Introduction: Questions, Framework, and Meaning

This paper begins by raising four core questions related to standards alignment. After suggesting a framework for addressing each question, it delves into the roles and expectations of local, state, and federal governments. It then reviews standards alignment efforts of nongovernment organizations and suggests that education policy and expectations about alignment are muddled and contradictory because core issues of meaning, values, and outlook have not been addressed completely.

**Question One:** What is meant by standards alignment? Do teachers, principals, superintendents, school board members, state policymakers, teacher educators, members of the U.S. Congress, officials in the Bush administration, and others mean the same thing? How do definitions differ, and what do these differences mean for education policy in the United States?

**Question Two:** What are the roles of federal, state, and local governments on matters of K–12 standards, teacher education standards and licensure requirements, and can policy be aligned across these levels of government in a consistent manner? What roles do nongovernment organizations play in policy development?
**Question Three:** Does standards alignment automatically equal support for a national curriculum for K–12 schools or for teacher preparation programs? Related to this, does standards alignment imply a national examination for elementary and secondary school children or for individuals seeking a state teaching certificate or license?

**Question Four:** What policy dilemmas are embedded in alignment issues? How do these dilemmas affect teacher preparation policy? To what extent are these dilemmas a reflection of a fundamental tension between levels of government over control of education?

Spolsky (2004) offers an elegant framework for considering the language and vocabulary used to discuss policy. He suggests that to understand and create coherent policy language, one must consider generally accepted practices and question whether they are the same or different from place to place. It is especially important to examine the way individuals or groups of citizens speak about different issues. He suggests that only after practices and beliefs are considered thoughtfully can we move to the realm of management, where laws, regulations, and policy come into play.

For the present study, Spolsky’s model has been applied to the issue of K–16 standards alignment. Thus the first question is, **what is meant by standards alignment?** This question takes us to consideration of individual actions or practices, because the way we define terms like standards or alignment or accountability is influenced by personal or group roles and experiences. For example, an elementary school principal may worry about meeting the “adequate yearly progress” expectations in No Child Left Behind (NCLB). For that principal, alignment likely would be defined as the connection between the curriculum and teaching in her school and the state’s examinations for elementary school children. An education dean, on the other hand, might have as her primary focus the alignment between the teacher education program and state program approval standards.

Consideration of such varying assumptions and beliefs leads us into the highly sensitive area of individual and organizational values. The question of whether standards alignment should result in a national curriculum for
K–12 students or for teacher preparation programs is intimately connected to larger questions about the role of education, the purpose of schools, the nature of knowledge, and the responsibilities of local, state, and federal governments. There are deep divisions in the United States concerning all these issues. And while almost all education bills, laws, regulations, or policy options are now peppered with references to standards alignment, governments are not the only players in this arena. The role of various nongovernment groups in standards-related policy is significant as well because of the potential of these groups to influence government decisions.

Clashes of meaning and beliefs between and among education decision makers and stakeholders have created a series of as yet unresolved policy dilemmas. Because these dilemmas have not been carefully addressed, attempts to manage standards alignment through local, state, or federal policies have resulted in confusion and frustration in the education community and, to some extent, in the general public. This paper concludes with a review of these policy dilemmas and a consideration of the impact they are likely to have on future policy options.

What Is Meant by Standards Alignment?

A review of the literature, current federal policy, pending federal legislation, and reports in the media offers little in terms of a common definition of standards alignment. In fact, the term has a chameleoonlike quality, taking on the characteristics of whoever is writing about it and in what particular context.

Standards Alignment and the Research Literature

In a discussion of the many alignment issues that have emerged as a result of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), Ananda (2003, p. 7) supports a definition of standards alignment originally posed by Webb (1997): “the degree to which standards, assessments, and other important elements of an education system are complementary and work together to effectively guide student learning.” Since this definition is offered in an article about NCLB,
and since that law says explicitly that states will decide what examinations will be used to meet the law’s accountability provisions for K–12 schools, one might assume that Ananda’s definition is a useful description of all state alignment policies. The key issue, however, is whether this definition can be applied similarly in all states.

Gayler et al. (2004) looked at policies in 25 states and found that in 19 of them studies of the alignment of K–12 content and exit exams were either under way or had been completed. Their comprehensive policy review offers interesting anecdotal information suggesting wide variations in state expectations for students, including instances in which states align their tests for a particular grade with curriculum content from a lower grade. They determined that state K–12 alignment policies vary to such an extent that cross-state comparisons are not meaningful. Agreement about set practices of standards alignment is further complicated by differences in meaning at the state and local levels. Dutro and Valencia (2004) studied the relationship between state and local reading standards in school districts in four states. At the state level, all four states in this study seemed to agree that local and state standards should be linked. However, at the local level, alignment meant different things and assumed different forms from place to place. Alignment also had “different utility to districts, ranging from helpful to benign to nuisance” (p. 31). The authors conclude that “the evidence here points to multiple meanings of alignment and differential influence of state content standards on district reform” (p. 35).

Alignment seems to have an unclear meaning in teacher preparation programs as well. Most of the research on standards alignment focuses on the nexus of state standards, state examinations, and the K–12 curriculum. Except for the efforts of some individual institutions of higher education to align their teacher preparation programs with state requirements, for the most part the role of colleges and universities in K–12 standards alignment policy is not clear.¹ Speaking at the CATO Institute in 2001, the incoming deputy secretary of education, Eugene Hickok, observed that “secondary school math teachers should be taking the same courses that math majors take in math departments. . . .Content matters [.] and it matters a lot in a
standards-based environment” (Cato Institute, 2001). Thus one perspective on K–16 standards alignment suggests that the K–12 curriculum should be, if not aligned with the higher education curriculum, at least linked to it in a deliberate manner.

It is interesting to note, however, that in the Gayler et al. (2004) study of alignment in 25 states, higher education officials who were asked about K–12 alignment and assessments were most interested in secondary school exit examinations as a possible factor in college admissions and the question of whether the exit exam was a useful measure of a student’s potential for success in postsecondary education. They rarely commented on K–16 alignment or on alignment of teacher preparation with state standards. In 2000, Haslam and Rubenstein reported that approximately 20 states were involved in K–16 initiatives for the purpose of standards alignment and as a way to connect high school and postsecondary education, but many of these were small, fledgling efforts. For the most part, they found that in those states with clear K–12 standards, these standards were unrelated to the college and university curriculum. Connecting K–12 and postsecondary curriculum is not easy work, and they caution that “historically, America’s systems of K–12 education and postsecondary education have operated independently of one another, with each having its own governance system and politics, its own goals and objectives and its own institutional culture. Indeed, in some cases, K–12 and postsecondary education have even operated at cross-purposes” (p. 1). They go on to suggest that “improving preservice teacher education could be included on the postsecondary reform agenda. Improving these programs would entail aligning them with standards for student performance. . . . In addition, preservice teacher training would increasingly become a university-wide responsibility, involving faculty from the academic disciplines as well as from the colleges of education” (p. 5).

The research literature, then, provides little guidance on the meaning of K–12 standards alignment in the public schools because it means different things in different state and local contexts. In the higher education arena, two points of view do emerge: (1) K–12 standards should be used to
prepare students for postsecondary education and therefore should be linked to the higher education curriculum and/or (2) the higher education curriculum as it pertains to the preparation of teachers should be aligned with what is taught in K–12 schools. Despite this relative clarity, however, particular dilemmas for colleges and universities in the standards debate must be considered. For example, what are the implications of standards alignment policy for arts and sciences departments and the curricula they offer? Does the goal of K–16 standards alignment clash with university values of academic freedom? These and related issues will be discussed in a later section.

**Standards Alignment and Current Federal Policy**

Given the nationwide emphasis on education standards and accountability over the past 14 years, one might expect that the U.S. Department of Education would provide clarity on the meaning of standards alignment. This has not been the case. Entering the term *standards alignment* in the department’s search engine produces 500 documents, most of which relate to state, district, or institutional accountability or compliance with federal law (primarily NCLB or the Higher Education Act [HEA], Title II). The next most frequent reference occurs in guidelines for grant applications related to standards alignment. These guidelines contain detailed information on how to submit a grant or contract proposal and indicate whether awards are available for alignment between K–12 standards and assessments or for revising teacher education programs to reflect K–12 standards and assessments. Yet none offers a definition of alignment.

