

To add Black teachers, abolish state testing

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Kentucky leaders should stop useless licensure requirement

Your Turn

Lucian Yates

Guest columnist

JCPS Superintendent Marty Polio and the Kentucky Commissioner of Education, Jason Glass, have issued dire warnings that educators (teachers, custodial staff, bus drivers, etc.) are needed. The population of Black teachers is even worse. Black teachers made up approximately 8% of all teachers in 1987 but only 6.7% in 2015.

Teacher testing took off in 1983 when A Nation at Risk was published. The report offered a blistering critique of the U.S. educational system. It posited that student academic performance was weak because too many teachers were weak. Based on the pseudoscience of eugenics, teacher testing attempted to ensure that the 'best and brightest' entered teacher education programs and the teaching profession.

The most used teacher test is the Praxis Series developed by the Education Testing Service between 1987-1993, and to teach in Kentucky, students must first pass the Praxis Core test (formerly called Praxis I), the Professional Learning and Teaching test, and the Praxis II content-specific tests. The costs range from \$90-150 each.

Although many educators and policymakers advocate for the continuation of teacher testing, a swelling chorus supports their elimination. Why should Kentucky explore the revocation of her reliance on teacher tests?

First, no studies indicate that the passing of Praxis ensures that teachers can positively impact K-12 student learning. There is little evidence that these exams predict teacher effectiveness. A study in North Carolina found that Black teachers

who had not passed the Praxis made a more significant impact on Black students than White teachers who passed the Praxis.

Likewise, Hanushek, Kain, O'Brien and Rivkin (2005) found no difference in effectiveness between teachers who passed the state's licensure exam and those who had not.

Second, since the reliance on teacher testing, there has been a steep decline in ethnic and racial minority candidates entering the teaching profession. This decline may be because Black, minority and poor students are more likely to fail the tests. Data from ETS reveal that 40.7% of Black first-time test takers passed the Praxis I in writing, whereas 81.5% of white first-time test takers passed the same test. On the math subtest of Praxis I, 79.5% of all white first-time test takers passed, and only 44.2% of Black first-time test takers passed the same subsection.

In a study by Bristol , 60% of the study participants indicated that they failed the state exam on the first attempt.

California reports that 40% of their teacher candidates give up because they fail to pass the required tests. For math and science teachers, that number climbs to 50%.

Third, teacher tests are expensive. To be licensed to teach K-5 in Kentucky, students must take three sets of tests which cost between \$90-150. If students pass each test on the first try, the total cost for certification in Kentucky is \$476.

I have heard stories of students taking some of these tests up to six times!

What are some policy implications?

California Governor Gavin Newsom suspended state testing requirements for teacher candidates and entry into teacher preparation programs during the pandemic. The order allowed teacher candidates to earn preliminary credentials without taking the required tests, and it allowed teacher candidates to enter their preparation programs without passing the necessary state tests. As a result, California gained 8,000 new teachers and 10,000 new students in teacher preparation programs.

The California legislature has proposed bills that would exempt teacher candidates from the basic skills test if they earned a grade of B or better in coursework as approved by the university teacher preparation program.

In Iowa , during the current legislative session, legislators have proposed a bill that would eliminate all 'teacher assessments administered to practitioner preparation program admission candidates, practitioner preparation program students before students complete a practitioner preparation program, and certain specified licenses for teachers.'

The usefulness of the state tests has been in question for some time. It's time to increase our teacher pool by abolishing these useless tests.

If policymakers are serious about expanding the pool of teachers, especially Black teachers and other teachers of color, it's time to explore different methods for teacher candidates to demonstrate competency.

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The usefulness of the state teacher exams has been in question. Kentucky can add to its teacher pool by abolishing the tests, writes the guest columnist. Pat McDonogh/Courier journal

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