Agenda Topic: Basic Skills Assessment of Teacher Candidates

Materials: “Illinois Perspectives on the Basic Skills Test for Teacher Certification”, a report of the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory

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Purpose of Agenda Item

- To present the findings of the NCREL study regarding basic skills assessment of new teachers.

Expected Outcome(s) of Agenda Item

- Board directive to staff to initiate changes to the requirement for the basic skills testing of candidates for teacher certification.

Background Information

In October 2000, the Board requested agency staff to identify and review existing teacher assessments for the purpose of identifying a more rigorous basic skills test to be required of candidates for initial certification.

In response to this request, and following a meeting of the Governor’s Task Force on Teacher Quality, the State Superintendent requested the North Central Regional Education Laboratory’s (NCREL) assistance and recommendation in the identification of the most appropriate basic skills test. In February, 2001, NCREL reported to the Board on some of its initial findings related to the study.

NCREL has completed its study, a copy of which is attached. The study focused on three basic skills assessments currently in use—the Praxis I, the CAAP, and the recently developed Illinois Enhanced Basic Skills test.

The results of the study do not clearly support any one of these three tests, and conclude, “Our interpretation of these results does not lead us to believe that any one of the three tests currently being considered by the State Board of Education would satisfy all of the main concerns of those interviewed.” Rather, the report suggests that the
ultimate decision for which of the basic skills test to use rests with the State Board of Education.

Dr. Ray Legler, Program Associate with NCREL's Center for Data Systems and Development will be present to discuss the findings with the Board.

**Analysis and Implications for Policy, Budget, Legislative Action and Communications**

**Policy**

As reported by NCREL, the decision of which basic skills test to use rests appropriately with the State Board of Education. Also, as found in the study, none of the three tests reviewed meets all of the criteria desired in a basic skills test. Therefore, the Board must consider the purpose of the assessment and the criteria that are most important for the test to meet.

The purpose of assessing a teacher candidate’s basic skills is simply that—to assess whether a candidate possesses the basic skills necessary to perform successfully in the classroom. It is not an assessment of an individual’s content or pedagogical knowledge. Neither is it an assessment of the individual’s ability to teach. Other assessments and requirements are, or will be, in place to assure a candidate’s content knowledge and teaching ability.

Additionally, the NCREL study raised the issue of alignment with Illinois standards. Because Illinois’ new comprehensive assessment system will include assessments of common-core knowledge (aligned with the Illinois Professional Teaching Standards and the language arts, technology and special education standards for all teachers) and assessments of content knowledge (aligned with the Illinois Teacher Content-Area Standards), the necessity to have a basic skills test which is explicitly aligned with these standards is negated. Alignment to Illinois learning standards and consequently teacher standards will be addressed via these other assessments.

It is unlikely that the basic skills of reading, writing and mathematics necessary to be an effective teacher in one state differ significantly from those skills needed to be an effective teacher in another state. Therefore, the Board should consider whether the benefits of the use of a state-specific basic skills test may be outweighed by the benefits that can be accrued from requiring a test used by several other states.

Two apparent benefits of use of a more widely used basic skills test are comparability and portability. Comparability provides us the opportunity to compare scores of Illinois candidates to those of teacher candidates in other states. Portability provides for movement from state to state. That is, if a candidate has successfully completed an assessment of basic skills for certification in another state, those scores could be accepted when seeking certification in Illinois.
Another issue raised in the study is the timing of the basic skills test requirement. NCREL found an “overwhelming majority” of respondents favored requiring the test prior to admission to the teacher education program. This finding supports the Board’s previous endorsement of requiring the test for teacher education candidates. The Board however, qualified that endorsement proposing a conditional admission for candidates who are initially unsuccessful on the assessment, affording them an opportunity for remediation of their deficient skills.

**Budget**

None

**Legislative Action**

Requiring basic skills assessment at time of admission to the teacher education program may require legislative action.

**Communications**

It is critical that applicants for certification receive timely information on any change in the required assessment. Institutions of higher education will also need to be immediately informed of changes in requirements.

**Pros and Cons of Various Actions**

Requiring a nationally-normed test in lieu of a state-specific basic skills test should facilitate the movement of teachers to Illinois from other states—teacher candidates will not be required to “re-demonstrate” their basic skills.

Requiring the same test as that used by several other states will permit the comparison of the performance of Illinois candidates to those of other states.

Requiring the basic skills assessment at time of admission to teacher education programs will ensure early on that candidates for teacher certification have the requisite basic skills.

Conditional admission of candidates who are initially unsuccessful on the test would allow them opportunity to begin their preparation program while seeking remediation of their deficiencies.

If a nationally-normed assessment is used, the cost, content, and administration of the basic skills test will not be under the control of the State Board.

**Superintendent’s Recommendation**

The Superintendent recommends that beginning July, 2003, the Board require candidates for teacher certification to demonstrate their command of the basic skills by successful completion of a nationally-normed assessment that promotes portability and will allow for comparisons of teacher candidate performance across the nation. The
Superintendent further recommends that this assessment of basic skills be required prior to admission to an Illinois teacher education program, with conditional admission being afforded teacher education candidates who are initially unsuccessful on the test.

**Next Steps**

The Superintendent and staff will report back to the Board in September regarding appropriate actions, i.e., administrative rule changes, notification of candidates, etc., to effect this change.