The lack of a federal definition notwithstanding, the connection between standards alignment and accountability is a strong theme in U.S. Department of Education materials. States are required under NCLB and Title II of HEA to report to the federal government each year on their attempts to align K–12 standards and assessments and on their reform of teacher licensure requirements. The secretary of education’s third annual report on teacher quality, *Meeting the Highly Qualified Teacher Challenge* (2004), reports that each state has engaged in some level of K–12 standards
alignment and that many have aligned teacher certification or licensure requirements with K–12 standards. Given the pressure of high-stakes reporting, it is not surprising that all states offer a description of ongoing or completed alignment efforts. But even the secretary’s report is not clear about what this alignment means. When presenting evidence of alignment between K–12 standards and teachers’ preparation in content areas, the Department of Education relies on states’ reporting whether or not teacher candidates must have a major or minor in the subjects they expect to teach or if they are required to pass a content-level examination—both of which are specific requirements of NCLB.

In considering the connection, if any, between these requirements and standards alignment, one must recognize that a college academic major or minor fulfills a graduation requirement of the particular institution, but it may or may not parallel the state’s K–12 standards and curriculum. Similarly, the presence of a content-based examination for teachers does not necessarily mean that the examination is aligned to the K–12 standards and content specific to, and defined by, that state. Assessing the degree of subject matter alignment between the K–12 curriculum and a state’s teacher licensure examination requires a separate analysis in each state, which the U.S. Department of Education has not attempted.

**Standards Alignment and Pending Federal Legislation**

In addition to NCLB, federal legislation introduced in the 108th Congress and the 109th Congress to amend Title II of HEA also addresses matters of alignment, specifically ways to hold institutions of higher education and teacher education units accountable for aligning their programs with state certification or licensure requirements based on K–12 standards and assessments. Four bills were introduced in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives. Of these (listed below) the first was passed in the House, but none became law:

- Ready to Teach Act of 2003 (H.R. 2211), introduced by Ohio Congressman John Boehner
• College Quality, Affordability, and Diversity Improvement Act of 2003 (S. 1793), introduced by Massachusetts Senator Edward Kennedy

• Capacity to Learn for all Students and Schools Act of 2004 (S. 2340), introduced by New Mexico Senator Jeff Bingaman

• Preparing, Recruiting, and Retaining Education Professionals Act of 2004 (S. 2335), introduced by Rhode Island Senator Jack Reed

There are differences among these bills, but they are quite similar on the matter of standards and alignment. Each proposes to hold institutions of higher education and their education schools, colleges, or departments accountable for the academic preparation and performance of teaching candidates. Although none of the bills specifically defines alignment, each suggests ways to align teacher preparation programs and teacher licensure regulations and examinations with K–12 standards and assessments. Yet despite these proposed strategies, all of the bills referenced above are evidence of how complicated and potentially elusive the goal really is. For example, each suggests that requiring an academic major for teacher candidates or a high level of competence in a “relevant” content area is evidence of K–16 alignment. Each encourages partnerships that include arts and sciences units in institutions of higher education. But none of the bills suggests holding postsecondary institutions or the proposed partnerships accountable for linking their students’ academic majors or minors to what is taught in K–12 schools.

The proposed amendments to HEA, Title II, combine strict demands for accountability and compliance with gentle cajoling in the form of federal funds that have been made available for projects that connect teacher preparation programs and K–12 standards. The difficulty is that the unit facing compliance requirements—the education school or college—has limited ability to leverage change in the subject matter preparation of teacher candidates, most of which takes place in colleges of arts and sciences. Arts and sciences departments may be enticed into entering into partnerships with schools of education and thinking about curricular
issues if federal dollars or grant funds are involved, but money alone is scant incentive for them to make broad changes in their curriculum. In fact, the very powerful pressures of promotion and tenure within these departments and their colleges and universities may make alignment with what is taught in K–12 schools a professional liability for faculty members. One of the Title II bills (S. 2340) suggests that licensure requirements for the “highly qualified teacher” designation (which is connected to completion of an academic major or the equivalent in a teaching field) be “consistent with relevant, nationally recognized professional and technical standards.” The idea that postsecondary education should be aligned with national content standards that are set at the elementary and secondary level is, to say the least, interesting. In some fields—such as the teaching of reading, for example—such a requirement would be highly controversial, since the standards themselves are a topic of debate in higher education circles. Furthermore, even aligning licensure requirements with nationally recognized professional standards might or might not ensure alignment with the K–12 curricular requirements in each state.

**Standards Alignment and the Media**

If the research literature, the U.S. Department of Education, and pending federal legislation do not offer coherent definitions of standards alignment, is there any clarification to be found in media reports on standards and assessments? The content and language of local, state, regional, and national newspapers can be accepted as reflections of what reporters think readers already understand and what they need to know. If reporters believe readers commonly understand a concept or phrase, they will not waste space in an article attempting to define it. To explore this line of inquiry, LexisNexis Academic was used to search U.S. newspaper articles from April to September 2004 (see Table 1). The search terms standards, alignment, and schools were used for full article searches. Those articles (33 in all) that turned out to be relevant to the topic of interest (i.e., concerned with the topic of educational assessment and alignment rather than subjects such as high school sports team alignment or coaches with high standards) could be organized into the following general categories:
• state or district officials interviewed about student achievement scores (high or low) indicated that the presence (or absence) of standards alignment was a factor in students’ performance at the state or local level;

• state or district officials interviewed about K–12 standards, assessments, and the school curriculum suggested that alignment helped account for students’ positive examination scores;

• state or local officials interviewed about aligning state standards and assessments said that such alignment was a goal, under consideration, or needed;

• several articles discussing standards alignment offered the reader some sort of definition to explain the concept; and

• two articles addressed the issue of higher education and alignment.3

### Table 1

Newspaper Articles on Standards and Alignment, April–September 2004

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<td>2</td>
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This exercise generated four findings. First, in spite of extraordinary attention to standards, examinations, and alignment by members of Congress, the Bush administration, and many state officials, during the six-month period reviewed, there was little media coverage of the topic. Second, no articles offered a definition of standards alignment, suggesting that reporters assume the reader understands what it means. Perhaps a common level of understanding exists in some communities, but it may be more likely that the meaning is whatever the reader believes it to be. Third, hardly any stories mentioned higher education, although one university system head discussed improving teacher education by linking candidate instruction to K–12 standards and one college president mentioned the need to align two-year and four-year college curricula. Finally, when student scores on a state examination improved, state and local officials tended to attribute the gain to alignment of the curriculum and the assessment; when scores remained constant or fell, officials were likely to say that further standards alignment was needed.

On this last topic of student scores, then, there was apparent agreement on this issue of alignment, although these conclusions are easily challenged and therefore remain open to question. Are raised test scores truly a function of better alignment between instruction and standards, for example, or do they come about because of pressure from school districts for teachers to “teach to the test”? Is student performance really a measure of alignment between standards and assessments, or is it a function of teachers’ skills? In other words, will perfectly aligned instruction result in improved student performance regardless of teachers’ skills? Or conversely, will highly skilled and knowledgeable teachers improve student learning even if K–16 standards are not perfectly aligned?

**Summary and Themes**

Clearly there is no nationally agreed-upon definition of standards alignment. The term carries different meanings at different levels of government, and the survey of news articles suggests that individuals use the term in different ways depending on the spin they want to put on reports.
of achievement gains or losses. It would seem that when there is an attempt to create policy without considering individual or group practice, issues come to mean what people think they mean in particular circumstances. Nevertheless, this review suggests that while there are no common definitions, there are some shared expectations for standards alignment, including the following:

- K–12 state standards and the local school curriculum should be linked to some extent;
- the local school curriculum should reflect the state's K–12 assessments (which may or may not mean that the curriculum is perfectly aligned with state standards); this expectation implies that alignment is a significant variable in improved student learning;
- K–12 standards knowledge should be embedded in teacher licensure requirements in the expectation that better understanding of the state's curricular standards and assessments contributes to a teacher's ability to teach to those standards;
- teachers should have appropriate content preparation or knowledge; and
- institutions of higher education, and in particular education schools, colleges, or departments, should be held accountable for all aspects of a teacher candidate's preparation.

