Teacher Quality in Nevada
Kim K. Metcalf, Dean
The College of Education
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
May, 2014

The quality of teaching and teachers in the U.S. has been the subject of conjecture, debate, and political dialogue since the concept of a free, public education for every child became a reality in this country more than two centuries ago. The intensity of the conversation has, however, increased greatly in the past 20 years, and it has become particularly contentious in cities served by large, urban school districts.

In this regard, Las Vegas and Clark County, and even the state of Nevada are not alone. Concern over the quality of public education and the comparative performance of Clark County students on standardized measures of achievement (e.g., the National Assessment of Educational Progress) rightly turns to the effectiveness of teachers and, by extension, to the rigor of the preparation these teachers receive. As the single largest producer of teachers in Nevada, the largest producer of advanced Education degrees in the State, and the institution from which CCSD recruits over 98% of graduates each year, the College of Education at UNLV has a particularly important role to play in ensuring the quality of Nevada’s teaching force.

There are many important and highly respected entities that rigorously examine and evaluate the quality of teacher education programs and the effectiveness of their graduates. Most notable among these is the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education. This organization is held responsible by the U.S. Department of Education for holding institutions that prepare educators to accepted standards of quality. In addition, every state, including Nevada, imposes strict standards, regulations, and accountability measures on the institutions that prepare teachers for licensure within its borders. The College of Education at UNLV meets and generally exceeds all of these commonly accepted professional and state standards. In addition, many of our programs are accredited by specific and independent professional organizations that require very high standards associated with their specific discipline.

Nonetheless, and despite its nearly universal rejection by all respected professional and licensing agencies, the National Council on Teacher Quality will release its findings on the quality of educator preparation programs across the U.S., and its own media machine will kick
into high gear to draw public attention. The poor quality of the methodology used by NCTQ has been routinely noted and criticized, as it should be. However, equally troubling is NCTQ’s use of a set of completely idiosyncratic and self-developed standards against which to assess programs. The standards do not match or even align with those developed and rigorously imposed by even the harshest, credible critics of educator preparation. As such, it is somewhat akin to determining the winner of a foot race not on the basis of who was faster or who crossed the finish line first, but rather on the length of the runner’s shorts or their shoe size. For these reasons, when asked to participate by NCTQ, our College politely declined.

Detailed data on the quality of the dozens of professional programs offered by the College of Education at UNLV are available from a variety of sources. However, because the NCTQ report is likely to effectively draw public attention, we conducted a self-analysis of our programs against the NCTQ standards available for each. Importantly, even against these somewhat arbitrary and unique standards, the evidence suggests that our programs compare quite favorably. The results of this analysis can be viewed by following the links provided below.

On every metric applied by recognized professional and governing authorities at the state and national levels, the College of Education performs at and generally well above the established criteria. This includes both our traditional and our alternative licensure programs across disciplines and our advanced (graduate) degrees for professional educators. In addition, surveys of our graduates and their employers conducted both by the College and, independently, by CCSD indicate very high perceptions of the quality of our educator preparation programs. In the most recent set of surveys, over 90% of graduates and employers indicated that UNLV had “significantly and positively contributed” to the success of the teachers. Still, we are acutely aware of our role as the leading provider of Education professionals in the State. We are proud of our contributions, but we are equally committed to continually examining our programs and improving the quality and effectiveness of our graduates.