



## CAN I REALLY TRUST THAT EVALUATION OF MY TEACHER PREP PROGRAM?



There is no shortage of organizations that evaluate or rank teacher education programs. From the government to national accrediting bodies, to various think tanks and media organizations, to the programs themselves, it can sometimes seem like everyone has something to say about the quality of teacher education. This can make it challenging for current or prospective teachers to know what to believe when trying to decide where they should pursue degrees or professional development. The programs themselves may also struggle to interpret conflicting results, or to avoid the pitfalls of being overly dismissive of negative judgments, or overly proud of more positive ones.

Fortunately, the National Academy of Education (NAEd), an independent nonprofit consisting of many of the nation's foremost education scholars, has studied the topic, with additional plans to delve more deeply into the subject with a three-year Gates Foundation grant. The new study is spearheaded by NEPC Fellow [Kenneth Zeichner](#) of the University of Washington and Linda Darling-Hammond of the Learning Policy Institute. The [NAEd's prior research](#) has found that most of the measures currently employed in teacher education program evaluations have both strengths and limitations, as is the case with most efforts at program evaluation. Based on that work, here is a quick guide to interpreting some of the more commonly used measures.

- **Average GPA of incoming class**
  - **Strengths:** Easy to collect and explain to the public
  - **Limitations:** Some institutions grade more harshly than others, and incoming grades can't tell us whether students encounter high-quality instruction once they enroll.
- **Average entrance exam scores**
  - **Strengths:** A single number that's simple to collect, represent, and explain to a

public familiar with exams. Standardized measures make it feasible to compare one institution with another. Some research links teacher entrance exam performance with outcomes to candidates' eventual K-12 students.

- **Limitations:** Highly correlated with socioeconomic status, and we can't tell us whether students encounter high-quality instruction once they enroll. Moreover, the single number has limited usefulness and validity (which is also a problem with studies linking those scores to value-added analyses of K-12 students' scores).
- **Course syllabi**
  - **Strengths:** Can indicate whether/how important content is covered. Requires fewer resources than course observations.
  - **Limitations:** To facilitate comparisons, needs to be accompanied by a reliable system of coding. Attaching high stakes to syllabus-based evaluations can lead to the unintended consequence of syllabi designed to game the system without representing what's actually taught. Additionally, syllabi can't fully capture what's actually taught.
- **Surveys of candidates**
  - **Strengths:** Students can report on actual experiences.
  - **Limitations:** Based on individual perceptions that may be biased and reflect impressions other than the quality of preparation.
- **Scores/pass rates for licensure tests**
  - **Strengths:** Easy to collect and explain.
  - **Limitations:** Multiple tests exist, making comparisons challenging—especially from one state to the next. Tests also may not cover important content or be appropriately rigorous. Moreover, these tests are designed to assess minimal competence rather than predict future effectiveness. And the tests can be gamed by, for instance, requiring students to pass a test to graduate, thus ensuring a pass rate of 100 percent.
- **Hiring and retention data**
  - **Strengths:** Important to students deciding which program to select.
  - **Limitations:** Influenced by geography and other factors beyond a program's control. It also can be difficult to track down graduates to collect accurate data.
- **Value-added models**
  - **Strengths:** Attempt to assess teacher impact on student testing outcomes while accounting for out-of-school factors.
  - **Limitations:** Numerous issues with methodological validity and reliability, with the test scores attributed to students, their teachers, and then their teachers' preparatory programs. Typically, the scores are only available for a limited set of grade levels and subjects for which states administer standardized tests. These attributional systems are also challenging for the public to accurately understand. And not all states have systems that generate VAM scores.

Like the prior report, the new NAEd study will focus on evaluating teacher education programs. However, it will be broader in scope, using a commissioned paper series to examine the following eight areas:

1. The relationship between teacher preparation programs and instructional quality
2. Students attending teacher education programs
3. Different types of teacher education programs and evaluation systems
4. Best practices for evaluating teacher preparation
5. Evaluating clinical components of teacher education (e.g., student teaching)
6. Teacher performance testing
7. Survey use in teacher education program evaluations
8. International insights on evaluating teacher education

The first papers will be released in the coming weeks on the National Academy of Education website. The project will culminate with a peer-reviewed consensus study that identifies best practices and makes recommendations.

Interested in learning more? Keep an eye on the study website at <https://naeducation.org/evaluating-and-improving-teacher-preparation-programs/>

### NEPC Resources on Teacher Education, Quality and Professional Development

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