What Are the Roles of Government and Nongovernment Organizations?

This section moves from the unresolved matter of defining standards alignment to the realm of citizen and organizational values or beliefs. Questions about the role of government in education focus on the issue of whether decisions about schools, what is taught in them, how children's progress is measured, and the manner in which teacher qualifications are determined should reside in homes, localities, states, or Washington, D.C. An additional layer of complexity to this question involves the growth of
nongovernment organizations that focus on standards development and regulation.

**The U.S. Constitution and the Federal Role**

When European settlers first arrived in what became the United States, governance of education was not on their minds. After a group of them eventually assembled to establish an overarching form of government for the first 13 colonies—and any future colonies that would join them—they focused on matters of immediate concern, such as safety, commerce, and citizen participation in decision making. Because the founders rejected government by monarchy, only certain powers for the federal government were included in the Constitution. In order to be sure that there was no confusion about the powers and authority of the president and the Congress, they added in the Tenth Amendment what came to be known as the “reserved powers” clause, relegating to the states all power and authority not otherwise specified. Thus, as the nation grew and citizens needed a mechanism to educate their children, local and state systems of education were established. It was not until the twentieth century that the federal government began to assume a noticeable presence in education policy, and arguably not until after World War II that the federal presence began to expand (see Cross, 2004, and “The Evolving Role of the Federal Government in Education,” this volume).

Because the federal government’s role in education has evolved, there was never a broad-based national debate on exactly what role various levels of government would assume in a system that had expanded to encompass preschool through postsecondary education. More fundamentally, there has never been a national conversation on three critical issues: (1) What is the purpose of education from preK through higher education in the United States, and is there agreement on this purpose? (2) How do various parts of the education system carry out that purpose? and (3) Who controls education policy and the resources necessary to enact it? Certainly decision makers and education stakeholders have raised these questions from time to time: In 1965, for example, when the first Elementary and Secondary
Education Act was passed; in 1978, when the U.S. Department of Education was created; and in 1998, when a group of governors held an education summit that advocated for a set of education goals. As important as these developments were, none reached the level of a true national debate carried on simultaneously at all levels of government and involving all citizens.

When the U.S. Department of Education was created during the administration of Jimmy Carter, Congress was very careful to use language that would limit the department’s potential intrusion into systems that were already in place in states and localities. However, Congress also needed to make it clear that the U.S. Supreme Court’s decisions in civil rights cases did give the federal government authority to deal with violations of the Fourteenth Amendment as they might pertain to schools and the education system. In addition, by the 1970s an array of programs was offering federal grants to states, school districts, institutions of higher education, and individuals for education purposes. Clearly it was important for the federal government to retain accountability for expenditures of federal funds. With these concerns in mind, Congress outlined the rationale for, and scope of, the U.S. Department of Education in the act that created it.

- Education is fundamental to the development of individual citizens and the progress of the nation;
- There is a continuing need to ensure equal access for all Americans to educational opportunities of a high quality, and such educational opportunities should not be denied because of race, creed, color, national origin, or sex;
- Parents have the primary responsibility for the education of their children, and States, localities, and private institutions have the primary responsibility for supporting that parental role;
- In our Federal system, the primary public responsibility for education is reserved respectively to the States and the local school systems and other instrumentalities of the States;
- The American people benefit from a diversity of educational settings, including public and private schools, libraries, museums and other institutions, the workplace, the community, and the home;
The importance of education is increasing as new technologies and alternative approaches to traditional education are considered, as society becomes more complex, and as equal opportunities in education and employment are promoted;

There is a need for improvement in the management and coordination of federal education programs to support more effectively State, local, and private institutions, students, and parents in carrying out their educational responsibilities;

The dispersion of education programs across a large number of Federal agencies has led to fragmented, duplicative, and often inconsistent Federal policies relating to education;

Presidential and public consideration of issues relating to Federal education programs is hindered by the present organizational position of education programs in the executive branch of the Government; and

There is no single, full-time Federal education official directly accountable to the President, the Congress, and the people.5

The limits of the federal government’s authority are unambiguous. Responsibility for education is vested in the states, and the federal government’s involvement is related to issues of equal access, accountability for the use of federal money, and gathering and sharing information. As Cross (2004) notes, there is a history of the federal government’s using its resources to encourage states to adopt rigorous standards for K–12 schools and for teacher licensure, but these efforts have been limited to providing funds for initiatives determined by individual states and local school systems. Without modification of the existing federal code, it remains beyond the scope of the federal government to impose one set of K–12 standards on each state.

**State Constitutional Authority for Education**

Theoretically there could be coherent national, if not federal, education policy if every state agreed to manage its education system in exactly the same manner. But state constitutions vary in terms of the amount of control a state delegates to localities. The Constitution of Virginia, for example, grants little authority to local school districts. The state board of education, with approval from the General Assembly, establishes standards for
K–12 schools. Members of virtually all education boards in the state are appointed by the governor, and it was only within the last decade that the Virginia General Assembly granted localities the option of electing members of their own school boards. By contrast, in Wyoming the state legislature may not pass laws providing for the management of common schools, and the constitution specifically prohibits the legislature or superintendent of public instruction from forcing schools to use particular textbooks. Nebraska, another state that embraces local control of education, has adopted curricular standards but not a state test, instead leaving matters of assessment to local schools (“Count Me In,” 2004, p. 141). Thus it is not surprising that there are differences in the content of states’ K–12 standards and the way these standards are assessed within the states. For that reason, any comparison of standards alignment across states is problematic (see Dutro & Valencia, 2004; Gayler et al., 2004).

The Influence of Nongovernment Organizations on Standards Setting and Alignment

Organizations exist in the United States devoted to promoting standards for virtually anything taught in a K–12 school: mathematics, history, science, social studies, geography, civics, reading, and so on. For the most part, these organizations focus on identifying content standards for a particular discipline, developing curricular materials related to the standards, and/or developing examinations aligned to their standards.

Several organizations have undertaken a broader mission to help schools or states implement a standards-based curriculum. One such group is the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC). Created in 1987 under the aegis of the Council of Chief State School Officers, the collaborative includes a number of education stakeholders, although it identifies state teacher licensure officials as the primary clients. The INTASC Web site describes the group’s mission as providing a forum to “learn about and collaborate in the development of compatible educational policy in teaching among the states, new accountability requirements for teacher preparation programs, new techniques to assess the performance
of teachers for licensing and evaluation, and new programs to enhance
the professional development of teachers.” Careful to acknowledge that
INTASC is not a decision-making group, the Web site notes that although
the organization has developed draft model standards, these are only one
possible resource for states.

A relatively new group, Achieve, Inc., was established by governors and
business leaders to help advance states’ K–12 education standards. Most
recently the organization was part of the American Diploma Project, an
effort to create a standards-based high school diploma. According to
Achieve’s president, Mike Cohen, the organization functions as a resource
for governors, business, and others. In addition, it organizes National
Education Summits and leadership forums (Education Daily, 2004b).

Resembling INTASC, and in some ways linked to it, is the Standards-Based
Teacher Education Project (STEP®), an attempt to align teacher licensure
requirements, teachers’ academic preparation, K–12 curricular standards,
and teacher education accreditation in selected states. A summary of this
project, written by the STEP coordinator, Diana Rigden, is included as
Appendix A. In it Rigden discusses this grant-funded project in detail and
notes some of the challenges associated with standards alignment across
the K–16 system.

