PERFORMANCE AUDIT

ARIZONA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

TEACHER-RELATED PROGRAMS

Report to the Arizona Legislature
By the Auditor General
June 1996
Report #96-7

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June 27, 1996

Members of the Arizona Legislature

The Honorable Fife Symington, Governor

The Honorable Lisa Graham Keegan
State Superintendent of Public Instruction

Transmitted herewith is a report of the Auditor General, A Performance Audit of the Arizona Department of Education's (ADE) teacher-related programs. This report is in response to a May 30, 1995, resolution of the Joint Legislative Audit Committee. The performance audit was conducted pursuant to the provisions of A.R.S. §41-2958. This is the second in a series of four audit reports regarding public education.

Although teacher certification is one of the most important functions ADE performs, certification decisions are based on a number of requirements, some of which are irrelevant, outdated, or need to be strengthened. The current certification process focuses heavily on college courses an applicant for certification has completed. However, completing these courses does not ensure that an applicant can teach effectively. Nationally, at least 35 other states have moved to performance-based teacher certification processes. Under these performance-based systems, applicants are tested for basic skills, subject-matter knowledge, and teaching skills. In addition, many of these states have adopted teaching standards defining the knowledge and skills a teacher should have. We also found ADE and the districts can take several actions to help address shortages of certified teachers in rural areas, and shortages of teachers in specialty areas. Finally, we noted ADE has begun to address delays in issuing some certificates and recommend ADE continue its efforts in this area.

My staff and I will be pleased to discuss or clarify items in the report.

This report will be released to the public on June 28, 1996.

Sincerely,

Douglas R. Norton
Auditor General

Enclosure

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SUMMARY

The Office of the Auditor General has conducted a performance audit of the Arizona Department of Education's (ADE) teacher-related programs. This audit was conducted pursuant to the provisions of A.R.S. §41-2958 and in response to a May 30, 1995, resolution of the Joint Legislative Audit Committee. This is the second in a series of four audit reports regarding public education.

The Department of Education, under the purview of the State Board of Education, is responsible for certifying teachers, investigating complaints against teachers, and imposing disciplinary action for unprofessional conduct. Additionally, ADE assists school districts with teachers' professional development activities, oversees teacher incentive programs, and reviews Arizona's teacher preparation programs. Teacher certification is one of ADE's most important responsibilities. The State requires that all teachers, with the exception of those teaching in charter schools, obtain certification in order to teach in the public education system. This requirement is intended to ensure that all teachers have a minimum level of teaching competency and will not pose a risk to children. Currently, there are approximately 74,500 certified teachers in Arizona, of whom about 38,000 FTEs were employed as teachers in public school districts in 1994-95.

State Needs to Reassess Teacher Preparation and Certification Practices (See pages 5 through 13)

Arizona's teacher preparation and certification requirements should be improved to better ensure teacher quality and a high level of student achievement. Rather than focusing on the courses a prospective teacher has completed to enter the teaching profession, Arizona should adopt a performance-based teacher preparation and certification process that focuses on assessing competency. When designing a performance-based certification approach, the State should establish teaching standards, develop assessment tools to measure teacher competency, and reform the teacher preparation process. Performance-based teacher preparation and certification practices are being used or promoted by national organizations, other states, and local groups.

Currently, certification decisions are based on a number of requirements, some of which are irrelevant, outdated, or need to be strengthened. Educational stakeholders, including the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, district personnel, and a state task force studying professional development, agree that the State's current requirements need to be reformed to better ensure teaching quality. Arizona should adopt training, certification, and professional development practices that better prepare new teachers and allow experienced teachers to continually refine their skills.

Arizona Could Do More to Address Districts' Needs for Teachers (See pages 15 through 21)

Although ADE statistics indicate Arizona has more certified teachers than the number employed in public schools, rural districts encounter difficulties in recruiting qualified teachers, and the State has a shortage of certain types of specialty teachers. As a result, schools often employ teachers who have not met all certification requirements.

Other states, and some Arizona school districts, have implemented partial solutions to the problem. ADE could provide information and assistance to adopt some of these solutions statewide. For example, ADE could establish a personnel clearinghouse to publicize information about job openings and available applicants. ADE could also help to expand the alternative certification program, assist teachers in obtaining specialty certification, and provide opportunities for other school workers to become teachers. In addition, the Legislature could consider establishing financial incentives to encourage teachers to work in underserved regions and specialties.

ADE Should Continue Efforts to Shorten the Certification Process (See pages 23 through 29)

While the Certification unit provides timely service to most applicants, ADE sometimes takes too long to issue teaching certificates. In the sample we examined, ADE issued 68 percent of certificates in 2 weeks or less, depending on the type of certificate and application. However, some certificates were delayed. In the sample, 7 percent took over 2 months to process, with the longest cases taking almost 5 months. Application delays can prevent districts from filling teaching positions in a timely manner and hinder teachers' ability to find employment.

ADE should continue its efforts to resolve certificate processing delays. Currently, ADE has initiated a Business Process Improvement (BPI) team, contracted for computer system enhancements, and taken other actions to address problems with the inefficient certification process. In addition to these steps, ADE could adopt practices used in other states to further improve its certification process. Potential improvements range from color-coding application forms to implementing phone and computer systems that would automatically answer queries about application status.

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The Office of the Auditor General has conducted a performance audit of the Arizona Department of Education's (ADE) teacher-related programs. This audit was conducted pursuant to the provisions of A.R.S. §41-2958 and in response to a May 30, 1995, resolution of the Joint Legislative Audit Committee. This is the second in a series of four audit reports regarding public education.

Under authority delegated by the State Board of Education, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, who administers ADE, has several responsibilities related to teaching. ADE certifies teachers, imposes disciplinary action for unprofessional conduct, and investigates complaints about teachers. In addition, the Department provides information and assistance to school districts, and districts, in turn, submit information about their teacher evaluation and professional development programs to ADE for approval. Further, ADE reviews college and university teacher preparation programs in order to approve their recommended graduates for automatic certification.

Teacher Certification

Teacher certification is one of the most important functions ADE performs. There are approximately 74,500 certified teachers (not including 12,600 substitute teachers) in the State, of whom approximately 38,000 were employed as teachers in Arizona public schools in 1994-95. In Arizona, all public school teachers, with the exception of those in charter schools, must be certified by ADE. In addition, in order to be accredited, schools must employ teachers who meet state certification requirements.

Current statutes and regulations set minimum standards for certified teachers. In general, applicants must:

- Earn a bachelor's degree
- Complete a number of professional preparation classes
- Have a major in the subject they intend to teach, if applying for certification to teach at the secondary level
- Either complete a student teaching requirement or have two years' teaching experience in the appropriate grade-level group; i.e., kindergarten through eighth grade (K-8) or seventh through twelfth grade (7-12)

- Undergo an FBI fingerprint check
- Satisfy requirements pertaining to knowledge of the Arizona and United States Constitutions
- Pass a test of basic skills at the 8th-grade level, unless they graduated from an Arizona Board of Regents-governed institution or passed a similar test in another state.

Recently, several changes impacted teacher certification in Arizona. For example, legislation passed in the 1995-96 session (Laws 1996, Ch. 1,§1) prohibits the Board from requiring graduate-level college courses as a condition of certification. In addition, ADE revised its policy regarding fingerprint clearance. Finally, an internal Business Process Improvement team and a coalition between ADE and others called the Professional Development Task Force prepared, recommended, and in some cases implemented changes to the teacher certification requirements and the certification process.[1] This report provides additional information about each of these changes.

Organization and Staffing

ADE's Professional Development unit, which is part of the Department's Programs Management area, oversees a number of functions related to teachers and instruction. The majority of the unit's 30 FTEs work in the Teacher Certification unit (23 FTE); which evaluates certification applications, issues certificates and endorsements, investigates complaints of immoral and unprofessional behavior, follows up on results of FBI fingerprint checks, and maintains data regarding certificates issued to teachers and other public school personnel. In addition, the Professional Development unit oversees other programs including career ladders (a pay-for-performance incentive program for teachers), alternative certification, teacher testing, and recognition programs. The unit also sponsors and coordinates a leadership academy for school administrators, and has statewide responsibility for the federal Troops to Teachers Program (designed to help people leaving military service to become teachers).

Scope and Methodology

Our audit focused on ADE's responsibilities regarding teachers, and on the policies that affect the quality and availability of teachers in Arizona. A combination of several methods was used to study the issues addressed in this audit. For example, we:

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1 The 40-member Task Force, sponsored by ADE, had a diverse membership including representatives from university teacher preparation programs, educational associations, the business community, and the general public, as well as teachers, district and school administrators, and ADE staff. It produced 25 recommendations for the State Board of Education.

