In this report we present a summary of the issues associated with the statutory requirements of a Standard Teaching Certificate examination by July 2003. This summary is intended to inform discussions and subsequent actions by the State Superintendent and his staff as stated in the Committee Purpose, which was established prior to our first meeting:

1. Identify key issues associated with the statutory requirement of a Standard Certification examination by July 2003, the Illinois context for such an examination, the State Board’s endorsement of a “portfolio review” as a “primary strategy” for the Standard Examination, and the relevant experiences of other states.

2. Develop recommendations to the State Superintendent regarding the direction to be taken by the State Board in relation to this statutory requirement.

In a series of four whole group meetings and two smaller working group sessions held during June – September, it became clear that while there were many consensus points (discussed below), there was and is one essential and currently irreconcilable point of contention: the question of whether there should be any high stakes assessment of teachers during their third or fourth year. Many argued for such an assessment, others argued for a low stakes documentation of professional growth. We, therefore, bring this to the fore of our report because this lack of agreement pervades all subsequent discussion.

SEAC Membership and Procedures

Members of SEAC were appointed on the basis of their expertise, stakeholder group representation, diversity, and interest in the project. Stakeholder groups included higher education, business representatives, union members, regional and district administrators, novice teachers, state board staff.

Because several previous committees had addressed issues related to induction, assessment, standards, and the concept of a developmental approach to teaching in Illinois, those documents were distributed to the group to be read prior to the first meeting. They were also referenced at that meeting, but the group did not spend extended time discussing previous reports. These included: The Illinois Framework For Restructuring the Recruitment, Preparation, Licensure and Continuing Professional Development of Teachers (1996); Illinois Legislation – P. A. 9548 and P. A. 90811; Assessment Advisory Panel Final Report (1999); Illinois Induction Advisory Panel Final Report (2000); and the Illinois Professional Teaching Standards (1997).
At each meeting the co-chairs encouraged all committee members to present all significant points of view, be open to the variety of views and positions identified, and be prepared to discuss these items in an appropriate manner. Over the course of the discussions, all positions were respected and all comments presented in the spirit of necessary examination of the issues. The representation of a variety of stakeholders’ beliefs related to the Standard Examination were explored and, where possible, agreement across groups was identified and shared back with the group for confirmation. There was significant and wide-ranging discussion at each SEAC session. Illinois State Board of Education staff acted as an excellent resource for a variety of topics under consideration. These included certification issues and licensure programs in other states, reflection on the variety of “portfolio” contents, statistical information related to the numbers and types of Illinois certificates acted upon, and an assessment of the spring 2001 legislative session.

Meeting notes were taken at each whole group session. These notes were not edited under most circumstances and were intended to be running records of the discussion. In most cases they were e-mailed to the entire group so that members who had missed a meeting were able to keep informed.

The following contextual issues were discussed at great length by the Committee members. Even though SEAC has little control or influence on the items listed below, the Committee is aware that these items will continue to exert significant influence on the final determination of the component(s) of the Standard Certificate examination. There were differing views on how and if these factors affect the Committee’s recommendations. Some committee members felt that the factors limited what the Standard Teaching Certificate assessment should be, while others felt that they should be acknowledged, but should not limit what we propose.

1. The impending vacancy in position of State Superintendent.
2. The eventual election of a new Illinois Governor.
3. Unlikely availability of funding from Illinois General Assembly for new projects and activities unless a strong coalition of stakeholders, all standing behind a stated proposal, is able to influence the General Assembly in the “veto session” or in the spring session of the legislature.
4. Lack of funding for previously proposed activities such as a state structured mentoring/induction program.
6. Current teachers’ and administrators’ attitudes toward the newly implemented recertification process.

At each whole group meeting, the Committee was asked, informally, to identify consensus points. These were summarized in the meeting notes. The points of consensus that held across meetings are discussed in the next section, as are the points of contention. By the end of the third meeting, it became clear that as new people joined the group, even though they had access to notes, the discussion proceeded in a cyclical manner with few concrete
suggestions or proposals coming forward. At that point the co-chairs asked a subset of the group to meet and begin to draft proposals so that written documents might serve as a concrete base for continued discussion. Members included Richard Laine, Zanele Sibanda, Bernie Ferreri, Catherine Shannon, Clay Marquardt, Susan Shea, Renee Clift, Bob Gerry, Lee Patton, and Frank Llano.