Rigden’s description of the STEP project, in particular the institutional
vignettes, illustrates the challenges of standards alignment in selected
institutions in seven states. There is no question that the most challenging
aspect of standards alignment pertains to teachers’ knowledge of the
subject or subjects they will teach. A colleague who is a curriculum director
in a Virginia school district recently described the high teacher turnover in
the district’s schools. She attributed teacher attrition to the district’s policy
of recruiting new teachers from outside of Virginia. As a result, the new
teachers enter the classroom unprepared to teach the Virginia curricula,
which are closely aligned with state’s Standards of Learning examinations.
When students do not perform well on state tests, the frustrated teachers
look for jobs elsewhere. By contrast, she mentioned that a neighboring
school district, which deliberately recruits new teachers from Virginia colleges and universities, has significantly less teacher turnover, presumably because the Virginia institutions explicitly link their preparation programs to the state’s K–12 standards.

Although the STEP model may be a useful one in certain situations, it is important to note that the states involved in STEP are not for the most part states with a deep history of local control. Most entered the program with at least some history of earlier work to establish K–16 partnerships, all are partner states within the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), and all use elements of the Praxis series for their licensure examinations. Given that the seven project states in STEP are similar in certain key variables, it is possible for the project to offer them a common model for connecting teacher education programs, arts and sciences colleges, and state K–12 standards. It is not clear whether this model would work elsewhere. In addition, there is no evidence that STEP reforms would take root if external funds were not available. Dr. Rigden has also noted that the continued involvement of arts and sciences faculty in STEP activities has posed a particular challenge. Finally, the staying power of the STEP project will be known only after more time has passed.

Teacher education accreditation agencies have a unique place in terms of both setting standards for teacher education programs and determining compliance with them. Along with a state’s approval system for teacher education programs in colleges and universities, these agencies may be the entry point for changing the teacher education curriculum and in theory aligning it with state standards. All states have a mechanism for approving teacher education programs, and currently the federal government authorizes two organizations to accredit teacher education programs. The oldest, the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), reported in 2004 that 602 institutions were accredited, with 100 others in the candidate stage. NCATE is organized to include major education stakeholder groups and representatives of specialty organizations (generally, standards-setting groups) as part of its governance. Its purpose is to “determine which schools, colleges, and departments of education meet rigorous
national standards in preparing teachers and other school specialists for the classroom." The Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC), established in 1997, reports they have accredited seven institutions and 100 others have met eligibility requirements. TEAC expects the institutions it accredits to conduct periodic academic audits “based on the questions each program’s faculty asks about the program and its performance within the context of the program’s mission.” TEAC asks the institutions to present evidence of students’ learning, the validity of student assessment practices, and efforts to improve programs. Thus NCATE’s evaluations are based on a set of national standards negotiated among and established by the education organizations that are its members, while TEAC accreditation is based on evidence offered by a college or university supporting the institution’s claims about its students’ achievement.

Differences in approach between NCATE and TEAC have been the substance of debate within the teacher education community. Which is best? Is one better in some circumstances? Is one better in any situation? Can there be more than one organization that accredits teacher education programs? It may be useful to consider for a moment how other professions think about program accreditation. In the *Journal of Health Administration Education*, Steven Sundre (2004) discusses the importance of professional self-regulation to create and reach high standards. He claims that external regulation that measures solely how rules are followed “often results in a lessening of commitment to excellence, since only thresholds of program quality (‘lowest common denominators’) are enforceable across wide groups of programs and individuals” (p. 8). A related issue, raised by Strike (1997) in his discussion of K–12 standards, is that a centralized approach makes content more visible and possibly vulnerable to political influence. In a 2001 article discussing and defending TEAC’s accreditation system, the council’s president, Frank Murray, alluded to both of these points by suggesting that developing teacher education standards through a process of political consensus has actually resulted in a lack of consensus on what makes a high quality teacher education program.
Summary and Themes

While there is no doubt that the federal government’s authority over education is limited, its influence over what occurs in schools has increased since the 1950s. Nevertheless, when it comes to decisions about issues of curriculum and assessment, it is clear that states hold all the cards, except, of course, those they have dealt to localities. Various organizations have been formed for the purpose of establishing and promoting standards, and at least one organization, INTASC, and one project, STEP, are involved in helping states think about K–16 standards issues. The matter of teacher education standards is less clear. Debate about the merits of NCATE and TEAC may be more political than substantive, but it is important to acknowledge that promoting national standards in a system designed around and historically committed to state and local control of education is problematic. That is, even if there were universal support for national standards for teacher preparation, aligning these standards in a meaningful way with the curriculum content taught in each elementary and secondary school would be problematic. This is a difficult issue because it is not merely about management or which accreditation agency does what. Rather, all of these issues are rooted in local and state value systems and beliefs about control and governance of K–12 schools.

Does Standards Alignment Lead to a National Curriculum and Examinations?

Without question, the federal No Child Left Behind Act was intended to be a catalyst for debate on K–16 standards and their alignment. Yet the more compelling issue is whether the legislation was a deliberate strategy to promote a national curriculum and national examinations for K–12 schools, for teacher education, or for both. If nationalizing K–12 education and teacher preparation was indeed the legislative goal, is it politically and professionally realistic?
Are a National Curriculum and/or National Tests on the Horizon?

Passage of NCLB led to concerns that the federal government was planning to impose a national curriculum on K–12 schools and/or a national examination for children in those schools. Anxiety among many state and local decision makers, parents, and citizens over the possibility of nationalizing education reflects the societal conflicts over beliefs as discussed previously. Although the U.S. Constitution reserves for the states anything not otherwise specified in the document itself, over time, as Congress has imposed federal taxes and then made decisions about how to spend citizens’ tax money, voters have tacitly struck a deal with lawmakers. In the simplest terms, it is that we elect people who make policy and spend our tax dollars, including revenues allocated to education, according to the wishes of their constituencies. If they do not spend the money as we wish, we vote them out of office. This social contract has given the federal government an increasing, although still somewhat limited, role in education.

Does that mean that there was citizen support for the provisions in NCLB? Obviously the answer is no. The final work on NCLB was completed in the summer before and autumn after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States, at a time when few citizens or lawmakers were focusing on the details of federal education legislation. Even if citizens had been fully aware of all of NCLB’s details, the possibility of transferring responsibility for education from localities and states to the federal government might not have been immediately obvious. Perhaps in recognition of the limitations on the federal government, Congress included language specifying that nothing in the law is intended to usurp state law or the authority of state officials, to compromise the rights of private schools, or to establish or impose a system of national teacher certification.11

Despite these caveats, though, some believe that the federal accountability requirements imposed on K–12 schools and on institutions of higher education now may be nudging the nation toward a national curriculum.
The question before us is, have these legislative requirements been so designed, or are they simply the result of attempts to manage education policy without careful attention to meanings and beliefs? Whatever the motivation, the policy world is not stagnant, and pressure for nationalizing or even federalizing education may be part of its ebb and flow. Consider Kirst’s observation in 1994 that the rise of the standards movement reflected 30 years of lost confidence in the judgment of local schools and their capacity to serve students. He predicted that “by the end of the 1990s the United States will not have a detailed national curriculum like that of France in the 1930s, but we probably will have a nationwide curriculum and standards and subject matter frameworks” (p. 384). He further noted that implementing national standards will have complex tradeoffs. Kenneth Strike, writing in 1997, suggests a different perspective by posing three concerns: (1) Is centralized goal formation a threat to liberty? (2) Can the country have national or centralized goals and individual implementation? and (3) Do centralized, politically influenced goals subvert truth? In regard to the last point he writes, “The decision as to whether to teach biology or auto mechanics calls for a political judgment. However, the question of whether the theory of evolution is true is a question for biologists. Balancing interests is a political matter. The truth value of biological theories is not” (p. 7).

Is Consensus on National Standards Possible?