- Reviewed current literature, studies, and reports,
- Met with teachers and parents regarding their concerns,
- Interviewed nationally recognized experts and federal officials,
- Conducted six focus groups with school district administrators from urban and rural districts in Phoenix, Tucson, and Flagstaff,
- Reviewed a random sample of teacher certification records at ADE,
- Interviewed 12 school district superintendents representing districts on reservations, along the Mexican border, in small towns, and in poor urban areas regarding teacher shortages,
- Contacted education officials in other states and reviewed pertinent documentation regarding certification requirements, procedures, and teacher shortages, and
- Surveyed 21 school district administrators regarding specific proposed certification requirement changes.

This report presents findings and recommendations in three areas:

- The need for Arizona to reassess teacher preparation and certification practices,
- Actions that could be taken to address Arizona's teacher shortages, and
- The delays in the teacher certification process.

The report also contains an other pertinent information section concerning pay-for-performance teacher incentive programs and school districts' use of private investigation firms to conduct background checks.

Our audit was conducted during the period July 1995 through March 1996. This audit was conducted in accordance with government auditing standards.

The Auditor General and staff express appreciation to the Superintendent of Public Instruction and staff of the Arizona Department of Education for their cooperation and assistance throughout the audit.

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FINDING I

THE STATE NEEDS TO REASSESS TEACHER PREPARATION AND CERTIFICATION PRACTICES

"The nation has reached a consensus that American education must be reformed. Political leaders and the public are calling for national standards for schoolchildren. Attaining this goal will require competent teachers who have graduated from programs which meet national standards. America must do a better job of protecting its children, especially at-risk children, from incompetent teaching." [1]

The State should reexamine teacher preparation and certification practices because they are outdated, lack accountability, and fail to ensure teacher quality. As a result, current certification requirements do not promote effective teaching in the State's public education system. Arizona should implement a performance-based approach to teacher preparation and certification to better ensure that the State has high teaching and learning standards. Furthermore, the State should develop an aggressive and flexible professional development program that helps teachers continually refine their teaching skills.

Teacher Preparation and Certification Requirements Need to Be Improved

Arizona's teacher preparation and certification practices should be improved to better ensure teacher quality and a high level of student achievement. Many of the current certification practices are irrelevant, outdated, or need to be strengthened. Arizona should improve current requirements by implementing comprehensive performance-based teacher training and certification practices. Other states are already using performance-based certification practices to produce higher levels of teaching quality and student achievement.

Current teacher preparation and certification requirements are not adequate — Recently, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction stated that "the current process by which we certify teachers would be scoffed at by most other professions, and dishonors the

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1 Arthur E. Wise, *NCATE and the Reform of Education*. National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), The New Professional Teacher Project, 1994.

talents of teachers themselves."[1] Some current requirements are weak, while others appear unnecessary:

- **Teacher Preparation**—Current certification requirements related to teacher preparation programs do not ensure teaching quality. The State requires that all teachers obtain a bachelor's degree, including completion of professional preparation courses (30 semester hours for secondary certification or 45 hours for elementary certification), and at least 8 semester hours of student teaching. ADE has not been given responsibility to provide state oversight of teacher preparation programs. Consequently, ADE does little more than ensure that certification applicants have completed a list of required courses. There is no assessment of these courses' relevance to actual classroom teaching. As a result, state teacher preparation programs are not held accountable for the quality of their graduates.

  In fact, numerous school districts indicated that many education graduates are not prepared to teach effectively after they graduate. Many suggested that beginning teachers cannot teach effectively because the State requires an insufficient amount of classroom exposure for certification.[2] As a result, beginning teachers frequently lack classroom management, discipline, and lesson-planning skills. A superintendent stated that teachers need more classroom exposure and fewer lectures during their training experience. A school principal indicated that many new teachers do not know how to teach because they lack adequate classroom exposure during the preparation process.

  Furthermore, there needs to be more collaboration between the Department of Education, state preparation programs, and school districts regarding the teacher preparation process. District personnel consistently indicated that, aside from Northern Arizona University and Grand Canyon University, preparation programs often use outdated, traditional techniques to train teachers. There is little outreach on the part of most preparation programs to determine school districts' needs. Additionally, there is no formal mechanism that allows districts to provide feedback to preparation programs about the quality of their graduates.

- **Teacher Testing**—Arizona's teacher testing requirements are not appropriate. Currently, A.R.S. §15-533 requires that out-of state applicants who have not passed an equivalent test in another state, and in-state applicants who did not graduate from an Arizona Board of Regents-governed institution, pass the Arizona Teacher Proficiency Examination (ATPE) to obtain certification. This is a basic skills examination that tests only a candidate's ability to read, write, and compute at an 8th-

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1 Lisa Graham Keegan. *Plan for Education in Arizona.* Arizona Department of Education (1996).

2 Many educators identified Northern Arizona University and Grand Canyon University as among the State's best teacher preparation programs, partly because they provide their students with ample classroom exposure.

grade level. The State does not require a professional skills or subject matter test for certification. As a result, teachers can obtain certification without demonstrating competency in teaching skills and subject matter areas.

The examination is a requirement that increases certificate processing time without enhancing teaching quality. Educational stakeholders around the State almost unanimously agreed that the examination should be eliminated.[1] They believe that the test is poorly designed and is not relevant to effective teaching.

- **Constitution Requirements**—The constitution requirements are not relevant to effective teaching. Currently, A.R.S. §15-532 requires applicants to either pass a test or complete a college course on the U.S. and Arizona Constitutions to receive a certificate. Though not universal, there is strong support among educators for eliminating these requirements because they do not contribute to effective teaching.[2] Additionally, the requirements are time-consuming. For example, one superintendent noted that teachers applying for their elementary education certificates spend as much time in constitution courses as they do in mathematics and science courses combined (six semester hours).

Arizona should adopt performance-based certification practices—The State should adopt a comprehensive performance-based teacher preparation and certification process to better ensure teaching quality in the State's public education system. The State should consider establishing teaching standards, developing or adopting assessment tools to measure teacher competency, and reforming the teacher preparation process.[3] When designing such a system, Arizona should examine various performance-based certification approaches being used or promoted by other states, national organizations, and the Task Force.

State should develop teaching standards—

The State could adopt or modify teaching standards developed by national groups and other states to better ensure teaching quality in Arizona's public education system. Performance-based teacher certification approaches establish standards, based on a common core of knowledge and skills, that describe what teachers should know and be able to do. These standards cover a wide

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1 A.R.S. §15-533 would need to be repealed and R7-2-604 would need to be amended to eliminate the requirement for the Arizona Teacher Proficiency Examination.

2 Most of the educational stakeholders who supported the constitution requirements did so because they received personal satisfaction from learning about the U.S. and Arizona Constitutions. They did not support the requirements because they produce more effective teachers.

3 The 20-member Skills Review Committee, the successor to the Task Force, has recently drafted new teaching standards. These standards have not yet been approved by the Board.

range of teaching competencies, including subject knowledge, teaching skills, and classroom management techniques.

Such standards are widely recommended by experts. Some in-state groups, such as the Task Force, have recommended that Arizona educators design statewide teaching standards. Additionally, national organizations, such as the U.S. Department of Education, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, the Holmes Group, and the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future have all recommended that states develop and implement teaching standards.[1,2]

Nationally, professional standards for teachers have already been developed by various groups, including the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards and the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC). These groups have designed both general teaching standards and subject-matter standards. For example, one INTASC general standard requires that "the teacher effectively uses multiple representations and explanations...that capture key ideas and link them to students' prior understandings." INTASC subject-matter standards require, for example, that mathematics teachers can identify real world applications, formulate problems and solve them using different strategies, verify and interpret results, and generalize solutions.

Other states have also adopted or developed such standards. In some states, agencies like ADE have coordinated the development:

- New Mexico established nine essential teaching competencies and indicators for teacher certification. These standards were developed by a number of task force groups consisting of representatives from all areas of the educational spectrum. Colorado and New York contracted with National Evaluation Systems (NES) to develop and administer performance standards and assessments for beginning teachers. State educators validated the assessment questions and exercises NES developed.

In other states, an independent professional standards board developed the standards:

- Oregon's Teacher Standards and Practices Commission designed the State's professional teaching standards. The Commission is an autonomous board, with broad representation, responsible for all facets of the teacher certification process. California's

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1 The Holmes Group, a consortium of College of Education deans from universities across the country, is studying ways to enhance the quality of teacher education.

