

Teacher Certification: Out-of-Field Teaching in Grades 7-12

by James E. Woolford and Susan M. Presti

In the fall of 1981, the North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research released a report called Teacher Certification: Out-of-Field Teaching in Grades 7-12. Based on data from the Department of Public Instruction's Division of Certification, the report found a high number of instructors in North Carolina teaching subjects in which they had no previous training.

The Division of Certification, which cooperated fully with the Center's investigation, also evaluated certification problems in 1981. In the summer, the Division proposed regulations on certification standards and on August 28 held a public hearing on these proposals. At that hearing Center Director Ran Coble released the preliminary findings of the Center's report. In his testimony, Coble revealed the high rate of out-of-field teaching in grades 7-12, highlighted shortcomings in the proposed regulations, and offered recommendations for improving the new rules. The State Board of Education, the body that establishes standards for public schools in North Carolina, did not take action on the certification proposals at its September 2, October 8, or December 3 meetings. The proposed rules on teacher certification are part of a package of teacher

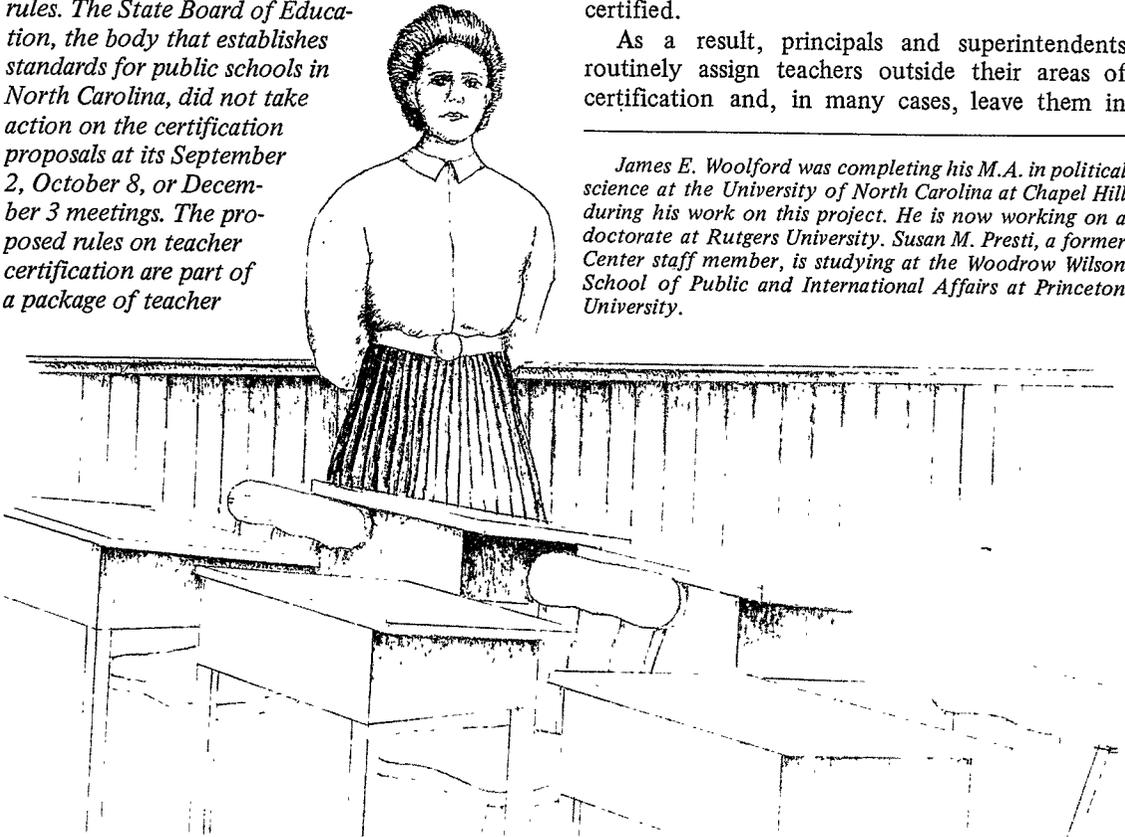
improvement plans called the Quality Assurance Program. The Board plans to consider these proposals at its February meeting.

The article below is excerpted from the Center's 60-page report. The box on pages 50-51 contains the recommendations presented at the August 28 hearing. To order copies of the full report, which includes statewide data broken down into local school districts, use the enclosed card (cost is \$4.00).

Teacher certification is the principal mechanism a state uses to assure the public that teachers have received the minimal training necessary to teach in a subject area. North Carolina, like all other states, requires that a person must be certified in a specific subject area before teaching in the public schools. The state does not, however, demand that a person teach the subject for which he or she is certified.

