley College, Massachusetts College of Art, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, Merrimack College, Montserrat College of Art, Northeastern University, Salem State College, Simmons College, Smith College, Springfield College, Stonehill College, Suffolk University, Tufts University, University of Massachusetts/Amherst, University of Massachusetts/Boston, University of Massachusetts/Lowell, Wheaton College, Wheelock College, and Worcester State College.
2. Some institutions report that obtaining useful practical and technical information about the MTEL is still problematic. In fact, no technical reports have been released "following the use of each form of the tests" and no technical advisory committee has been formed to "meet up to four times annually to review the test items, test administration, scoring procedures, and score setting for validity and reliability", even though both actions have been called for in the MTEL contracts.
3. The opportunity for IHEs to conduct these valuable statistical analyses upon their own candidate test score results has just recently become more restrictive. In an April 18, 2002 letter to Judith Gill, Chancellor, Board of Higher Education and Clare Cotton, Executive Director, Association of Independent Colleges and Universities in Massachusetts, Commissioner of Education David Driscoll stated that candidates will now be required to give explicit "consent before his or her

institution is sent any information on individual subarea performance." This requirement is imposed even though Driscoll acknowledged that language in the current registration booklet is "essentially identical in nine of the states served by the National Evaluation Systems." This additional release will inevitably result in fewer complete data records for teacher candidates and their institutions.

4. Each contract for the MTEL has stipulated that the test developer (National Evaluation Systems) provide the test scores in electronic format to IHEs (just as the NES presently does for Title II reporting purposes). The contract specifies that "The Contractor will... electronically transferring official scores to the institutions after each administration." After four years of testing, however, the NES still does not provide the data on an electronic medium suitable for processing by standard software like SPSS or EXCEL.
5. Commissioner Driscoll stated that "There are two reasons for my prohibition on cross-institutional pooling of data. First, we wish to protect the individual's identification. Second, we wish to lessen misuse of our licensure tests." (*ibid.*). The first point can be easily addressed on the data records using standard procedures such as codes and pseudonyms to protect individuals' confidentiality. Regarding the second point, we do not know what kinds of "misuse" the Commissioner has in mind. The practical consequence of this prohibition is to further reduce the capability of IHEs to serve their students and the interests of the general public by improving teacher candidates' test scores. The political impact of this prohibition is that independent analysts are prevented from conducting the sorts of rigorous validity and differential impact analyses that could assist teacher candidates.
6. It is important to note that the dramatic increase from June 1999 to the 2001 Title II results in the last column is partially attributable to different definitions of test-takers. Prior to Title II, test-takers included anyone who claimed affiliation with a college or university. There were no controls on the population of test-takers, i.e. anyone who took the test and claimed an institutional affiliation was counted in institutional results. For Title II purposes, however, only "program completers" are test-takers. According to Title II guidelines as provided by the Massachusetts Department of Education, program completers are only those individuals who took the teacher test and met all other institutional program requirements for graduation and certification. This distinction has led to the apparent paradox that presently exists when test administration results are released. That is, "On the February 23, 2002 administration, a total of 58% of 5,225 first time test takers passed all three parts of the test" (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2002) yet the statewide pass for Title II (1999-2000) was 81%.
7. Congress requires IHEs to send their Title II test results to their respective state agencies by April 7 of each year. The Massachusetts results for 1999-2000 were subsequently posted on most institutional web sites, in accordance with the requirement that the results be available to the public. This year, however, most IHEs have not posted their results on their respective web sites as of 22 June 2002—and we checked 58 separate IHE sites. Furthermore, the Department of Education declined to provide those results for this article. Thus, even though in theory the latest Title II results are accessible by the public we could not in point of fact obtain and use them.

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