2 The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future is a "blue-chip" group of public officials, business and community leaders, and educators examining how to better prepare teachers for the next century.

Commission on Teacher Credentialing developed teaching standards in 1974, and completely revised them in 1988 to better measure teaching quality.[1]

State should strengthen teacher testing requirements—

Once standards have been developed, the State should consider adopting a stringent teacher testing process to ensure that teachers possess teaching competency prior to certification. Teacher testing is a common method of assessing the professional skills and subject-matter knowledge of teachers. Currently, 35 states require subject-matter examinations, 28 states require teaching skills examinations, and 7 states require performance assessment examinations for certification. Arizona does not require any of these types of tests for certification, but should consider adopting one of the teacher testing systems available nationally to better ensure teaching quality. For example:

- At least 35 states use exams developed by either NES or ETS. These organizations have designed teacher tests for basic skills, subject-matter knowledge, and teaching skills. NES assists states with implementing and administering tests, and implementation costs to the state are minimal. For example, NES provides the money to develop, implement, and administer teacher tests. NES then collects fees from applicants to recover initial expenses. These fees generally range from $40 to $150 per applicant, depending on the extent of the testing.

- New Mexico has a three-tiered testing process. Applicants must pass a basic skills tests to enter a teacher preparation program. Teaching candidates must pass a subject-matter and teaching skills examination for initial certification. Teachers are tested a third time at the district level as soon as they are ready, anytime within the first three years of teaching experience. At that time, teachers must demonstrate competency in the State's teaching standards to receive standard certification; for example, they must use a variety of teaching and student evaluation techniques.

- Oregon requires applicants to pass a basic skills test to enter a teacher preparation program. The State also requires teaching applicants to pass a professional knowledge test and a subject-matter test as a condition for certification.

- New York's teacher certification examinations test applicants' subject knowledge, teaching skills, and actual classroom performance.

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1 Currently, 13 states (California, Georgia, Hawaii, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Minnesota, Nevada, North Dakota, Oregon, Texas, West Virginia, and Wyoming) have independent professional standards boards.

State should reform the teacher preparation process—

Finally, Arizona's teacher preparation process should focus more on outcomes (teacher competency) and less on inputs (specific course work requirements). Currently, ADE simply checks that programs require graduates to complete specific courses so that they may be authorized to recommend their graduates for automatic certification. Instead, the State should encourage preparation programs to use advanced techniques to train teachers in accordance with state teaching standards. ADE should disseminate information and generate discussion between districts and preparation programs regarding training techniques and the needs of beginning teachers. In addition, the State should periodically audit programs to ensure that they are teaching in accordance with state standards. Various Arizona educational stakeholders, including the Department of Education, district personnel, and the Task Force, support these concepts.

- The State Superintendent of Public Instruction recently urged state preparation programs to reform the way they prepare teachers. She stated that "teacher colleges can no longer remain faithful to once-effective instructional methods and curriculum in light of the changes taking place."[1] Additionally, various district personnel indicated that preparation programs should be encouraged to provide their students with more student teaching experience, and to start it earlier in the program, using the most advanced teaching techniques available.

- The Task Force recommended that ADE approve education programs on the basis of their graduates' proficiency in the new standards and their classroom performance. They added that ADE should establish systematic communication between schools and education programs regarding the programs' relevance to job performance. They also recommended that programs be reviewed on a regular basis.

Other states with performance-based certifications systems could serve as models for improving Arizona's teacher preparation processes:

- New York approves all teacher preparation programs. There is a five-year approval process, which includes paper audits and on-site visits by Department of Education personnel and outside consultants. New York expects preparation programs to teach to state-designed performance standards. Similarly, California's Commission on Teacher Credentialing approves all teacher preparation programs. All schools must demonstrate that they are teaching in accordance with state teaching standards. The Commission audits each program every six years. In addition, the Commission's evaluation team conducts extensive reviews of the success of each program's graduates.

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1 Lisa Graham Keegan. *Plan for Education in Arizona.* Arizona Department of Education, 1996.

- Colorado allows universities to design their own preparation programs and does not mandate specific courses. Graduating students compile personal portfolios that demonstrate their teaching competency. These portfolios contain information about the student's training experience, including examples of their lesson plans, videotapes of their classroom performance, and their individual student development plans. The State provides the basic structure for the portfolios including standards for what teachers should be able to accomplish, but it is the teacher's responsibility to work with the preparation program to use the portfolios to assess progress toward individual goals. Colorado also provides feedback to the universities regarding the quality of their graduates.

State Should Strengthen Teacher Professional Development

In addition to strengthening entry-level certification requirements, Arizona should consider implementing an aggressive and flexible professional development program to help maintain teaching quality. Currently, the State does not have any professional development requirements. However, research suggests that continuing professional development is critical for effective teaching. Therefore, the State should, at a minimum, provide assistance to districts with their specific professional development needs.

Recent legislation eliminated a requirement that all teachers obtain either a master's degree or 40 semester hours of graduate credit by the end of their first 8 years of teaching. Laws 1996, Ch. 1, §1 (A.R.S. §15-203) prohibits the State from requiring any graduate-level courses as a condition for certification. As a result, Arizona now has an opportunity to design a more meaningful state-level professional development program.

Professional development important—Researchers and members of the education community generally agree that professional development is essential for effective teaching. For example, a recent U.S. Department of Education report linked higher student achievement to higher teaching quality that had been attained through professional development and practice. Additionally, a 1986 report by the Carnegie Task Force on Teaching called for the creation of a National Board of Professional Teaching Standards to "improve student learning" through professional practice and development.[1] Other research groups, including the National Staff Development Council, also link professional development to increased student learning.

Many options exist—There are many ways to accomplish effective professional development. However, before designing a professional development program, the State

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[1] Carnegie Task Force on Teaching as a Profession. *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century*. (New York, 1986).

should examine professional development programs being used or promoted by other states, the Task Force, and local districts.

- Iowa and New York do not have any specific requirements for professional development. Iowa allows districts complete freedom to design professional development plans for their teachers, and certificate renewal is based upon district recommendations. Iowa has designed a variety of professional development models, and established regional service agencies to assist districts with professional development. Similarly, New York makes professional development the responsibility of districts. However, 25 Teacher Centers, linked together by computer and administered by teachers, conduct needs assessments to determine the areas where teachers need professional development, and provide professional development activities. The State partially funds these centers ($8 million in fiscal year 1995-96).

- California requires 150 clock hours of professional development for certificate renewal every 5 years. Teachers work with local advisors (generally fellow teachers or school principals) to design individualized professional development plans. Teachers must submit their completed professional development portfolios, signed by their advisors, to indicate all plan steps were accomplished, to the State for certificate renewal. The State also conducts occasional studies on teachers' success in the area of professional development.

In Arizona, many educators recommend a flexible, decentralized approach:

- The Professional Development Task Force recommended that districts develop a professional development plan for each teacher. The Task Force also recommended that the Department of Education "provide networking and promotion of best practices" for professional development and that the Legislature provide funding for professional development.[1]

- Most district superintendents and personnel directors supported a decentralized approach to professional development. Under such a system, the State might establish minimum requirements, such as total combined in-service and continuing education hours. Districts would have flexibility in designing individualized professional development plans for their teachers. The State could provide assistance to districts with their specific professional development needs.

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[1] The Task Force recommended that the Legislature fund professional development at a rate of 3 percent of salary. Although statewide figures on total teacher salaries are not readily available, one estimate shows the cost of funding at this level would be over $38 million.

Some districts already have extensive programs in place:

- Alhambra Unified School District (USD) and Mesa USD have aggressive professional development programs. Alhambra's program directly links professional development and teacher evaluations to student achievement. The District offers 53 professional development courses and activities each semester. Mesa offers between 60 to 100 in-service training courses each semester, and requires teachers to submit professional growth plans. A district educational management group coordinates and disseminates information about professional development activities throughout the District.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Legislature and the Board of Education should consider eliminating unnecessary certification requirements by:

   - Repealing A.R.S. §15-533, which requires a basic skills examination for some applicants applying for certification,

   - Eliminating requirements for the Arizona Teacher Proficiency Examination in R7-2-604, and

   - Repealing A.R.S. §15-532, which requires all applicants for certification to pass an examination on the U.S. and Arizona Constitutions.

2. The Board of Education should establish a performance-based teacher certification system by:

   - Developing standards for teacher knowledge and skills,

   - Testing applicants on subject matter and professional skills reflecting the standards, and

   - Providing systematic feedback to teacher preparation programs on the ability of their graduates to meet state teaching standards.