As a result, principals and superintendents routinely assign teachers outside their areas of certification and, in many cases, leave them in

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Percent of N.C. Teachers Out-of-Field in Grades 7-12

Reading	60.1%
Math	37.3%
Science	30.4%
Health	23.8%
English	22.5%
Social Studies	16.6%
P.E.	15.8%
Foreign Language	8.8%

Source: N.C. Center for Public Policy Research

“out-of-field” assignments permanently — a process that causes the mental and physical well-being of students to suffer. While not guaranteeing high-quality teaching, a certificate does ensure that a teacher has some background, training, and knowledge in a particular area. Without that training, a teacher is much more likely to be

ineffective in the classroom. And untrained teachers in a physical education or science class may even precipitate or aggravate a physical injury.

Out-of-field teaching for grades 7-12 is a widespread problem in North Carolina. An analysis of the 1980-81 teacher certification records maintained by the state Department of Public Instruction and the Professional Personnel Activities Report (PPAR) submitted by local school districts revealed the following:

- Over 60 percent of those teaching *reading* classes did not hold reading certificates.
- Over 37 percent of those teaching *math* did not have a math certificate. Most of the out-of-field math teachers were certified in science or social studies.

- Three out of ten *science* teachers lacked the proper certification for the classes they were teaching. Out-of-field teaching was most prevalent in grades seven through nine.

- One out of five health instructors did not have *health* education certification. For health, sex education, and family education classes (i.e., excluding joint health education-physical educa-

Recommendations

The North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research recommends the following policies to decrease the rate of out-of-field teaching in North Carolina, to make post-graduate teacher training programs more meaningful, and to improve the Professional Personnel Activity Report:

Decrease the rate of out-of-field teaching:

- 1) Teachers should be certified or provisionally certified in all subjects they teach.
- 2) When a teacher is assigned to an area in which s/he does not have a certificate, the teacher and the local superintendent must jointly file for a provisional certification. The application must be sent to the Division of Standards and Certification.
- 3) a) While holding a provisional certification, a teacher must complete the equivalent of six college credit hours a year in course matter related to the subject in which s/he has been assigned until the minimum requirements for certification in that subject have been met. A minimum of 24 semester hours, including at least one teaching methods course in that subject, should be required for a certification.

b) If no college within 60 miles of a teacher's workplace has an approved program in

his/her area of provisional certification, the teacher may work with the superintendent, officials in the Division of Standards and Certification, and representatives from colleges with approved programs in the subject area to design an in-service/home study program that will meet the minimum guidelines outlined in (a).

- 4) If necessary, superintendents and teachers may jointly file for an emergency certification from the Division of Standards and Certification. This will be granted only if the Division decides the school system has an emergency personnel problem that cannot be met in any other way. Emergency certifications are temporary and will expire at the end of the school year in which they are issued. They cannot be reissued in consecutive years to the same teacher or to a different instructor teaching the same course schedule that was covered by the previous emergency certification.

- 5) The current DPI provision allowing occupational education certificate holders (16 NCAC 2H .0217) to teach out-of-field will be deleted from the administrative code so that occupational education certificate holders will abide by the rules outlined above.

- 6) If a school system is in violation of these guidelines, the state shall take the following actions:

a) First year — issue a warning to the

tion classes), two out of three teachers were out-of-field.

- Although there is a reported surplus of *English* teachers, more than one out of every five instructors teaching English was not certified in English.

- Overall, persons certified in *social studies* taught out-of-field more often than any other group. (Persons holding social studies certificates were the primary out-of-field teachers in four areas: math, English, physical education, and health. They were second in the remaining areas: science, foreign languages, and reading.) Despite this, there was a high level of out-of-field teaching in social studies classes: One out of six social studies instructors did not hold the proper certification.

- *Physical education* is another area of reported oversupply, yet almost 16 percent of physical education instructors lacked the proper certification.

- Approximately nine percent of *foreign language* instructors were out-of-field. This was the lowest percentage of any subject area surveyed.

Federal budget cuts in education could exacerbate the out-of-field teaching problem. If reduc-

tions must be made in the number of school personnel, the most recently hired teachers will be the most likely to lose their jobs. Laying off first, second, or third year teachers may deplete the low supply of teachers certified in reading, math, science, and health — the subjects that now have the poorest record in out-of-field teaching. The reading and health areas could be hit the hardest since the state has issued these certificates for less than ten years.

In August, the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) proposed new regulations that attempt to address the problem of out-of-field teaching. The proposed regulations require that any person teaching a subject for more than half of the school day have either certification or provisional certification in that subject. Any person teaching a subject less than 50 percent of the time must have what DPI calls an “endorsement” or “provisional endorsement.”

Although a step in the right direction, the proposed regulations have at least five weaknesses (see box on pages 50-51 for recommendations regarding these problems).

- 1) They do not define what will constitute a

superintendent and school principal.

- b) Second year (if the school is still in violation) — issue a reprimand to the superintendent and principal. These reprimands will be included in the administrators’ personnel files.

- c) Third year — withhold state money from the local school system based on the following formula: Every child in a class taught by an out-of-field teacher will not be counted in the school’s overall average daily membership figures for the purpose of obtaining state money under the State Public School Fund.

