



Commission on Teacher Credentialing

Report from the CTC Chair Linda Darling-Hammond January 31, 2013

Over the last year, the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing did significant work to develop and begin to implement a strategic plan that aims primarily to do two things: first, to ensure that the CTC runs efficiently and effectively in discharging its duties to protect the public, to enable teachers and other school personnel to get the kind of knowledge and skills they need to serve children well, and to support a profession that can earn the public's trust. And second, to do this in a way that focuses on what's most important to produce these results, so that we are creating springboards for success and not merely barriers to entry. And that is the delicate goal of a credentialing commission.

This balancing act -- how to do the important work of the people without burdening the people -- was a central topic of the Governor's State of the State address and the topic of a conversation that Director Mary Sandy and I had with the Governor last evening. He would have liked to have been here to speak to us himself this morning, but he is attending a funeral and I am sure would be glad that we are sharing his sentiments with you. In the State of the State address last week (a really remarkable address from our Governor that made me proud to be a Californian), Governor Brown said some important things about the role of government. I want to quote those comments for a moment and relate them to our work here at the Commission. He said:

"As Legislators, it is your duty and privilege to pass laws. But what we need to do for our future will require more than producing hundreds of new laws each year. Constantly expanding the coercive power of government by adding each year so many minute prescriptions to our already detailed and turgid legal system overshadows other aspects of public service. Individual creativity and direct leadership must also play a part. We do this, not by commanding 'thou shalt' or 'thou shalt not' through a new law but by tapping into the persuasive power that can inspire and organize people. Lay the Ten Commandments next to the California Education code and you will see how far we have diverged in approach and in content from what forms the basis of our legal system."

Later, he observed: *"In addition to the teacher in the classroom, we have a principal in every school, a superintendent and governing board for each school*

district. Then we have the State Superintendent and the State Board of Education, which makes rules and approves endless waivers—often of laws which you just passed. Then there is the Congress which passes laws like “No Child Left Behind,” and finally the Federal Department of Education, whose rules, audits and fines reach into every classroom in America, where sixty million children (students) study, not six...

In the right order of things, he noted, education—the early fashioning of character and the formation of conscience—comes before legislation. Nothing is more determinative of our future than how we teach our children. If we fail at this, we will sow growing social chaos and inequality that no law can rectify.”

This question of how we teach our children is the focus of our work, and the CTC’s role here is crucial. There are three central aspects of any profession, and these are part of the garden that we tend. First is the ethical commitment that professions make to ensure that the people they serve are well-served by both the professionals’ moral commitment and their knowledge and skills. Second, and related, is the body of knowledge and skills that professions use to attend to the welfare of each child, in the case of teaching, and without which they are not permitted to practice. And third is the fact that professions define, transmit, and enforce standards of practice. They take responsibility for each other’s practice and for ensuring that their work is based on the knowledge of the profession as a whole; not just individual proclivities or idiosyncratic ideas.

Ensuring that professionals get the knowledge and skills they need to serve their clients well is what allows government and the people to trust them to make good decisions, rather than trying to micromanage what they do. Without that trust, we end up with tens of thousands of regulations that try to prescribe the work of the profession and make it more difficult for professionals to do their jobs. It is hard for a teacher to meet the individual needs of a unique child if she is constrained by dozens of strictures that deflect her attention from the most important focus, which should be meeting the child’s needs.

In his speech, the Governor went on to articulate something called a principle of subsidiarity. Subsidiarity is the idea that we should entrust the decisions that are made to whatever level of government can best handle it. He pointed out that: *“Subsidiarity is offended when distant authorities prescribe in minute detail what is taught, how it is taught and how it is to be measured. I would prefer to trust our teachers who are in the classroom each day, doing the real work – lighting fires in young minds.”*

That trust of the professionals who are doing the work in the classroom is what also operates in professions like medicine, law, engineering, accounting and architecture. It is the credentialing system that undergirds their ability to work in a trustworthy fashion by setting their own standards. However, teaching has historically been a quasi-profession in this country, because it has not had the level of investment in the processes of preparation or in ensuring that all entrants



have access to the knowledge base of the field, so that teachers and administrators can be fully trusted to make the decisions to do their work.

So our role in this Commission is twofold: On the one hand we need to ensure this base of knowledge that justifies the public's trust; that is our main job. And at the same time, we need to accomplish this in a manner that is effective and does not create unnecessary burdens, so that we do not become part of a counterproductive regulatory overlay.

This leads me to the two things that we have prioritized in our strategic plan, and that I look forward to us implementing over the course of this year. The first is a focus on efficiency for our consumers. If you have completed the requirements, it should not be a trial to get this agency to issue you a credential; you should not have to run a gauntlet of obstacles, wait a long time, or ask over and over again to have it done. As an educator or employer, you should be able to count on the Commission to operate efficiently in providing information; enabling you to do your job; and moving your work forward. The Commission has made huge strides on that agenda over the last year, and we have plans in place to continue to improve.

The second is a focus on performance that can replace the tradition of piling up requirements that may be unrelated to whether people can actually do the job. The goal is to enable educators to do what is necessary to practice responsibly. This focus is taking shape through our work on the State's teacher performance assessments, our conversations about a new administrator performance assessment, and the steps we are taking to put in place performance-based accreditation. We can reduce the reliance on extensive paperwork and leverage improvement if we are able to look at transparent information about the outcomes of programs; if we ask whether educators feel that they have been well prepared and how they were served by their programs; if we develop evidence showing that teachers can actually teach and that administrators can engage in the key tasks of instructional leadership, such as developing and evaluating teaching and planning professional development.

We should ask whether our constituents -- including California's educators and the parents and children whom we ultimately serve -- are getting what they need to allow them to do the work of teaching and learning. I believe that pursuing our strategic plan will place us on a path to meet the public's and profession's needs and to support our children. To close once again with the Governor's words: "*Nothing is more determinative of our future than how we teach our children.*" So let's get to work. Thank you.