3. The Board of Education and ADE should, at a minimum, encourage continuing professional development of teachers by providing assistance and information to districts, particularly about professional development "best practices."

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FINDING II

ARIZONA COULD DO MORE TO ADDRESS DISTRICTS' NEEDS FOR TEACHERS

Although ADE records show Arizona has many more certified teachers than the number working in the public school system, rural districts and districts seeking certain types of specialty teachers cannot find enough qualified applicants to fill all their positions. Rural districts sometime have difficulty filling positions in general subject areas such as math, science, and English. Statewide, districts have difficulty finding an adequate number of certified special education, bilingual, English as a Second Language (ESL), and substitute teachers. While these problems have no simple solutions, several actions would help to address the shortages.

Background

To meet legal and accreditation requirements, districts must generally employ only certified teachers, although districts can also meet immediate needs by using three types of underqualified teachers. Holders of elementary certificates can teach in kindergarten through 8th grade, while holders of secondary certificates can teach in the 7th through 12th grades. At the secondary level, certificates specify the subject the teacher is qualified to teach, and districts must use teachers with correct qualifications for all subjects required by the State Board. At all levels, special training is required for certification or endorsement to teach ESL, bilingual, and special education classes.[1] Arizona regulations allow three kinds of exceptions to the certification requirements. First, an applicant who lacks certain requirements (constitution knowledge, mathematics, reading, or the Arizona Teacher Proficiency Examination) can obtain a certificate that allows him or her to teach for one year while making up the deficiencies. Second, an applicant who lacks other requirements but has a bachelor's degree can obtain a one-year emergency certificate if a district superintendent requests that such a certificate be granted due to a district emergency. Finally, ADE offers provisional certificates for vocational, bilingual, and certain other specialties to applicants who meet some but not all requirements and demonstrate they are working toward meeting the remaining requirements. Teachers holding emergency or provisional certificates are referred to as underqualified.

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1 An endorsement is an addition to a certificate, indicating that the holder is qualified in a specialized area such as bilingual education in addition to the general qualification indicated by the certificate itself.

Rural School Districts Have a Shortage of Certified Teachers

Many rural districts have a shortage of certified teachers in general content areas such as math, science, and English, as well as in the specialty areas that are problematic statewide. As a result, districts are forced to assign certified teachers to teach subjects in which they are not certified, consolidate and/or cancel classes, and hire teachers who have emergency or provisional certificates. Several factors contribute to teacher shortages in rural districts.

Many school districts outside the major metropolitan areas have significant shortages of certified teachers, as indicated by their employment of underqualified teachers (teachers holding emergency or provisional certificates). According to ADE records, in the 1994-95 school year, 1,837 of the State's 33,335 full-time teachers (5.5 percent) had these types of certificates. These teachers worked in 154 of the State's 219 districts. That year, 22 districts—21 outside the metropolitan areas—used underqualified teachers to fill over one-fifth of their full-time teaching positions, and in 10 of these districts, 1 teacher in 3 was underqualified. Our interviews with district superintendents found that in February 1996, each of the 12 districts we contacted were using 1 or more underqualified teachers in several types of classrooms. These 12 districts employed a total of 122 underqualified teachers, with one district located in a metropolitan area employing 32 underqualified teachers and a district located on an Indian reservation employing 41 underqualified teachers. Although the classes taught by underqualified teachers are generally in specialty areas such as English as a Second Language, underqualified teachers filled 45 positions in such areas as English, math, auto mechanics, and gifted education.

Eight of the nine rural district superintendents surveyed identified the shortage of certified teachers as either a "very serious" or "somewhat serious" problem. The other stated that the shortage of specialty teachers is a very serious problem. According to these officials, their districts must:

- Spend time and money recruiting teachers from other states. Recruiting out-of-state teachers often requires school district officials to attend job fairs in other states, which is time-consuming as well as expensive. One official stated that his district spends $12,000 to $15,000 per year on recruiting, and another said approximately 17 percent of the teachers his district hired this year were from out of state. One district reported that many of these out-of-state teachers leave after only two or three years of employment, contributing up to 70 percent of that district's 30-50 percent turnover rate.

- Cancel or consolidate classes. Sometimes, school districts must cancel classes because they lack the necessary number and type of teachers. One official stated that his district has canceled two separate language courses (Spanish and German) because the district has been unable to fill the vacancies. He reported that the students had to be consolidated into other classes.

- Assign teachers to teach subjects they are not certified to teach. Several district officials surveyed said they have to use teachers certified in one subject to teach another subject in which they are not certified. For example, one district uses a certified elementary teacher as a special education teacher, even though this teacher has not been trained or certified to teach these special-needs children.

Several factors make rural districts unappealing to Arizona graduates—Although rural districts attempt to recruit in-state education graduates, they are unable to compete with urban school districts for the limited number of quality teachers. The majority of the rural districts surveyed reported that their geographic locations impede their in-state recruiting efforts. Rural districts often lack available housing—in fact, one official from a district located on an Indian reservation stated there are no homes within 30 miles of its schools, and a superintendent in another rural community indicated that many district teachers commute 3 hours daily from Phoenix due to a lack of suitable housing in town. In addition, rural districts may offer less access to professional development, and sometimes make more demands on teachers by asking teachers to spend more time on duties other than teaching, such as performing custodial activities and coaching. While reservation districts can sometimes pay salaries comparable to urban districts,' some of the rural district officials we spoke to said their salaries were not competitive with the metropolitan areas.

Shortages Are Not Limited to Rural School Districts

Statewide, school districts in all areas encounter a shortage of special education, ESL, and bilingual teachers, and certified substitutes. Even urban school districts have significant difficulty finding and hiring teachers in these specialties.

All of the districts surveyed, including those in urban areas, reported difficulty in hiring and retaining enough certified special education, ESL, and bilingual teachers. ADE figures show that in 1994-95, only about 70 percent of the statewide demand for special education teachers was met with fully certified teachers. That year, Arizona school districts had 306 special education positions, but employed only 214 fully certified special education teachers. Districts filled 85 positions with underqualified teachers, and had 7 vacancies. Further, all three urban school district officials surveyed described the shortage of specialty teachers as either "somewhat serious" or "very serious." According to these officials, their districts must cancel classes, consolidate their classes with those in other districts, and use substitute teachers to cover vacancies. For example, one district has been forced to staff its classroom for severely and moderately handicapped special education students with a teacher aide and about a dozen emergency substitutes who work in rotation due to regulatory limits on the number of consecutive days an emergency substitute may work in any one classroom.

In addition to the shortage of specialty teachers, all of the districts surveyed reported problems finding sufficient certified substitute teachers to meet district needs. For standard one-year certification as a substitute, an applicant must have a four-year college degree, as well as undergo a background check. When certified substitutes are unavailable, districts hire emergency substitute teachers, who are only required to have a high school diploma or GED in addition to a background check. Half of the 12 districts surveyed used emergency substitutes at least as often as certified substitutes.

Districts and Other States Have Implemented Several Partial Solutions

The problem of teacher shortages, especially in special education, cannot be easily addressed. However, there are a number of promising strategies that could increase the supply of qualified teachers. Other states have similar problems and have implemented a variety of partial solutions, as have some Arizona school districts.

Other states have shortages—Arizona is not alone in experiencing teacher shortages. The results of our nine-state survey revealed that the shortage of special education teachers is not limited to Arizona, but is severe in all nine states, and eight of the nine states also have shortages of bilingual and ESL teachers.[1] Education officials from these states indicated the shortage of specialty teachers, especially in special education, is a national problem. The shortage of bilingual and ESL teachers is especially acute because of the increased demand for their skills. According to a 1994 General Accounting Office report, the number of limited English-proficient students increased nationally by almost 26 percent over the last decade.

Several options are available—Our research identified a number of actions the State and school districts can take to increase the supply of teachers, encourage teachers to work in underserved areas, and help districts fill vacant positions.

Personnel clearinghouse—ADE could provide a means for districts with vacancies and teachers seeking positions to find each other. Texas and Florida operate teacher clearinghouses to enable districts with vacancies to find qualified applicants. A similar program in Arizona was discontinued in 1994 because of limited participation by school districts, but ADE is currently working to reestablish a portion of the clearinghouse

[1] Nine states (California, Colorado, Florida, Iowa, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Texas, and Utah) were surveyed regarding teacher shortages. These states were selected because they resemble Arizona in having a mix of large urban and very remote rural areas, or because they have similar populations of non-English speaking students. Others were chosen because they had been identified as states that might have found ways to overcome teacher shortages without sacrificing quality of teaching.

using its new Internet site. This clearinghouse will apply only to the Troops to Teachers program. In addition to the Internet clearinghouse, ADE plans to begin asking certification applicants to indicate their willingness to interview for specific types of positions. Then, when a district requests an emergency certificate for an applicant, ADE plans to send the district a list of other applicants who are qualified and available for the position. ADE will also provide the list to any district upon request.