Wixon, Dutro, and Athan’s 2003 study of standards development points out that while content standards are intended to speak to what students should know in a particular discipline, they “are also ideological, reflecting values and beliefs regarding the nature of teaching and learning, and more generally, the purposes of education” (p. 69). As a result, achieving consensus on standards is not a straightforward process and consensus is not easily reached. In his introduction to a collection of essays on the composition, role, and findings of National Reading Panel, Allington (2002) also determined that politics, ideology, and beliefs were very powerful in framing the report of the Reading Panel and quieting opposition to its findings. Reading in particular has become highly politicized because
NCLB offers grants to states and localities to create reading improvement programs based on a specified approach. Scholars in reading and literacy contend that nonexperts are making political decisions not just about what to teach children, but also about how to teach children. They are also concerned that the federal government, through provisions in NCLB and findings of the National Reading Panel, is making decisions about what scholarship is valid and what is not. This controversy is essentially about who identifies and holds control over knowledge. According to the perspective suggested by Strike (1997), deciding whether to teach reading or something else may be appropriately a political decision, but deciding how to teach reading is a professional matter. If the federal government decides directly or indirectly what constitutes knowledge in a particular K–12 level discipline, and if future teachers are expected to be proficient in that content knowledge, what does this mean for the control that arts and sciences faculties have over their own curricula, and what are the implications for academic freedom?

Although there is no commonly accepted definition of standards alignment, those who reference it most frequently appear to mean the extent to which states’ K–12 curriculum and student assessments are linked. For NCLB this created a problem. Decision makers wanted to be able to compare student achievement from state to state but understood they had no authority to force any state to accept and use a particular examination. They came up with an intriguing, but less than ideal, solution: to require that states and localities receiving NCLB, Title I funds agree to participate in the biennial state National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) in reading and mathematics—and in that way provide decision makers a way to see if students are scoring roughly the same on their state examinations at grade levels and in subjects as on NAEP.\textsuperscript{12} NAEP has been in existence since 1969 and is known as the “Nation’s Report Card” because it tests a representative sample of students in various subjects at grades 4, 8, and 12. There are no real consequences associated with achievement on NAEP, so critics note that the scores may not actually reflect student knowledge. Nevertheless, NAEP data are used extensively to inform research and policy.
The use of NAEP to make value judgments about state examinations (a purpose, incidentally, for which it was never intended) and the fact that it is referred to as the Nation's Report Card have led to some interesting observations regarding NCLB and whether or not it is mandating a national examination through some sort of backdoor policy. Two conservative sets of views are found on the Web sites of the National Anxiety Center and the Heartland Institute. The National Anxiety Center exists to expose what it considers untruths in the liberal press and generally to criticize big government, so it is not surprising that comments on the Web site alert citizens about suspicions that NCLB and the NAEP are the advance guard of policies to impose national testing for students and by implication a national curriculum. Similarly, the Heartland Institute cautions readers about government intervention in schools through NCLB and NAEP and claims that such “government schools” are “islands of socialism in a sea of competition and choice.” Concern that NCLB is the next step toward federal or national control of schools has emerged from sources other than social conservatives. Discussing NCLB’s provisions and accountability, Elmore (2002) points out that states and localities have differing capacities to engage in school reform and that “school personnel must share a coherent, explicit set of norms and expectations about what a good school looks like before they can use signals from the outside to improve student learning” (p. 35). On the subject of how to improve student learning, he concludes, “The history of federal involvement in that long endeavor is at best mixed and at worst a failure. The current law [NCLB] repeats all of the strategic errors of the previous ESEA [Elementary and Secondary Education Act] reauthorization, only this time at a higher level of federal intervention. The prognosis is not good” (p. 35).

**States' Reactions to NCLB**

One of the first reactions to NCLB came from the National Education Association (NEA), whose officials announced in 2003 that they would sue the U.S. Department of Education on the grounds that the government was not providing sufficient funds to implement its provisions (Feller, 2004).
Although more than 30 state legislatures passed resolutions objecting to NCLB, no state decided to join the NEA's litigation. This does not mean that states were willing to accept the law's provisions. In California, a predominately Hispanic school district filed a suit in federal court claiming that NCLB had a discriminatory impact on Spanish-speaking children (Education Daily, 2004a). The fear that states would be held to NCLB requirements without sufficient funds to help schools meet them led to legal challenges from Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, and Georgia (Borsuk, 2004; Loviglio, 2004; Salazer, 2004). The Pennsylvania and Georgia suits are of interest because both involve school districts challenging the state for imposing NCLB's provisions on local schools. Both cases revolve around whether the state has developed sufficient capacity for school districts to make needed changes to meet the federal law's expectations. In Pennsylvania this pertains to the needs of non-English-speaking children, and in Georgia it involves the state's funding formula for poor rural schools.

**The Bush Administration's Response**

Criticisms of NCLB and misgivings among local and state decision makers over the extent to which NCLB intrudes on state and local rights have not gone unnoticed by the Bush administration. Consider the excerpts below from speeches and interviews with President Bush and members of his administration. Following a speech in Maine in 2001, President Bush was asked about whether NCLB would lead to a national test for K–12 students. He replied,

> I'm going to address that today. . . . The Governor and I talked about that. Maine has got a very strong accountability system. And it has enabled the publicly elected officials to address problems. When I talk about accountability systems, I talk about those developed by states and local jurisdictions. . . . I'm aware that there was some consternation about proposals that I'm working on with both Republicans and Democrats in the Congress. People remember when I was a governor and I wasn't particularly happy when the federal government began telling us what to do, particularly when it came to educating our children. And consistent in the plans that I'm working with the Congress on is that philosophy that we trust the local people.¹⁴
On January 8, 2004, Deputy Secretary of Education Eugene Hickok was interviewed on the Lehrer NewsHour. He indicated that the NCLB goal of disaggregating test data is intended to get information about where achievement gaps may exist, not to create a standard accountability system. “One size doesn’t fit all,” he said. President Bush may or may not have clarified the administration’s position on a national test for K–12 students in an April 6, 2004, speech in El Dorado, Arkansas:

I think all high schools ought to participate in what’s called the NAEP. The NAEP is a national norming [sic] test. It’s not a national test. It says, there is—they take the Arkansas test and they compare them to other states to determine whether or not standards are being met. That’s all it is. You need to know. Your Governor needs to know, the citizens need to know how you stack up relative to other places, if you expect to educate children for the jobs of the 21st century.

The matter of a national curriculum came up again in April 22, 2004, in Bay Mills, Michigan, when Deputy Secretary of Education Eugene Hickok stated that, “education will always remain a state and local issue, but the gradual nationalization of standards by the states, themselves, will have the effect of national standards without national standards” (quoted in Vert, 2004). Again on the question of whether there should be a national test, the former secretary of education, Rod Paige, responded:

Absolutely not. Matter of fact, we are resisting that. We’re operating inside the framework of the Constitution that we have, which makes this an individual state responsibility. And any state has the authority, indeed the responsibility, to define its own education system. It would be much simpler if it were a centralized system, but it is not. And so we’re operating inside the framework that we have. We think it’s a good framework. Our Constitution has done well for this country.

These comments document how members of the Bush administration are trying to support the provisions in NCLB, which appear to expand the federal role in education, while making it clear that they are not advocating a national curriculum or a national examination. It is possible that members of Congress and Department of Education officials wonder if NCLB has actually moved beyond a public policy comfort level. A colleague recounted to me a conversation with congressional staffers regarding a
proposed definition for “highly qualified” special education teachers. One of the staffers did not believe they could accept a particular definition being proposed because Congress does not want to federalize education (M. Gore, personal communication).

**K–12 Standards Alignment and Teacher Education**

The debate over NCLB and federal involvement in K–12 education influences higher education as well, but the impact is less direct. All aspects of education policy are connected to and influence all other parts, and the relationship between K–12 standards alignment and teacher preparation is both direct and intricate. State and federal decision makers understand that teachers need to be well versed in the subject matter that is taught in schools. There is agreement that teachers must also appreciate how the local school’s curriculum relates to state standards and assessments. Adjusting state requirements for a teaching license remains the policy tool most commonly used to offer a level of assurance that teachers have those skills. Yet, as noted previously, the secretary of education’s *Third Annual Report on Teacher Quality* equated teaching content expertise with completion of a college major or minor. Given differences in states’ standards and curriculum, as well as some degree of variation in how localities use state standards, is a college major or minor actually assurance that a teaching candidate is well versed in the subject she or he will teach? Is an individual who majored in history with a concentration in European history prepared to teach American history? Is a history major who specialized in the colonial America ready to teach world history?

