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UUP has an agenda: Quality

By Frederick E. Kowal, Commentary
 Published 9:26 pm, Wednesday, April 8, 2015

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The National Council on Teacher Quality criticized United University Professions ("Our budding teachers deserve better training in New York," March 30) for our position regarding the State Education Department's deeply flawed teacher certification process.

Hey, NCTQ, what took you so long?

After all, UUP has loudly voiced its concerns about New York's teacher certification exams for the past two years. And for good reason: these tests are riddled with problems pertaining to content, their computer-based format — administered and scored by corporate education testing giant Pearson — the basis for cut scores, and the lack of timely access to test preparation materials.

SED changed certification requirements for 2014 and 2015 student teachers well after they started their teacher preparation programs. And the department was two years late in making

test preparation materials available for the [Educating All Students](#) exam and Academic Literacy Skills Test.

SED's latest imbroglio was its decision to require students to take the newly revised Content Specialty Tests before establishing passing scores for the exams. As of early April, graduates are languishing as SED figures things out.

SED says this is standard procedure. We disagree.

As for the NCTQ, well it has quite the agenda — an agenda that has zero to do with improving teacher prep programs that develop effective teachers through challenging coursework and rigorous certification exams.

The NCTQ's defense of new teacher certification requirements serves to show its true colors — as an education "reform" operative funded by the [Gates Foundation](#), the [Searle Freedom Trust](#) and the [Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation](#), among others.

The NCTQ was spawned in 2000 by the conservative [Thomas B. Fordham Foundation](#). It received a \$5 million grant from the Bush administration in late 2001 to create the [American Board for Certification](#) of Teacher Excellence, now an online teacher prep program; anyone can get certified through the ABCTE for \$1,990.

[Chester E. Finn Jr.](#), president emeritus of the [Thomas B. Fordham Institute](#), sits on the NCTQ's Board of Directors. [Michael Barber](#), chief education advisor for corporate testing giant Pearson, is on its advisory board, as is Teach for America founder [Wendy Kopp](#).

The NCTQ also annually assesses the nation's teacher prep programs — without visiting

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campuses. Instead, it relies on online searches, Freedom of Information and campus data requests. [Georgia State University Professor Emeritus Jack Hassard](#) called the research "junk science."

[Diane Ravitch](#) said it best: The NCTQ "is not a research organization. It is an advocacy organization." It's about the money, and to so-called education reformers like the NCTQ, public higher ed is a cash cow ready for milking.

It's little wonder that NCTQ President [Kate Walsh](#) chose to lash out at UUP now. At a March 5 press conference, UUP called for an investigation of the State Education Department's deeply flawed teacher certification process.

Our message resonated with the Board of Regents, which is considering setting up "safety nets" for student teachers to secure initial certification without passing SED's four certification exams as they currently exist. The Regents will discuss the issue at their April 13-14 meetings.

It's simple, really: certification exams should be well-vetted before students are required to take them. They must be thoroughly tested, and teacher educators need to be part of that process.

What UUP is working to achieve is what the NCTQ purports to want: challenging, high-quality teacher prep programs that turn out passionate, prepared teachers who are ready to enter the profession.

That's our agenda.

Kowal is president of United University Professions, which represents 35,000 academic and professional faculty on 29 New York state-operated campuses

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