Financial incentives offered in some states—

Some states provide financial incentives to encourage education students to teach in underserved areas or specialties. For example, Florida's Teacher Scholarship and Forgivable Loan Program exempts teachers who teach in a targeted area, such as bilingual or special education, or in a targeted geographic hardship area, from repaying certain student loans. Similarly, Utah's Career Teaching Scholarship Program offers recipients a waiver of tuition and fees at public universities or a $970 per-semester scholarship at private universities if they agree to teach in a Utah public school. Preference is given to scholarship applicants who plan to teach in an area where there is a shortage. Arizona's Teacher Incentive Program provided education students with loans of $5,000 per year to a lifetime maximum of $10,000. If the students worked in underserved areas after graduation, these loans were forgiven at the rate of one year's loan per two years' work. The Program was funded at $90,000 in fiscal year 1989-90 and again in fiscal year 1990-91, but has not been funded since.

A variation of this approach is to provide ongoing financial incentives to reward teachers for working in underserved areas. For example, New Mexico provides districts with funds based on the number of students requiring bilingual and ESL services, and the districts then distribute the funds to teachers in these areas as pay incentives. In one district, bilingual teachers receive an extra $1,000 per year, and ESL teachers receive an extra $600. New York's legislature is considering a similar plan for teachers who work in schools targeted due to low student achievement. In Arizona, some school districts on Indian reservations, in addition to offering competitive salary schedules, provide housing at a very low rent to attract teachers. Although these districts continue to experience high turnover, this incentive has been successful in helping the districts to hire enough teachers to meet their needs.

Alternative certification available to college graduates—

Alternative certification programs offer another way to increase the supply of teachers. Although Arizona already has such a program, it could be expanded. These programs enable college graduates to earn teacher certification without returning to the university. Arizona's program requires districts to work with ADE to develop a training plan and monitor participant progress during a year of on-the-job and in-service training. At the end of the year, ADE issues a teaching certificate based on the district's recommendation. Currently, the program is

limited to secondary certification, and has not been widely used—in fact, only 49 teachers statewide will have been certified this way by the end of the 1995-96 school year.

Once a performance-based certification system is in place, as recommended in Finding I (see pages 5 through 13), the alternative certification program could be improved and expanded. According to ADE, one weakness of the current program is the lack of testing to ensure alternatively certified teachers can perform as well as traditionally prepared teachers. A performance-based system would provide a mechanism for such testing. Further, Arizona's program could be expanded by improving communication between ADE and the districts. In our discussions with district officials, we found at least two who were unaware of the program or were confused about the requirements.

Other states, including Colorado and the District of Columbia, offer ESL, bilingual, and special education certificates through their alternative certification programs. These states require proficiency examinations at entry and exit, and either take more time to complete or require extensive course work at community colleges or district offices. ADE could also expand its program by including other types of certification and using performance-based measures to assess candidate qualifications.

Regular teachers can obtain specialty certification requirements—

In addition to statewide efforts by ADE and the Legislature, other steps toward reducing shortages of specialty teachers can be taken by school districts. One such step is to help regular teachers earn ESL, bilingual, or special education certification. Districts could provide training opportunities and classroom experience to enable teachers to meet performance standards in specialty areas. For example, in Utah, the Department of Education coordinates in-service and university classes offered at districts to enable teachers to earn ESL and bilingual endorsements. In Arizona, the Cartwright School District requires its new teachers to earn ESL certification, and the District works in coordination with Chapman University to provide the preparation teachers need to meet that requirement.

School community members can become teachers—

Finally, another district-initiated solution involves identifying potential teachers among teacher aides and other school employees, and helping them to become certified. Several urban districts in Maricopa County have joined together to address shortages of ESL and bilingual teachers in this way. Several school districts work with local community colleges and universities to offer promising candidates assistance in earning their certification. The districts provide the candidates with guidance and encouragement, flexible work schedules to enable them to attend college courses, and sometimes financial assistance to purchase textbooks. In addition, each district guarantees a job interview to the candidates it sponsors.

Assisting local residents in becoming certified teachers could alleviate the major obstacle rural districts face in filling vacancies. Because these people already live in the community, this solution would overcome the difficulty of finding teachers who are willing and able to live in rural districts. Teacher preparation programs are already available to rural residents through community colleges and Northern Arizona University's distance learning system. ADE could assist rural districts in implementing such programs by disseminating information from the successful urban programs and providing advice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. ADE should establish and maintain a clearinghouse of information about available teachers and available teaching jobs.

2. The Legislature should consider establishing financial incentives to attract teachers to underserved locations and specialties. Options for financial incentives used in other states include providing scholarships or forgivable loans for education students, and funding salary incentives for specialty teachers.

3. The State Board of Education and the Legislature should consider expanding the State's alternative teacher certification program to include special education, bilingual, and ESL certificates. This could involve extending the training period or increasing the training requirements.

4. ADE should disseminate information to school districts about methods for increasing the supply of specialty and rural teachers, such as assisting school employees in becoming certified teachers, participating in the alternative certification program, and providing opportunities for certified teachers to obtain specialty certificates.

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FINDING III

ADE SHOULD CONTINUE EFFORTS TO SHORTEN THE CERTIFICATION PROCESS

The current certification process in Arizona takes too long for certain types of applications. While ADE issues many teaching certificates quickly, several factors cause delays and frustration for some applicants and for the school districts that want to hire them. Revision of the complex teacher certification process may help ensure all teaching certificates are issued in a timely manner.

Background

ADE processes thousands of certificates and endorsements every year at several offices. In 1995, the ADE Certification unit reviewed approximately 45,500 applications, including 9,265 renewal applications. Most applications for certification services are received between April and September. Processing steps required for each application vary. For example, new graduates of six approved Arizona teacher education programs present an Institutional Recommendation (IR), which can be handled in one step, by one person.[1] Renewal and substitute certificate applications are also simple to process. Other applications require more expertise and processing time to evaluate transcripts for courses taken and semester hour requirements.

While Many Applications Are Handled Quickly, Delays Remain a Problem for Some

ADE has difficulty issuing teaching certificates to some applicants in a timely manner. While over two-thirds of certificates are issued within two weeks, other certificates are delayed. About 7 percent of the certificates take over 2 months to issue. Application delays cause school districts to request rush treatment for applicants they intend to employ, resulting in inequities and further delays for applications set aside while ADE processes the district requests. The lengthy and complex certification process also impedes districts' ability to place teachers in the classroom in a timely manner.

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1 Arizona State University, the University of Arizona, Northern Arizona University, Grand Canyon University, Prescott College, and Southwestern Baptist Bible College review their own graduates' qualifications for certification. The institution then sends a complete application package to ADE verifying that the graduate has met all requirements.

To determine timeliness in certifying teachers, a sample of 360 was drawn from the 31,116 certification actions taken between November 1, 1994, and October 31, 1995. The total number of days from the date the last item of the application package was received by the Certification unit until issuance of a handwritten "Memorandum of Certification" was then calculated.[1] As shown in Table 1 (page 25), the average processing time for certification applications ranges from 4 to 32 days, depending on the type of certificate and type of application. Many applications, such as entry-level certificates with Institutional Recommendations (IR) and Substitute certificates, were handled in less than one week. However, while the average processing time for certification appears reasonable, processing times within each type of certificate can vary widely. For example, of 20 new entry-level certificates without an IR, 5 were issued within 20 days, but 4 took more than 60 days to issue. Additionally, other cases revealed excessive delays:

- A teacher in a rural Arizona town applied for certification as an ESL teacher, but processing delays forced her to wait three months. ADE received her application on June 21, 1995. A school district official sent a "rush" request on September 18, explaining that the applicant might lose her ESL stipend without immediate certification. ADE issued the certificate on September 21, 92 days after the application was received. According to ADE staff, an excessive backlog of applications likely caused the delay.

- A teacher sent her certificate renewal application on June 22, 1994. ADE did not issue her certificate until November 3, although ADE received a letter from the applicant on August 30 expressing concern about the delay. The total processing time for this renewal was 126 days.