Two Conceptions of the Process of Attaining a Standard Teaching Certificate

Two proposals, coming from this smaller group, accurately reflect many of the consensus points, but they also sharpened the differing perspectives participants brought to the discussion. Both of the proposals are attached to the end of this document, but they are briefly summarized below:


This proposal is aligned with the teacher re-certification system in that it requires the new teacher to participate in continuing professional development activities, which might include participation in mentoring and induction programs; participation in a university based master’s program for novice teachers; and compiling a professional portfolio. New teachers would write plans and would accrue Continuing Professional Development Units in these and the other activities listed in Section D. The plans would be monitored by Local Professional Development Committees, just as they are for senior teachers. The acquisition of these credits qualifies a candidate for the Standard Certificate. If the candidate does not acquire the necessary credits, the candidate will not receive the Standard Certificate.

There was a great deal of discussion about this proposal. Consensus settled on some, but not all, of the purposes identified and the inclusion of a mentoring program, a university master’s program, or a portfolio component as choices for activities for new teachers. There was disagreement over the quality of the documentation that would say that new teachers met criteria, how this would be judged and by whom, and the concept of these items as “optional” items among others included in Section D of the Value Manual, and with the concept that the Local Professional Development Committee would “sign off” on the candidate’s completion of the required activities.


This proposal calls for a new teacher to self assess current knowledge and skills with a mentor and to develop a continuing professional development plan to meet those needs. The plan (not the self assessment) would be shared with the principal. Over three years the teacher would follow this plan. In the third year...
teachers would engage in a performance-based assessment to document that they meet the Illinois Professional Teaching Standards. In addition, the plan calls for a three year pilot of a portfolio assessment, which would be used to inform capacity building for a statewide implementation. The portfolio would be reviewed by peers (meaning other teachers, but not novice teachers) at the end of the third year. If the portfolio / performance documentation is unsatisfactory, the candidate may have time remaining in the four-year period to revise and complete problematic areas. If these problems are not resolved, the Standard Certificate is denied. The proposal does not call for full implementation in 2003, but for pilot testing of portfolio assessment in some districts prior to full implementation.

There was a great deal of discussion about this proposal as well. There was agreement that the support of a mentor in the first year was desirable, but disagreement over the involvement of the principal. There were many questions about this being an unfunded mandate and about the necessity of support beyond the first year. There were also concerns about how the assessment process would occur in the third year, about who would actually do the assessment, and if the assessment would actually improve teaching quality. Participants also raised questions about the nature, form, and cost of assessments that would be used in districts not choosing to pilot test portfolios and prior to full implementation of a portfolio system.

In the small group meetings, the proponents of each proposal did not wish to compromise on some melding of the two, and so both proposals were put before the larger group. When both proposals were shared with the whole group, it became clear that a compromise was not only impossible, but that many members felt that it was undesirable. At that point the co-chairs, in consultation with the Illinois State Board of Education staff, decided that further whole group meetings were not likely to be productive. Given the rapidly approaching deadline of July 2003, we decided to write this summary and to bring it to the attention of the State Superintendent and, if he so chooses, the State Board of Education. The remainder of this report is a summary of consensus points that held across meetings and concerns raised about one or more of the proposals.

**Consensus Points**

1. WHATEVER the process of obtaining a Standard Teaching Certificate may be, those who are currently first, second, and third year teachers should not be expected to undergo requirements that are thrust upon them at the last minute.

2. WHATEVER the process of obtaining a Standard Teaching Certificate may be, the state must encourage and, if possible, help fund a system of support for novice teachers, including mentoring/induction programs.
3. WHATEVER the process of obtaining a Standard Teaching Certificate may be there must be safeguards to protect beginning teachers who choose to work in the most challenging and stressful school cultures.

4. While under an Initial Certificate, a teacher should participate in professional development activities. These should relate to beginning teachers’ needs and to state standards for learning and for teaching.

5. Documentation of professional growth should not be unduly burdensome to the candidate, nor to other teachers.

6. A system for supporting and assessing novice teachers should enhance knowledge and skills in the certificate-holder’s areas of certification, endorsement or teaching assignment and expand the certificate-holder’s knowledge and skills in classroom behavior management techniques, learning styles of at-risk students or students from low performing schools, parental involvement, and in working with students from diverse cultures and students with special needs.

7. The programs and activities designed for new teachers should be an important component of a systemic conception of continuous professional growth from the pre-service program through the early years of teaching through continual professional development to Master Teacher (NBPTS) certification.