- 7) a) The state should increase its appropriations for staff development; LEAs should be required to use the increased appropriations to help defray the costs to the teacher of pursuing an additional certification.

- b) If additional staff development monies are not appropriated, the teacher shall be granted administrative leave with pay so that s/he can complete the necessary coursework to obtain certification. Such administrative leave shall not be counted against the annual leave, sick leave, or vacation days due that teacher, and the school system shall be responsible for securing substitute teachers for those days.

Make post-graduate teacher training programs more meaningful:

- 8) College teacher education programs should work more closely with nearby LEAs to develop

more effective teacher training programs and to improve job counseling of prospective teachers. In addition, colleges and LEAs should develop two-way in-service programs in which professors come to the schools to give in-service classes for teachers and also to spend time in the teacher’s classrooms so that they become more familiar with the needs of the instructor in teaching particular subjects.

Improve the Professional Personnel Activity Report:

- 9) The PPAR should be modified with the following changes:

- a) The form should include a section for teachers to list their areas of certification.

- b) The certification codes for seventh and eighth grade science courses should be separated (currently they are coded by the same number, even though seventh grade science is life science and eighth grade science is earth science).

- c) The form should have a section in which teachers in team-teaching situations (e.g. a language arts-math course) identify which subject they are teaching.

- d) The form should ask teachers whether or not they have tenure.

- 10) DPI should use the PPAR form to monitor annually the rate of out-of-field teaching, and the results of that monitoring effort should be published and made available to the public.

provisional certification, an endorsement, or a provisional endorsement.

2) They do not provide adequately for local school superintendents to cope with short-term emergency personnel situations.

3) Under the proposed guidelines, a superintendent or principal could rotate teachers into different slots each year, thus never addressing a school's need for having staff qualified to teach a particular subject. Because of this pattern, the regulations could result in a teacher continuously working towards endorsements and certifications for subjects that s/he will teach for only one year.

4) The regulations institute unequal educational standards by requiring endorsements rather than certifications of persons teaching subjects less than 50 percent of the day. Such a standard implies that a person needs different qualifications to teach a subject two times a day than to teach it four times a day.

5) Worst of all, the new regulations place the onus for rectifying the out-of-field problem on

the teacher — who often has little say about class assignments — rather than on the superintendent or principal, who actually makes class assignments.

Out-of-field teaching is but one part of the overall problem of teacher quality (an issue currently being studied by the Department of Public Instruction in their Quality Assurance Program). To assume that eliminating all out-of-field teaching would solve the teacher-quality problem is to oversimplify a complex issue. A certificate does not guarantee that a person will be a good teacher but it does ensure that a person has displayed certain minimal competencies identified by the state as being important for good teaching. By doing so, certification establishes the education standards of the state.

If these educational standards are to have any meaning, the state must use its power to certify teachers in a positive, active manner and ensure that its educational standards are upheld. To do this, the state must adopt out-of-field teaching policies that are both fair and consistent. □

Who's Teaching Science?

by Alfred W. Stuart

After reviewing "Teacher Certification: Out-of-Field Teaching in Grades 7-12," Center board member Alfred W. Stuart wrote that "the out-of-field problem is probably worse than the article indicates." From his perspective as chairman of the Department of Geography and Earth Sciences at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Dr. Stuart views with particular alarm the certification process for science teachers and the way in which teachers correct certification deficiencies. Dr. Stuart's additional critique is reprinted below with his permission.

For science certification, the great majority or all of the coursework may be taken in one science. Here at UNCC, for example, a student can receive an Intermediate Certificate (grades 4-9) to teach science by taking 18 semester hours of "Science" — not distinguished between biology, physics, chemistry, earth science, or others. That is, all of that science coursework could be taken in biology and the teacher assigned to teach earth science. That, in fact, is a common tendency in the eighth grade where earth science is required. There is some overlap between the various sciences, of course, but the differences are greater. I suspect that the biology teacher who is asked to teach earth science will give it a

strong biological thrust while omitting important, non-biological materials. The geologist who is assigned to teach biology would probably do just the reverse but that is not a very likely possibility. There are some science teachers who are well trained in several of the disciplines but they, unfortunately, are rare and they are more likely to teach at the senior high school level.

A second problem is that there seems to be a strong tendency for teachers to attempt to correct deficiencies in their training or to remain current by taking courses (workshops) offered by the school system itself rather than by taking the proper courses at a college or university. Some of these in-house workshops are quite effective but from what I know about them they are typically watered-down versions of university work. The more capable or motivated teachers tend to regard these workshops with disdain, preferring to take the more rigorous university courses. Thus there is the probability that weak teachers meet re-certification requirements by taking weak courses. There is a financial side to this since the school systems pay most or all of the cost of the workshops and, consequently, are reluctant to subsidize tuition at a college or university. The systems could have special courses offered by colleges or universities for their teachers for what it costs them to put their own together but generally they do not even attempt to do this. This problem takes on added significance with budget cuts since schools are going to be shifting present teachers around rather than hiring new ones. □