- An out-of-state teacher applied for an initial teaching certificate on May 19, 1995. During the 1995 summer peak period, ADE's process was to address out-of-state applications last, after processing applications from Arizona residents. The certificate was eventually issued on October 4, 1995, almost five months later.

Delays in processing create difficulties for school districts in placing qualified teachers in the classroom on time. Rural superintendents told us delays hurt them in particular, because they often must recruit from out of state, so ADE must evaluate their applicants' transcripts in detail instead of relying on the recommendation of the teacher preparation program. One district was forced to circumvent certification requirements in order to hire an experienced out-of-state teacher with excellent skills and recommendations. Because the teacher's certificate had not been issued by the beginning of the school year, the district

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[1] Although the handwritten memorandum is proof of certification, a few districts will not employ or pay teachers until they receive a more formal printed certificate. On average, ADE's Data Entry unit requires approximately 55 days after the handwritten memorandum date to issue the printed certificate.

hired the teacher as a "consultant" at additional expense and placed a certified substitute in the same classroom to comply with legal and accreditation requirements.

Table 1

Processing Time for a Sample of Certification Actions November 1, 1994-October 31, 1995[a]

Type of Certificate	Total No.	Certificates Processed by Days to Process								
		0-5	6-15	16-30	31-45	46-60	61-75	76-90	91+	Avg. Days[b]
Entry-Level Elementary and Secondary—with Institutional Recommendation	25	22	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	3.92
Entry-Level Elementary and Secondary—without Institutional Recommendation	20	4	1	8	1	2	2	2	0	32.10
Advanced-Level Elementary and Secondary	26	12	3	3	1	1	2	3	1	24.88
Substitute	22	18	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	4.55
Other Certificate Types[c]	14	2	4	4	1	2	0	1	0	24.86
Renewal	87	43	22	10	6	3	2	0	1	13.17
Other Actions[d]	80	36	17	13	5	3	1	2	3	17.86
Total Number of Records	274	137	50	39	16	12	7	8	5	16.09

(a) Three-hundred sixty records were selected at random from certification actions taken between November 1, 1994, and October 31, 1995. Eighty-six records that did not contain enough information to calculate processing time were excluded prior to analysis.

(b) Average days of processing time for all cases in this category.

(c) Other certificate types include adult education, emergency, provisional, vocational, early childhood, handicapped, and speech and language therapy.

(d) Other actions include adding an endorsement or academic major to an existing certificate, issuing a certificate after deficiencies are removed, notifying an applicant that he/she failed to qualify for the certificate, reissuing a lost certificate, and recording a name change.

Source: Auditor General staff analysis of ADE teacher certification records.

ADE Should Continue Efforts to Resolve Certification Delays

ADE should continue to address factors contributing to teacher certification delays. Although ADE has begun to resolve some of these problems, further improvements are needed. To better serve districts' and teachers' needs, ADE could employ some certification practices used in other states.

Several factors have contributed to the delays—The current teacher certification process has been burdened by inadequate automation, inefficient practices, lack of policy manuals, and seasonal peaks in workload. For example:

- **Inadequate management information system**—The Certification unit's existing computer system is limited in its usefulness. For example, it does not contain certain important data fields, such as application date, that would help management to monitor unit performance. Complicated computer programs must be written in order to query the system, so management cannot readily obtain information regarding the volume and nature of services. Staff can locate individual records by entering the predefined key field information, but cannot search the data file if the key field information is incorrect or missing. As a result, evaluators spend excessive time searching for applicant information among hard copy records, and management lacks information needed to efficiently allocate work among staff.

- **Inefficient practices**—Files and forms used by the Certification unit appear needlessly complex. During processing, application files are maintained in eight locations based on stage of completion, resulting in occasional loss of files or portions of files. For example, one applicant for an ESL endorsement was required to resubmit transcripts after ADE lost the first set she submitted, causing a total processing time of almost five months. Forms have been another source of inefficiency, because some contained incorrect instructions until their recent revision.

- **Lack of policy manuals**—Until recently the Certification unit had not developed policy, procedure, and training manuals. As a result, many questions that arose during processing were resolved on a case-by-case basis. This was not only time-consuming, but could lead to inconsistent decisions, according to one certification specialist.

- **Seasonal peaks**—Causing further process delays is the seasonal nature of the workload. Beginning in April, the Certification unit receives an influx of applications from three teacher groups: new teachers graduating in early May, Arizona teachers seeking renewals before the July 1 certificate expiration date, and out-of-state teachers wanting certification before school starts. The enormous volume of summer applications creates a processing backlog. On September 22, 1995, unit staff estimated the backlog at 4,000 applications, and by November 1, a count of the applications showed 900 still remained from the summer peak.

In addition, increased workload with no increase in staff has contributed to the unit's timeliness problems.

- **Inadequate staffing**—According to Certification unit records, between 1991 and 1995, the number of services provided by the unit increased by approximately 79 percent, from an estimated 25,586 to 45,888. However, the number of staff allocated to the unit has remained stable. While ADE expects to achieve some increased productivity by implementing a new computer system, staffing in the unit may need to be reevaluated in view of the change in workload.

ADE is making efforts to improve—ADE officials recognize the need to improve timeliness and have taken a number of steps. For example,

- **Business Process Improvement (BPI)**—ADE has initiated a Business Process Improvement team (BPI), comprised of Certification unit employees, to recommend changes to certification processes and requirements. As a result, ADE has conducted workshops to train school district and university personnel and has redesigned its applicant waiting areas and staff work areas. ADE is also revising its application packet, which will include accurate, color-coded application forms. The BPI team has also recommended, but ADE has not yet implemented, revisions for application forms and staggered certificate renewal dates. The team also made several recommendations to reduce the number of certificate types and streamline the requirements.

- **Computer system enhancements**—ADE has contracted for development of workflow and optical records management enhancements to its computer system, and has already begun installation of the necessary hardware. The system should provide on-line access to applicant information, and facilitate assigning responsibility for each application to a single evaluator. At this stage, it is too early to determine the new system's impact on certification timeliness.

- **Background check changes**—Further, to enable districts to hire teachers quickly, ADE recently changed fingerprint clearance practices. Since January 23, 1996, school districts have been able to conduct their own background checks to expedite the certification process. The FBI fingerprint check is still conducted, but the applicant may begin teaching before FBI results are received. For additional information on this issue, see Other Pertinent Information, page 31.

- **Regional offices**—In addition to its permanent offices in Phoenix and Tucson, ADE has opened regional offices in Flagstaff, Yuma, and Window Rock to better serve applicants in remote Arizona locations. These offices are only open for part of the year and are not listed in application packets, but they do provide a valuable service in

helping applicants to submit complete and accurate applications, and breaking the statewide workload into more manageable segments.

- **Policy and training manuals**—ADE has prepared new manuals to improve consistency and reduce the need for time-consuming, case-by-case decision making. These manuals have been approved by unit management and should be printed and distributed by mid-summer 1996.

More can be done—In addition to these actions, ADE should consider adopting practices that have been effective in other states. We surveyed nine states regarding their certification practices, and found that several have implemented additional efficient practices in their certification units. For example,

- **Remote access to computer system**—In Georgia, districts have remote access to the State's computer system for checking application status, to give evaluators more time for processing applications instead of responding to telephone queries. This has also had the effect of reducing district "rush" requests.

- **On-line access to background check information**—Washington has gone further to expedite its certification process, by giving its network of regional certification offices remote access to state law enforcement background check information. The access to law enforcement information allows certificate issuance within 24 hours of clearance.

- **Bundling applications**—Two states reduce confusion by bundling completed applications according to the service required, such as initial issuance, renewal, or evaluation of additional course work. Because evaluators work on one bundle of similar applications at a time, they can process each application more quickly.

- **Automated telephone queries**—Georgia's advanced phone system allows applicants to call and check application status by social security number, thereby freeing phone lines for more difficult questions. The Georgia Professional Standards Commission linked its phone system into an advanced statewide phone system and pays only a monthly users' fee.

- **Expanded use of regional offices**—Four of the states we contacted have regional offices to assist applicants with information and/or perform application processing. These offices are open all year and are specifically listed in application packets. To be most effective, Arizona regional offices would require year-round staffing and computer hookups to the central office.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. ADE should continue its efforts to improve teacher certification timeliness by implementing Business Process Improvement team recommendations, such as making computer system enhancements and staggering certificate renewal dates.

2. ADE should further improve processing efficiency by developing policies and procedures, simplifying its filing system, and clarifying its application forms.

3. ADE should make better use of regional offices by providing information about them on application forms and keeping them open for as many months as the workload requires.