As discussed earlier, there is considerable variance in education policy not only among states but also within states from school district to school district. There is no question that local schools want teachers who know content specific to the subject they will teach, but it is more important for them to be proficient in the curriculum specific to the school and state. While states have some control over an institution’s teacher education program, they have little or no leverage with arts and sciences departments. As a result, ensuring that a teacher’s knowledge matches a particular school’s needs is
not accomplished as easily as one might expect. These challenges for K–12 schools and the institutions of higher education that prepare teachers must be considered in the context of the debate about de facto nationalizing of education and the worries voiced by local and state decision makers.

Within this very uncertain political environment, NCATE has adopted a position supporting a national teacher licensure examination, which the organization believes will apply a “common yardstick” to teacher candidates. According to NCATE President Arthur E. Wise (2004), “there is much to recommend national norms on teacher assessments. Currently, state cut-off scores preclude a quick comparison of the scores of candidates in different states on the same exam. A national assessment will apply a common yardstick. . . [Since] the teaching field already has an assessment, the Praxis series, in use in many states, . . . why not just develop norms for the existing test?” The president of the Educational Testing Service (ETS), Kurt Landgraf, echoed this perspective in testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Education and the Workforce. According to Landgraf, “ETS is cooperating with the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) to establish a professionally recognized and defensible range of common passing scores on selected Praxis content knowledge tests. Doing so will make institutional accreditation decisions compatible from state to state, while recognizing local demand for and supply of teachers.” He went on to recommend that “states . . . re-evaluate their existing teacher licensure programs and begin raising the standards for entering the profession.”18 A third organization, the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) has weighed in on this matter as well. In a counterpoint to a USA Today editorial that questioned the idea of a national test for teachers, then AACTE president David Imig endorsed a national test for teacher licensure, stating that “uniform use of a national test would allow more appropriate pass-rate data reporting across states and institutions—as required by Title II of the Higher Education Act—and would enable policy makers and practitioners to measure and evaluate more effectively what and how well candidates are learning” (Imig, 2003).
The reasons put forward by AACTE, ETS, and NCATE in support of a national teacher licensure test are logical from their perspectives. Such an examination might provide evidence, for example, that a teaching candidate who passes the licensure test in Virginia is comparable to a teacher candidate who passes the same test in Missouri, thus facilitating teacher mobility. But there are still unresolved questions, such as whether either candidate would be familiar with and able to teach the curriculum in Virginia, Missouri, Texas, South Dakota, or elsewhere. Arguably, if all teachers took a common licensure examination, an abundance of data about their characteristics and qualifications would be available. We could look at teachers’ backgrounds, where they went to college, possibly their SAT scores and undergraduate GPAs. On its face, the issue of convenience for school districts might appear to be a potential upside of a national teacher test. Yet the unresolved quandary is whether and to what extent the national examination could be aligned with each state and, more important, to the curriculum in each school district. A national examination for future teachers might be desirable from the perspectives of ETS and NCATE, but among other stakeholders a clear hesitancy emerges in regard to federalizing or nationalizing K–12 education and teacher licensure requirements. If states and localities feel strongly about retaining control over education decision making and want teachers who are highly qualified to teach to their unique curriculum, and if federal policymakers acknowledge that they support state and local control, organizations that support a national test for teacher licensure may be swimming against the political tide.

**Standards Alignment and Academic Freedom**

Academic freedom has a strong tradition in colleges and universities in the United States. Although academic freedom does not give faculty unfettered rights, it ensures that institutions of higher education remain a marketplace of ideas (Pullin, 2004). One of the central tenets of academic freedom is the autonomy of each faculty member in his or her own classroom. Insofar as standards alignment implies accountability of faculty and colleges to state or federal governments, the movement for alignment, or even the ideal of alignment, may be seen as a potential threat to autonomy and therefore to
academic freedom. Thus “the recent press to reform teacher preparation programs presents a challenge to faculty members’ views that they should have autonomy to make independent determinations about curriculum, course content, and grading with limited interference by their employing institutions or by the government. Many faculty also are concerned about what appears to be a new quest for orthodoxy in research, theory, and practice in the field” (Pullin, 2004, p. 302).

In the field of teacher education, state pressures in regard to program approval, licensure requirements for teachers, and accreditation (particularly as a requirement for state recognition of a college or university’s teacher preparation program) have already eroded a measure of academic freedom. This has not been challenged in the courts, although Pullin (2004) observes that historically courts have found that freedom of speech is not absolute and that at times the interest of the state in supporting a broader common good takes precedence (p. 306). Extending this line of reasoning, a faculty member hired to teach science methods in a teacher licensure program might not have the right to teach creationism if the state’s public schools required the teaching of evolution. Or conversely, the science department faculty at a university with a teacher preparation program might find their scholarship curtailed if the university was located in a state whose science curriculum had adopted creationism. Admittedly this latter example is extreme, because the argument could be made that the science curriculum in the university would be helpful for teachers planning to move to other states where evolution is taught. But pushing this issue even further, what would be the impact on academic freedom of a national K–12 curriculum in science that was developed through political consensus at the national level?

One option is to offer separate science, mathematics, language arts, or history courses for future teachers. This option, of course, is even more controversial. Questions about the academic pedigrees of teachers have been raised and debated for some time in the research literature (Monk, 1994; Wilson et al., 2001.) Clearly, decisions by state governments to require academic majors for future teachers were a response by policy makers to
concerns that teachers would not have deep understanding of the content they would be teaching. Thus, creating a separate collegiate academic track for persons who plan to teach would be counter to the current policy tide. Moreover, creating a separate content curriculum for teachers would not alleviate potential anxiety among arts and sciences faculty over academic freedom as it pertains to decisions about collegiate-level course content. At the center of these debates is the question of who controls knowledge. Is knowledge the outcome of professional research and consensus or a reflection of decisions made in the political realm?

A related problem, as Pullin (2004) points out, is the potential role of corporate interests in the creation of knowledge. Pullin warns that one of the strongest proponents of centralized teacher education is the Educational Testing Service, which owns and publishes the Praxis teacher licensure examinations. This poses an interesting issue of possible unexpected consequences of a national teacher licensure examination. Would the use of a privately owned examination have the effect of moving national education policy from the public to the corporate world? What would be the impact of a national examination on faculty in arts and sciences as well as in education if they were expected to align their curriculum with a privately owned test?

**Summary and Themes**

For the most part, local, state, and federal decision makers favor a form of standards alignment that results ultimately in increased student test performance. Implied by this goal is the need to identify teachers who have not only completed academic majors but also know the K–12 curriculum well enough to teach it. However, given the hesitancy among many in the policy world to equate standards alignment with a national curriculum for K–12 schools, a political or professional drive to establish national standards and assessments for teacher licensure is unlikely in the near future. In addition, the goal of hiring quality teachers may be broader than that of simply finding candidates who have a thorough knowledge of content taught across the United States. It may be just as important, or even
more important, to educate teachers who will have the necessary skills and disposition to teach diverse learners within the context of the school and state in which they work. Moreover, efforts to centralize teacher education must be considered within the context of whether such actions would clash with the very strong university values of academic freedom.

**Unresolved Policy Dilemmas**

A review of the murky area of standards alignment has unearthed more policy dilemmas than it has resolved. All of these dilemmas are in some measure the result of attempts to establish a system of standards alignment that have not been preceded by close attention to the core values and beliefs about the purposes of education, the roles of local, state, and federal governments in overseeing education, and the ways alignment can and should work in practice. The problems that follow are offered as issues worthy of further debate and discussion.

The nation does not agree on the purpose of education and how local schools serve that purpose. As education became established as the responsibility of localities and states, different purposes for schools emerged from place to place. These purposes may include preparing individuals for the workforce, helping children understand their responsibilities as citizens, promoting certain cultural values, and so on. Without widespread agreement on the purpose of education, do attempts to align standards across the states conflict with differing expectations and values?