8. A pencil and paper test, particularly a multiple-choice test, is not an appropriate assessment of professional growth.

9. Portfolio assessment should not be undertaken unless there is a statewide, state-supported induction and mentoring program first.

10. The local administrator’s evaluation of a teacher, as required by state law, and the decision to grant a Standard Teaching Certificate should be completely separated.

11. Certification is a state responsibility, not a district responsibility.

Lack of Consensus

The following points are not elaborated upon, but are simply statements over which there was significant disagreement. SOME ARGUED FOR ALL OR PARTS OF EACH STATEMENT; OTHERS AGAINST.

1. A high stakes assessment is necessary because there is no guarantee that universities are recommending qualified teachers for the Initial Certificate or that administrators are dismissing unqualified teachers. We must augment the current system with a separate and high stakes assessment.
2. A high stakes assessment will discourage teachers from teaching in high poverty schools or challenging classrooms.

3. Without a high stakes assessment, there will be no vision of what certification in Illinois can become; we will be mired in the past.

4. High stakes assessment will exacerbate the teaching shortage.

5. A high stakes assessment will drive districts toward providing induction and mentoring programs.

6. Given all the issues and projects that are competing for state funding, additional funding for induction and assessment is not likely.

7. Local Professional Development Committees feel that they already have too much to do.

8. Certification decisions and/or recommendations should not be made by principals or other administrators at the local district level and should not be mixed up with the evaluation process.

**Significant Issues Raised by the Discussions**

The following points are general questions raised by the discussion. They do not take into account the suggestion that there be pilot studies of portfolio assessment or any other forms of assessment. Many argued for a period of time to collect information relevant to each point, but no consensus was obtained about the scope, nature, duration, or funding of any pilot programs or evaluations of other assessments. We note that one aspect of our charge was to identify things we may not know.

1. At this point, we do not know enough about the process, outcomes, costs, and benefits associated with *mandated* portfolio assessment. Data are beginning to be available from states like Connecticut and North Carolina that have begun to implement a portfolio assessment for beginning teachers. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) portfolio should not be the sole source of information for an Illinois development process because it is more rigorous than necessary for beginning teachers; it was specifically designed for very experienced teachers, and all who submit NBPTS portfolios are volunteers. We do not know enough about what the impact of a requirement to produce a portfolio will cost teachers, districts, or the state.

2. At this point we do not know enough about the costs associated with second tier assessment in general, not only in terms of money but in terms of time, emotional
stress, and the disincentive to enter or remain in teaching. Many people felt that Illinois does not have the resources or capacity to conduct portfolio assessments on a statewide basis in the near future.

3. At this point we do not know who should play a role in making any final decisions about eligibility. There is considerable apprehension about which entity will have such a significant responsibility – the principal, the LPDC, the regional offices, the unions, a portfolio evaluator (or committee), the state agency itself, or a combination of any of those named.

4. At this point we do not know enough about the legal implications of denying a certificate based on one or more assessment activities, particularly if a teacher has received strongly positive annual reviews.

5. At this point we do not know about the resources and capacity that are necessary or available to implement a major assessment initiative that would lead to a Standard Certificate. Capacity includes identifying and training the necessary educational staff to provide for the components of the assessment. Resources include financial as well as human from all levels of the teacher professional development process – the candidate, the teacher preparation providers, all institutions of higher learning, school district administrators, regional offices, unions, especially supervisors, and related Illinois State Board of Education staff and organizations.

6. At this point we do not know if it would be desirable to develop a transition plan that would enable pilot studies of various forms of assessment, plus the time to learn about other states’ evaluations of their assessments, in order to make decisions based on data from a wide variety of sources.

7. The State Board should consider moving, or possibly eliminating, the July 2003 deadline and should work to develop guidelines in time for teachers with an Initial Teaching Certificate to meet the new deadline.

Minimum Recommendations

Our recommendations are based solely on the consensus points identified above.

1. The State of Illinois should not implement a paper and pencil assessment leading to the Standard Teacher Certificate.

2. The State Board should move quickly to inform people in “the pipeline,” meaning those who are currently teaching on an Initial Certificate.
3. The State of Illinois should give priority to providing support to initial certificate holders through opportunities for relevant professional development and for learning from and with experienced teachers (mentors).

Appendices

SEAC Membership List


Sibanda/Laine/Ferreri Proposal – Standard Teaching Certificate Assessment Implementation Plan (Plan B)

Nordstrom / Tozer Letter