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OTHER PERTINENT INFORMATION

During the audit, information was collected about teacher incentive programs used in Arizona and other states, and about school districts' use of private investigation firms to conduct background checks.

Arizona's Career Ladder and Performance Incentive Programs

Currently, Arizona has a career ladder teacher incentive program designed to attract and reward highly skilled teachers. Arizona's program differs from other states' career ladders in that Arizona ties teacher salaries to increased student achievement. While many educators, including most career ladder participants, support the program, its success has never been fully evaluated and it has never been funded for all districts. Another program, the Optional Performance Incentive Program (PIP), provides rewards to entire schools.

Career Ladder

Background—A.R.S. §918(D) defines the career ladder program as a multi-level system of teaching positions that provides opportunities for continual professional advancement. The statute requires that teachers demonstrate improved teaching skills, higher instructional responsibilities, and increased student achievement to advance on the career ladder. Teachers receive additional compensation as they advance. Participation in the program is optional.

Arizona first implemented the career ladder program in 1985, when it established pilot projects in 7 school districts. By 1994, a total of 29 districts participated in the program. Since that time, the State has not authorized further expansion of the program. During 1994-95, nearly 9,000 teachers participated. The State appropriated approximately $26 million for the career ladder program in fiscal year 1995-96, and districts must supplement state appropriations with local funding.

Specific characteristics of career ladder programs vary from district to district. For example,

- Mesa's program has three components: district-wide incentives, school-wide incentives, and individual teacher incentives. The district uses career ladder monies to reward district and school personnel when they achieve district and school goals. Additionally, the district rewards individual teachers as they progress on the career ladder. In order

to advance, Mesa teachers must submit a student achievement plan at the beginning of each school year. At the end of the year, teachers must show how they preassessed, taught, and post-tested the students for increased achievement.

In contrast to Mesa, most other districts use career ladder monies only to reward individual career ladder teachers. For example,

- The Dysart District (Phoenix) program rewards individual teachers based on calculated composite placement scores. Teachers must submit Student Achievement Progress Reports and undergo an evaluation process to advance on the ladder. These evaluations focus both on student achievement and teacher performance.

- The Payson District bases career ladder advancement solely on peer evaluations. The review process is extensive. Teachers cannot advance on the ladder unless their peers recognize increased teaching and student performance. Currently, Payson is conducting a district-wide evaluation of the career ladder program to determine its impact on student achievement.

Districts also use career ladder monies to enhance professional development activities. For example,

- The Sunnyside District (Tucson) offers in-service training in a discipline system that helps students become self-directed and self-disciplined by teaching them to be responsible for their own behavior. Ganado District used career ladder monies to develop a culturally relevant curriculum model of teaching that represents beliefs in the Navajo culture known as the "Foundations of Learning."

Career ladder programs in other states— In 1985, 13 states, including Arizona, had career ladder programs or pilot projects. By 1994, only 4 states (Arizona, Missouri, Tennessee, and Utah) continued to fund career ladder programs. Most states terminated their career ladder programs because they require large appropriations for full implementation. For example, Tennessee appropriates over $100 million annually for its program, and Texas was appropriating nearly $300 million annually before eliminating its program.

Arizona's career ladder program differs from others because compensation and advancement are directly linked to increased student achievement. Although several early career ladder programs in other states required demonstrated improvements in student achievement for advancement on the ladder, the states eliminated this criteria. Now, no other state ties advancement on the career ladder to student achievement. Furthermore, Arizona has a separate salary schedule for career ladder teachers, while other states apply career ladder pay increases to traditional salary schedules.

Optional Performance Incentive Program (PIP)

In addition to the career ladder program, A.R.S. §15-919 established the Optional Performance Incentive Program (PIP) in 1994. The Program uses state appropriations to reward entire schools, rather than individual teachers, for enhanced performance. PIP uses survey information collected from parents, students, and teachers to measure "customer satisfaction" with school performance. Currently, Hudson High School (Tempe) and the Sedona-Oak Creek School District are the only participants in the program. For fiscal year 1994-95, the State funded the PIP programs at Hudson and Sedona-Oak Creek at $105,000 and $202,000, respectively.

Concerns About Arizona's Teacher and School Incentive Programs

Our analysis of state teacher and school incentive programs revealed that these programs have not been adequately assessed to determine their impact on the quality of education. Furthermore, our study disclosed equity and fiscal accountability issues with each program.

- **Program Assessment**—Currently, ADE does not conduct any systematic program assessment of the career ladder program. Studies conducted by ADE (1994) and an outside consulting firm (1993) of the program indicated that participants believed that it has enhanced collegial relations, increased professional growth, and led to a more positive learning environment. However, there has not been a conclusive study that directly connects career ladders to increased student achievement. Consequently, it is still questionable whether the program is meeting legislative objectives. PIP's impact on student achievement has not been assessed.

- **Equity Issues**—Limited career ladder appropriations have resulted in inequities. First, limited state funding of the program prohibits many districts from participating. Second, districts with limited tax bases cannot easily fund career ladder programs. As a result, poorer districts would have a difficult time participating in the career ladder program even if further state funding is available.

- **Fiscal Oversight**—Currently, there is no state oversight of career ladder appropriations. Districts have complete autonomy over the use of career ladder funds. Without state oversight, a potential exists for districts to misuse career ladder monies.

Background Checks

According to school district officials and ADE staff, processing time for required FBI fingerprint checks averages three months. To hire teachers more quickly, districts can conduct their own background checks and sign a waiver accepting any liability. ADE then certifies the teacher, while the FBI fingerprint check proceeds at its normal pace. However, private background checks are limited, and certificates are not immediately revoked if the FBI check discovers violations.

ADE's procedure for criminal background checks is time-consuming but broad in scope. It involves sending fingerprints to the Department of Public Safety (DPS), which forwards the fingerprints to the FBI. DPS uses the applicant's name to obtain information from the Arizona Crime Information Center (ACIC), which includes Arizona arrest, warrant, and conviction file information. The FBI uses the fingerprints to access a similar national information database.

Because a three-month delay may be unacceptable, districts use private firms to expedite the fingerprint check. Since January 23, 1996, ADE has been allowing districts to conduct their own background checks and sign a liability waiver to expedite a potential teacher's certification. The newly certified person may teach in a classroom pending results of the FBI fingerprint check. Districts routinely use private firms for background checks on non-certified staff, such as school bus drivers.

We found that private firms cannot conduct as thorough a background check as ADE because only law enforcement agencies and current law enforcement officials can legally access all information contained in state and national databases. However, private firms may access:

- Arizona Crime Information Center current warrant information via DPS, but not a criminal history
- Public court records and hearings
- Motor Vehicle Division records
- County felony convictions (purchased from individual counties), which typically lag three to four months behind current records. Purchased county records do not contain information on misdemeanor arrests or convictions.

Due to limited information access, discrepancies between the DPS/FBI fingerprint check and private investigation firm check may occur. In one instance, a district official complained that a private investigation firm check showed a clean record, while the DPS/FBI fingerprint check uncovered violations. Teachers in this situation do not face immediate certificate revocation, but must have their cases reviewed by the State Board of Education. Until this hearing, the

district may choose to allow teachers to remain in the classroom, place them on administrative leave, or terminate their employment.

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Agency Response

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ARIZONA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION'S RESPONSE TO THE AUDITOR GENERAL'S REPORT ON TEACHER-RELATED PROGRAMS

The Arizona Department of Education (ADE) Certification Unit welcomed the Auditor General's review of performance, as it was expected to substantiate the finding of an internal review by a Business Process Improvement Committee, discover other areas of inefficiency, and offer plausible recommendations for improvement. The Auditor General's staff approached the review with thoroughness and accuracy. The following comments and information are offered for clarification.

In 1994, ADE management recognized serious problems with customer service and the length of time to process some applications for certification. Additionally, there was a general consensus among educational constituents that the entire system of certification and teacher evaluation had become outdated and irrelevant. The system did not support a mission of providing excellent education for school children.

Certification Unit staff were trained in the Business Process Improvement (BPI) approach and completed an evaluation in April 1995. The team identified 24 problems with process, policy, personnel, and equipment and proposed nearly 100 recommendations that would improve the integrity of certification as well as customer service. Nearly all of the changes that were within the authority of ADE have been implemented. However, most of the business of certification is governed by State Board of Education Rules and Regulations; changing those rules requires considerably more time, and the process has begun.