NCLB is interpreted differently by different constituencies. As Spolsky (2004) suggests, meaning is based on individual or group circumstances or practice. When NCLB was written, insufficient attention was given to the ambiguity of key provisions and the possibility or likelihood that they would have different meanings in different situations. In addition, NCLB was written and accepted before a level of common understanding had been reached about the relevant issues. For example, a widespread, shared definition of standards alignment would require political compromise at the national or federal level, and this has not been achieved. Whether in a practical sense such a definition could even be feasible remains an open
question, since this would require a common set of standards that would be both broad enough and nuanced enough to satisfy all the different constituencies—teachers, superintendents, governors, education deans, and the parents and guardians of schoolchildren.

**State and local differences are greater than expected.** Attempts to document standards alignment as well as implementation of NCLB have shown that local and state differences may be greater than expected. Smoothing out these differences might lead to efficiencies in data collection, textbook selection, teacher assessment and the like. But efforts to standardize school, district, and education systems must confront values and beliefs about where the authority for education resides. Each state has established through its constitution and/or legal code processes for determining what will be included in the K–12 curriculum and how it will be measured. The fact that a certain textbook may be approved for use in multiple states does not mean that the book is used in the same manner in every classroom and school. Nationalizing the K–12 curriculum—and by extension teacher preparation requirements—would require that states change not only their education statutes but in many cases their constitutions as well.

Even within states there is substantial diversity from community to community. In October, the *Washington Post* reported that membership in local Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) was declining and that parents were forming local parent-teacher organizations instead (Paley, 2004). When interviewed for the article, parents who were involved in these alternative organizations noted that they were unhappy that a portion of their PTA dues was being used to advance state or national policy agendas and that they preferred to pay dues to support activities in their local school or community.

**Accountability and Alignment are used interchangeably.** It is appropriate for governments to impose expectations when they provide funding through grants, such as grants to state education agencies or partnerships to implement revisions in teacher preparation standards and programs. It is equally reasonable for a unit of government to expect accountability
from those over whom it is charged to provide oversight. The difficulty arises when the notions of alignment and accountability are used interchangeably. Although accountability and alignment may be connected, alignment requires that multiple parties modify behavior and/or policy. In reality, alignment is a collective responsibility rather than an activity of an individual unit (government or other). As such, alignment needs to include all relevant parties and to provide a mechanism for adjusting the system when any one part changes. The real conundrum is whether a system of standards alignment can work when only one of the parties involved in the alignment system (i.e., teacher education programs) is subject to sanctions-based accountability.

**Will standards alignment collide with academic freedom?** Arguably, challenges to academic freedom as they relate to state program approval of teacher education have not been taken too seriously within universities. The right of the state to impose standards on education schools or departments has a certain logic, because for the most part people who take education courses plan to teach in the state’s public schools. However, any state attempt to leverage change in the arts and sciences curriculum is a much larger issue. There are very powerful academic norms and beliefs in colleges and universities about how knowledge is developed and disseminated. Faculty members in arts and sciences colleges are rarely rewarded for adjusting their curriculum so that potential teachers will have academic majors or minors aligned with K–12 standards. To the contrary, the promotion and tenure system for faculty is grounded in the creation and refinement of knowledge in a specific field or subfield. There is the option, of course, of developing English, history, science, or mathematics courses in arts and sciences colleges just for future teachers. However, there would be little incentive for faculty to teach them, and such courses might open the institution to the criticism that it was providing future teachers with watered-down instruction.

**Political versus Professional Consensus.** As decisions move from localities to states to the national level, it is more likely that decisions will be made by political consensus. The problem is not when issues that belong to the
political world are handled in this manner, but rather when matters that ought to be decided by professionals—such as the appropriate way to teach reading to fifth graders in rural South Dakota—are moved out of their hands and into the political realm.

**Conclusion**

Policy decisions about standards alignment are speeding down the policy superhighway and no one is wearing a seatbelt. Fundamental questions about the role of government, the purpose of schools, the locus of control, the goals of alignment, and the relation between all these matters and teacher preparation have not been carefully considered. Instead of moving full speed ahead, it may be time to pull over to a rest area, take out a map, and make sure we know where we are headed.

**References**


Spolsky, B. 2004. “Does the U.S. need a language education policy, or is English enough?” Bowen Lecture in Education Policy, George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia, September 8.


Notes

1. Attempts to create an aligned K-16 system have occurred in individual colleges and universities and individual states. These efforts, such as the grant-supported STEP program, are discussed in greater detail later in this paper.

2. Dr. Hickok was Undersecretary of Education in 2001.

3. One article concerned a principal accused of inflating achievement data so that the school would appear in positive light when reporting “adequate yearly progress” under NCLB. The other involved criticism of a virtual school’s curriculum because it was too aligned with a “controversial” curriculum used in another state.

4. The second question—that is, how do various parts of the education system carry out that purpose?—is explored further in Earley (2005).


7. STEP project states are Delaware, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, and Virginia.

8. STEP was launched with funds from the Carnegie Foundation; in Virginia the effort is supported with funds from the state’s federal Teacher Quality Enhancement Grant.


10. See www.teac.org.

11. It is now common for federal education legislation to include caveats of this kind; this may indicate concern among some lawmakers that they are perilously close to overstepping federal role.

12. NAEP relies on a random sample of students in terms of grade and subject, so participation in NAEP means that a state or school district agrees to be part of the pool from which test subjects are drawn. NAEP assessment levels and areas are proposed by the federal government. The examinations are administered and scored across all states by a federal contractor.


Appendix

Building Liberal Arts and Teacher Education Collaboration Around Academic Content Standards

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Ideally, new teachers arrive at their first classrooms with a broad knowledge of the liberal arts. They know mathematics, science, history, literature, and the arts with a fluency that allows them to make quick connections between the subject at hand on any given day and those ideas and events that both shape the subject and are shaped by it. A teacher’s job, after all, is to guide students to understand the past, contribute to the present, and anticipate the future. It is to engage and challenge students’ minds as they develop the intellectual tools they need for the future. The job of a teacher preparation program that graduates teachers and a state that licenses teachers is to ascertain and certify teachers’ knowledge of the subject and their teaching ability.

The K–12 academic content standards, created by disciplinary groups and adapted by individual states, guide curriculum and testing programs in virtually every state. Since their adoption in the early 1990s, these standards have dramatically upped the ante not only on what is taught and how it is taught but also on what teachers must know to be effective. Consider, for example, some of the things that a nine year old in Mississippi is supposed to learn and be able to do by the end of fourth grade:

- explore concepts of two- and three-dimensional geometry;
- learn about probability and the process of data analysis and prediction; add and subtract fractions with like and unlike denominators;
- learn the interaction of bodies in the solar system;
- discover the effects of external forces on the Earth’s surface;
investigate the different forms of energy and the changes in states of matter;

• select, use, compare, and convert different systems of measurement;

• discover the interdependencies of economics;

• explore the meaning and responsibility of citizenship in a state and nation;

• read, analyze, and respond to challenging literature; and

• demonstrate knowledge of grammar, mechanics, sentence structure, and standard English.

Keeping these specific academic goals in mind—and they by no means exhaust the list of academic standards for the fourth grade—consider what the education of elementary teachers in Mississippi needs to include in order for them to be successful in teaching a class of 25 nine year olds. How will teacher preparation programs ensure that teachers master the content knowledge outlined in academic standards for the subjects they will teach? Who is responsible for making sure that graduating teachers know what they need to know? These questions drive many of the national pronouncements and reform projects encouraging faculty in the arts and sciences to join actively in the preparation of teachers.

Since 1997, the Standards-Based Teacher Education Project (STEP®) has challenged institutions of higher education to improve teacher preparation by strengthening requirements, courses, and assessments to ensure that graduating teachers have solid content knowledge and effective strategies for teaching the subjects. The goals of the project are closely aligned to the expectations of both national accreditation and state approval standards, and its success rests on three elements:

• Project leadership. STEP requires the involvement and oversight of the deans of education and arts and sciences and expects the leadership of senior faculty in managing the project.
• Project activities. Each STEP campus forms working committees of faculty from the arts and sciences, education, K–12 schools, and community colleges in key disciplines. These committees align the courses and requirements of teacher education with K–12 academic content standards and teacher licensure standards; they discuss the scholarship of teaching in the disciplines; and they establish an evaluation process for collecting data to assess candidate content knowledge, teaching skills, and ability to improve student learning. These exercises and discussions provide the stimulus for changes to strengthen the teacher preparation program.

