



California Council on Teacher Education

CCTE Statement on RTTT

The California Council on Teacher Education (CCTE), in its Policy Framework, calls for, among other points, (1) educational policy at all levels to be informed by research, best practice, and experts in the field, (2) multiple and alternative approaches to educational assessment and evaluation which are valid, unbiased, and relevant to teaching and learning, (3) recognition that education, including teacher education, is an intensely interactive and highly individualized activity requiring stable and adequate financial and personnel resources, (4) fostering public and political support for education at all levels, pre-K to university, to assure an equitable commitment of financial resources to maximize teaching and learning, and (5) recognition of the critical importance of valuing and continuously affirming cultural, linguistic, and ethnic diversity throughout education and society.

For the past several years CCTE has been deeply disappointed that the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation has consistently and significantly failed to meet the above policy criteria, but instead has been based primarily on input from the business community and other non-professional education sources, has relied heavily on the use of dogmatic standards and high stakes testing to the detriment of creative and individualized teaching and learning and counter to any equalization of services to all students, has distributed available funding as a reward for meeting such standards and for success on such tests rather than in response to the greatest local needs, and has pushed incentives for privatizing educational activities rather than bolstering public support for schools, teachers, and students. As a result, the gap between the most and least successful schools and students has widened, specifically to the detriment of those in the less affluent and the most ethnically segregated schools and communities.

CCTE's disappointment has now been further heightened as the initial educational policies of the Obama Presidency, in the form of the Race to the Top (RTTT) initiative, are leaning ever more in directions counter to effective and constructive educational policy. RTTT increases reliance on high stakes testing, moves to unfairly and invalidly tie such test results to evaluation of teachers and schools, builds even further a policy structure that rewards those who are already doing well with no attention to those schools and students in the greatest need, and offers yet further incentives to privatize educational activities. The primary rhetoric of Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, referring to RTTT as a "competition," clearly reinforces the focus on rewarding those states that can show already strong programs while ignoring those in the greatest need.

More specifically, the concerns of CCTE about RTTT stem from the fact that student achievement, currently measured in California through the California Standards Test and the California Achievement Test, is on its own an insufficient measure of any teacher's abilities, skills, or knowledge because of multiple variables among students in California classrooms. The RTTT requirement that at least 95% of students be tested would result in a range of scores including English learners and children with disabilities, further confounded by the widely varying school demographics across the state. Graduates from any single university find employment in many different schools and school districts representing communities with widely differing resources. A teacher employed in South Los Angeles, whose students are primarily Latino, low-SES, and English learners, will experience very different student test outcomes than a teacher employed in nearby Pacific Palisades, where students are mostly White, middle to upper class, and native English speakers. To quantify the success of these teachers using their students' test scores is

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statistically unfounded, personally unfair, and educationally unwise. To then seek to link that data back to the institution where the teachers were prepared is a further illogical step.

CCTE members and our educational colleagues at all levels across California are committed to preparing high-quality teachers and to tracking their classroom outcomes to further improve teacher preparation programs. Such programs across the state are already required to collect and analyze data from candidates, graduates, and their employers, and to demonstrate how this information is used to improve program practice. The California Teacher Performance Assessment and the Performance Assessment of California Teachers are two assessment systems currently in place, embedded in preparation programs that measure candidates' knowledge about teaching and skills in the classroom. Rigorous state standards are used to develop and evaluate preparation programs, and a recently reformed state accreditation system ensures that all preparation programs are meeting or exceeding these standards. The California approach to evaluation of teachers in preparation and new teachers on the job is already robust and effective. The directions sought in RTTT would only confuse and compromise that effectiveness.

While CCTE applauds the four educational goals stated in the RTTT Executive Summary, the proposals, procedures, and activities which otherwise comprise RTTT are not consistent with nor appropriate to accomplish those goals. CCTE finds the federal policy directions of NCLB and RTTT to be detrimental to students, teachers, schools, and the future of public education in the United States. We call upon the Obama Administration to rethink national education policy to bring it into line with the President's promises of an America that is open and available to all, and that allows and encourages creativity, individualism, and success for all students, all teachers, and all schools. This will not occur through high stakes testing, dogmatic standards, invalid attempts to tie student performance data to teacher effectiveness, privatized education, or rewards only for those who have already succeeded; rather, it will occur through increased funding to those schools and students most in need, smaller class sizes, special attention to the needs of educationally at risk populations, teachers free to teach as the professionals they are rather than in response to scripted curricula, and students finding joy in creative learning.

CCTE also calls upon the California Legislature and Governor to resist the ill-advised appeals and policies of RTTT and to cease current efforts to bring our state into line with RTTT criteria, since such actions would serve to re-orient our state's schools, classrooms, teachers, and students in unwise directions. Instead, we call upon California's political leaders to seek as quickly as possible to reinvest in public education at all levels, with special attention to at risk student populations, for our state will rebuild its economy and grow strong again in the future only if our public schools, from pre-K through graduate school, are once again the best in the nation and in the world in service to all children.

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by the CCTE Board of Directors