Acting proactively, ADE assembled a committee of education constituents, known as the Professional Development Task Force (the "Task Force"), to review the rule recommendations it intended to submit to the State Board. The Task Force represented school and district administrators, the deans of the colleges of education, teachers unions, the PTA and other community organizations, and a number of other education stakeholders. After four months, the Task Force made 25 recommendations to the State Board of Education. Approximately half of the recommendations addressed specific rule changes that were acceptable to all Task Force members; the other half recommended comprehensive review of the teacher evaluation and certification system.

A smaller group of constituents, the Skills Review Committee ("SRC"), has been working since January 1996 to prepare recommendations on new teacher standards, the university program approval process, teacher evaluation and certification requirements. The SRC has drafted the teacher standards, proposed a three tier framework of certification and assessment, and is discussing university program approval processes and other critical issues. It is expected to present recommendations to the State Board in August. Rulemaking and the implementation is expected to be complete within two years.

The ADE Professional Development Unit is committed to continual improvement of the certification and evaluation system, working with the educational constituency. Sixty percent of the recommendations of the BPI team have been implemented. Another 20% are in process. The recommendations that have been implemented were the "quick and easy" solutions; the remaining 20% of the recommendations address more serious and systemic problems, the very issues noted by the Auditor General's report. With continual effort and commitment, those issues will be resolved or substantially alleviated within the next two years.

The ADE expresses gratitude to the members of the Task Force and the SRC, who enthusiastically embraced the challenge of designing a new system which, ultimately, will improve student achievement, and to the Auditor General's staff, who validated both the problems and solutions identified by those groups.

FINDING I: THE STATE NEEDS TO REASSESS TEACHER PREPARATION AND CERTIFICATION PRACTICES

The ADE agrees that teacher preparation and certification requirements in their present form are outdated, lack accountability, and fail to ensure teacher quality. The current Board rules and standards have not been reviewed comprehensively for several years. Practices need to be reassessed and made more relevant to classroom performance. Research has shown that no other factor has as much influence on student achievement as the teacher's proficiency. The State must invest in quality preparation programs, valid professional proficiency assessments, continued research, and professional growth of teachers and administrators if it is to meet its mission of providing access to extraordinary education.

Recommendation 1: The Legislature and the Board of Education should consider eliminating unnecessary certification requirements. The ADE and most education constituents agree with the recommendation. The ADE has suggested several times that these irrelevant requirements be repealed; the Legislature has been unwilling to sponsor such legislation. Until the statutes are repealed, the Board must require basic skills testing and Constitution coursework.

Recommendation 2: The Board of Education should establish a performance-based teacher certification system. Historically, it has been assumed that proficiency is demonstrated by successful completion of a number of university courses. However, the quality of university teacher preparation programs varies and some coursework may not be providing adequate practical experience and time for reflection. As noted in the report, some universities are using innovative approaches to teacher preparation, offering instruction and classroom practice simultaneously. If there were a formal mechanism for district feedback regarding graduates' performance, those universities would be quickly recognized for their successful endeavors.

A number of recommendations will be forthcoming from the SRC which would change the entire character of the certification process to one that is performance-based. The SRC will recommend that teacher preparation programs be based on the new teacher standards. It will also recommend that the State Board adopt assessments for content and professional knowledge for the issuance of a provisional license, and a performance assessment for the issuance of standard certificates. ADE will provide feedback to the universities and the public about their graduates' performance on the proficiency assessments.

As noted on page 6, the ADE has no authority over teacher preparation programs. In fact, creating and implementing a successful teacher preparation program requires the collaboration of universities, district employers, the ADE, and teachers as well as a focus on performance and continued research on best teaching practices.

Continual professional development is necessary and important. As student needs and population change, schools must respond with different teaching strategies. The SRC will recommend a program of continual professional growth that emphasizes:

- A beginning teacher support system, including mentoring and exposure to master teachers in the classroom

- Professional growth opportunities that include a wide range of relevant experiences such as professional seminars and workshops, district in-service, educational research, serving on an accreditation team, being trained as a teacher evaluator, serving in a leadership role of an educational organization, or university coursework in the field of education or a subject content area.

Recommendation 3: The Board of Education and ADE should, at a minimum, encourage continuing professional development of teachers by providing assistance and information to districts, particularly about professional development "best practices". The ADE intends to continue providing assistance and information to districts and to improve its communication to districts about professional development best practices.

FINDING II: ARIZONA COULD DO MORE TO ADDRESS DISTRICTS' NEEDS FOR TEACHERS

The report documents a problem which undermines the educational system not just in Arizona, but nationwide: unqualified teachers. Alleviating teacher shortages will require collaboration of **all** stakeholders. The SRC discussions confirm a mutual desire of the constituents to work on solutions.

As noted, the ADE will begin offering personnel assistance to certified teachers and districts through a clearinghouse as soon as the new computer system has been implemented. The ADE will take a proactive approach to helping districts find qualified individuals who are fully certified and it will collect and disseminate general information about teacher shortages.

As suggested on page 19, the State could help alleviate teacher shortages by offering tuition waivers for certain content areas and funding salary bonuses for the geographic areas that need the incentive to attract certified teachers. A Federal loan forgiveness program exists for teachers working in a district with more than 15% underqualified teachers, but not all graduates have loans to forgive. Salary incentives and tuition waivers should be the most effecient responses to the teacher shortage problem.

The SRC is considering ways to increase the options for alternative teacher preparation, but it is imperative that valid performance assessments are implemented before the program is expanded. If there is suspicion that some university-prepared teachers fall short of proficiency after two years of formal undergraduate training (page 6), one must also question how well novices can be prepared in a fourteen week district program. It may be that the reason there were only 49 people who were alternatively certified during the 1995-96 school year is that most districts do not have time, staff, or resources to provide extensive training for the career-changing individual. Training teachers diverts funding and detracts from their primary purpose of educating children. The Troops to Teachers program has had disappointing results, in part because districts have not been willing to employ people without formal educational preparation. Additionally, other states often do not accept certificates issued on the basis of alternative preparation. When credible performance assessments have been implemented, and teachers demonstrate proficiency before becoming certified, there will be far less concern about alternatively prepared teachers.

Universities are willing to provide career counseling into teacher shortage areas, but they need better information from districts and ADE regarding the number and location of vacancies. ADE will look for ways to increase communication about shortage areas. As suggested in the report, universities can also contribute to the solution by collaborating with districts to provide on-site or televised courses in needed subject areas. Additionally, districts will soon be able to request lists of qualified (certified) individuals when they have vacancies. The districts may be able to spot potential teachers in their community (page 20); they are not likely, however, to divert their stretched resources to providing them assistance in attaining a degree. Professional associations could contribute to the teacher shortage solution by recruiting out-of-state teachers.

FINDING III: ADE SHOULD CONTINUE EFFORTS TO SHORTEN THE CERTIFICATION PROCESS

The ADE is grateful for the acknowledgement of the substantial effort it has put forth in reducing processing time and improving customer service. As noted in the report (page 27), many of the processes have already been changed. The telephone script is more informative. Public information has been increased and made more accessible through training workshops, regional offices, universities, districts, and associations. Staffing changes have been made to improve accuracy and efficiency. Forms have been revised. Training manuals are nearing completion. Fingerprint cards are accepted ahead of the application to avoid delays. Imaging equipment has been purchased and implemented. A programmer has been contracted to design a database and automate as much of the process as possible. The phone system was improved to allow better access to evaluators. Most importantly, 57 rule changes were submitted to the State Board in May and the SRC is preparing many more to be submitted later this year.

In spite of all these efforts, the increase in work volume continues to remain a huge problem (see page 27). Increased efficiency and more automation will help, but the highly technical and analytical nature of the evaluation process requires human resources. Seasonal peaks are particularly difficult to handle. Thousands of applications arrive during the summer, all needing to be evaluated before school begins in August. While part-time seasonal staff help somewhat, supervisors spend considerable time training and monitoring their work. Permanent staff levels need to be increased to handle the 79% increase in applications since 1991. Additional seasonal staff should be added as necessary.

The ADE has prioritized the implementation of changes by an analysis of the cost and benefit, and as resources have allowed. The BPI debated at length the dualing influences of customer service and efficient processing. As customer service increases, efficiency decreases and the length of time to evaluate and process applications increases. While the Certification Unit could increase efficiency greatly by closing the Phoenix office to customers and decreasing telephone service, customer complaints would soar. The Unit continues to emphasize that all Certification business can be conducted by phone or mail, but some customers insist on driving to an office. Discontinuing personal service is not a reasonable solution.

The ADE is committed to making the changes that will continue to improve customer service and efficiency.

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