• Project expectations. STEP requires frequent reports on the progress of changes initiated by the project and provides feedback and direction. It expects campuses to demonstrate that their entry and exit standards, course requirements, and the content of courses in both general education and the disciplines enhance teacher knowledge and skills. It also expects the entry, interim, and exit assessments to reveal how well teacher candidates master subject area knowledge and teaching skills and to demonstrate teachers’ ability to improve student learning.

Twenty-five campuses in five states have completed their formal three-year commitment to STEP, and ten campuses in Mississippi and Virginia are currently participating in the project. A new relationship of shared responsibility has been fostered between faculty from the colleges of education and arts and sciences on most of the STEP campuses, and in many cases this relationship was formalized into a new university structure. STEP facilitated the campuses’ process for engaging in an ongoing analysis and review of the teacher preparation program in light of academic content standards and teacher licensure standards.

From the start of this initiative, STEP has emphasized that its role is to provide guidance and technical support to campuses as they respond to state and national mandates. STEP helps them do the work they have to do. About one-third of the campuses, however, participated in STEP without incorporating the goals of the project into their teacher preparation
programs, so that after three years there was little beyond a short report to show for their work. The difference in the effectiveness of STEP on these campuses had to do with both project leadership and faculty commitment.

It is not in the best interest of professors of history, mathematics, physics, English, and other arts and sciences to become serious partners in teacher education. Their responsibility is to their discipline, and their rewards, tangible and intangible, come when they enhance understanding and exploration in the discipline. While teacher preparation programs benefit from the focused attention of their colleagues in the arts and sciences, it is not clear what arguments are compelling enough to inspire their sustained involvement.

The ambivalence, even hostility, of the arts and sciences to teacher education is reflected in the 2003 annual report of the American Council of Learned Societies. In his president's report, Francis Oakley outlined activities of the past year and reconfirmed the mission of the organization. He challenged members to revitalize their advocacy for the humanities and social sciences and to recognize that battles they have launched within their own disciplines have undermined the efficacy of their subject areas. The fault line, he writes, should be more correctly identified as running between the preprofessional studies and the liberal arts. Preprofessional studies—such as teacher preparation—are task-oriented, focused on means and ends, promote functionality and application, and, in Oakley’s words, “threaten to colonize human consciousness.” By contrast, Oakley writes, “study in the liberal arts penetrates by reason the structure of the natural world and evokes the dimensions and significance of the beautiful. Through the liberal arts one can reach an understanding of what it is to be human—of one’s position in the universe—and of one’s relations with one’s fellows.”

Mr. Oakley’s assertion that study of the liberal arts should be kept pure from the functional, applied world of the professions—an assertion that finds support among a wide range of arts and sciences faculty—is what STEP (and other reform efforts like it) seeks to challenge directly. For teachers,
study of the liberal arts is the bedrock of their work—it is the “stuff” that they are expected to know and expected to teach their students. But even knowing the content well—being an exceptional liberal arts student—is not sufficient for future teachers who must also learn how to translate the content for students in the K–12 classroom. Colleges and universities must be prepared to reshape the priorities and relationships in higher education so that the responsibility of graduating knowledgeable, skilled teachers is shared by faculty in the arts and sciences as well as in education.

The K–12 and teacher education world is one of policies and regulations. These policies are established by commission reports, state and federal mandates, standards, accreditation agencies, and so on. A policy is stated and then it seems that those setting the policy expect a miracle to occur: All teachers become highly qualified; all children learn; all schools are high performing. Those who educate new teachers stand at the nexus where policy meets reality and must define the pathways to get to the ideal “there” from the real “here.”

A compelling case exists for arts and sciences/teacher education collaboration. What most people know from common sense has finally been confirmed by research: teachers make a difference in whether students learn or not; what teachers know matters—or, to put it in more specific terms, teachers who know their subjects are more effective in promoting student learning. Student learning—in another example of the profession’s catching up with commonsense expectations—has become, once again, the purpose of schooling.

The policies and regulations that have emerged from this “new” educational focus on teacher knowledge and student learning include:

- **At the national level:** tougher standards for accreditation that require evidence of content knowledge and content pedagogy;

- **At the state level:** tougher standards for teacher licensure, including higher scores on the content licensure tests, and program approval that (like national accreditation) requires evidence of content preparation;
• **At the district level:** tougher accountability policies for student learning that reflect directly on teacher knowledge and performance.

This is the “task-oriented, applied, functional, focused on means and ends” world that Oakley warns “threatens to colonize human consciousness” and swamp the liberal arts. This tension between the scholarly, academic world of the liberal arts and the pragmatic, functional world of the teaching profession threatens to overwhelm commonsense suggestions of those commission reports and reform mandates that arts and sciences and teacher education work together. Fortunately, however, there are many examples of campuswide collaboration that can be held up as models for other colleges and universities.

• **Working together to create and teach new courses.** When the state of Georgia initiated more rigorous content standards for middle schools, the Georgia State University STEP science subcommittee created an integrated three-course science sequence for middle grades teachers. With the support of the provost and vice president for academic affairs, faculty members from physics, chemistry, geology, biology, and science education designed inquiry-based curricula, laboratory activities, and student assessments based on the applied theme of understanding everyday science in and around a house. The scientists designed a course sequence that integrates the disciplines but each semester highlights the main concepts of at least two disciplines and features a number of subthemes. The classes are team-taught by the science faculty with pedagogical input from the science education faculty, and students have the opportunity to explore the relationships among the various branches of science with the professors. While incorporating the curriculum standards for middle grades teachers, the courses extend beyond these standards to provide future teachers with a solid science content base and interactive, inquiry-based instructional strategies.

• **Formalizing a university structure to promote collaboration.** The University of Georgia established the Deans’ Forum to support
ongoing dialogue among a selected group of faculty leaders in both the Franklin College of Arts and Sciences and the College of Edu-
cation who had common interests in the future of higher educa-
tion as it relates to state and national agendas. Coadministered by
the deans of the two colleges and supported by the provost and
vice president for academic affairs, the Deans’ Forum holds meet-
ings to discuss potential forms of collaboration among the faculty
members of the two colleges, ways to improve the knowledge and
practice of teaching at the university, and possible incentives for
exceptional teaching. The membership remains balanced between
the two colleges and members serve a three-year term; new mem-
bers apply or are invited to join. One of the first positions taken by
the Deans’ Forum was the declaration that “The College of Educa-
tion, Arts and Sciences, and P–12 teachers share responsibility for
teacher education and are responsible for collaboration within pro-
grams.” The Deans’ Forum provides leadership and guidance to
STEP activities at the university and was instrumental in creating a
three-campus coalition called GSTEP that has expanded and deep-
ened reforms in teacher preparation and professional development
in the state.

- **Establishing a routine process for linking content and pedagogy.**
  As part of its involvement in Project 30 (a national effort promoting
  arts and sciences/teacher education collaboration), Millersville Uni-
  versity (Millersville, Pennsylvania) created “pedagogy seminars”
  to supplement regular courses in the arts and sciences and to help
  future teachers identify and analyze the teaching techniques used
  by their professors. The one-credit seminars, team-taught by an arts
  and sciences faculty member and a member of the teacher educa-
  tion faculty, challenged students to reflect on their own learning
  and to consider how to translate subject-matter content for student
  learning. This model has not only strengthened teacher preparation
  but has also led to an increased awareness among faculty of the
effectiveness of their teaching strategies.
These and other campuses have strengthened the arts and sciences membership in existing Teacher Education Councils, established standards in core general education courses for all undergraduates, hired faculty in the disciplines who have research interests in how the discipline is taught and learned, and included arts and sciences colleagues in supervising field experiences of teacher candidates. Examples such as these offer support to those colleges and universities intent on improving the quality of the teachers they produce. They also illustrate the need for strong leadership from deans and administrators as well as the willingness of faculty to explore together how to make the college preparation of teachers rich in both discipline-based knowledge and in pedagogy.

References


