

FACULTY RESEARCH EDITION

of

The Savannah State College Bulletin

Published by

The Savannah State College

Volume 18, No. 2 Savannah, Georgia December, 1964

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A Study of the Use of the National Teacher Examinations Within Institutions and School Systems Located Primarily in the Southern Region

by

Calvin L. Kiah

Since 1963, Savannah State College has used the National Teacher Examinations as the institutional comprehensive examination for all persons majoring in a teaching area offered by the College. Prior to our decision to employ these examinations as the comprehensive examination for all teaching majors, institutional policy at our college had required successful completion of a comprehensive examination of all persons to qualify for graduation. Until our employment of the NTE, however, comprehensive examinations were of institutional origin, constructed and administered within each specialized departmental area. Satisfactory performance on such examinations was, thereby, departmentally determined. At the outset it was decided that no cutting or qualifying score indicating satisfactory completion would be established, but based upon the experience gleaned from the results over a period of time one would be agreed upon at a later date.

Some discussion during the past year in a committee considering the institutional comprehensive examination resulted in a decision to establish a critical or minimum score to be achieved by each student in order to qualify for graduation.

To achieve maximum defensibility for this decision, it was deemed wise to solicit the policy and procedure followed by other professional bodies interested in determining teacher quality. This seems particularly applicable in view of the fact that our comprehensive is a standardized one, widely used by both educational institutions and employing agencies in the assessment of teacher competence and potential.

In order to assemble a fund of data which would aid us in our effort to arrive at an acceptable minimum score, a brief questionnaire was prepared for circulation among a selected number of teacher preparation institutions and employing school systems. To guarantee maximum response, the questionnaires were inscribed on self-addressed postal cards.

They asked for responses to the following items:

Institution.....

- I. Do you employ the National Teacher Examination in your program of Teacher Education? Yes..... No..... If so, what purpose does it serve?

- 1) Admission to student teaching? Score Req.
 - 2) General requirement for graduation? Score Req.
 - 3) Other Score Req.
- (Please state)

II. What disposition is made of persons who fail to achieve qualifying scores?

- 1) Retake exam at earliest opportunity
- 2) Required to take additional courses before taking exam again
- 3) Student is allowed to take exam but one time
- 4) Other
(Please state)

School System.....

- I. Do you employ the National Teacher Examination as a screening device in the selection of teachers for your system?
Yes..... No.....
- II. If you do, what minimum score must an applicant achieve to be favorably considered for employment? Score.....
- III. Please indicate whether this is a state requirement or a local one.
State..... Local.....

We concentrated our inquiries primarily in our own geographic area and in institutions of a size roughly comparable to our own. Though this was the general pattern of our sampling, we did, nevertheless, spot check institutions in other areas and of varying sizes and types which also prepare teachers. The school systems contacted were wholly within our own region and the border states. Institutions contacted were selected from the 1961-1962 membership list of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education. The school systems we selected rather arbitrarily keeping in mind that our objective would be to select a group from which we might expect to elicit a reasonably representative picture of what the performance in the area is.

The questionnaires were distributed to a total of 75 institutions and 43 school systems. Of the 75 institutions contacted, 67 or 89% responded. Of the 43 school systems contacted, 40 or 93% responded.

A summation of the findings of the survey is herewith presented.

No. Institutions Contacted	No. Responding	No. Employing Exam	Percentage of total contacted employing exam	No. Requiring Minimum Score
75	67	22	29	1

Purpose for Which Exam is Employed

Admission to student teaching	Gen. Graduate Requirement	Other
None	9	13

Disposition of Failures

Retake Exam	Additional Courses Acquired	Exam taken only once	Other
4	1	1	1

1. The number of institutions employing the NTE was small—only 29%
2. For the purposes of this study, and using the NTE, the most significant finding is the following: of the colleges responding, only one institution indicated a critical score and this seemed tied to state certification requirements rather than to basic institutional policy.
3. Some of those responding from the colleges which presently use the NTE indicated some intention to establish critical scores but “none has as yet been established” (the foregoing is a typical statement).
4. One institution, a large one in the northern area of the nation, expressed deep distrust of the NTE as an instrument for assessing teacher competence.
5. Of the institutions contacted outside the southern area, there seemed little evidence of employment of the NTE.
6. Three institutions commented that while they do not use the National Teacher Examinations, they do employ the Teacher Education Examination Program (TEEP) which is another examination provided by the Educational Testing Service. None of these institutions, however, has established a critical or cutting score.
7. Under “Purpose for Which Education is Employed,” 9 reported, as a general requirement for graduation and 13 reported under other reasons. In only one case, however, was a certain score established which each student was required to attain to qualify for graduation. No institution reported employment for determining eligibility for admission to student teaching.
8. Of the 13 institutions reporting “other” under purposes for

employing the NTE, 8 of the reasons were connected with providing opportunity for their students to comply with certification requirements.

9. The information requested under II, dealing with the disposition of persons who score lower than the minimum was understandably sparse, even inappropriate, in view of the virtual unanimity of the respondents in not having established minimum critical scores. However, it will be noted that 5 institutions reported measures taken. It is interpreted here that these institutions, observing scores lower than certification requirements, provide opportunities for their students to retake the examination. One institution, it will be noted, provides additional courses designed to help students strengthen themselves in areas of weaknesses as revealed by the examination.

School System

No. School Systems Contacted	No. Responding	No. Employing Exam	No. Requiring Minimum Score	State Requirement	Local Requirement
43	40	15 (38%)	10 (25%)	3	15

1. Of the 40 systems reporting, 15 or 38% of the school systems responding employ the NTE as a screening device in the selection of teachers for employment. Of the 15, 10 or 25% set a critical or minimum score. The lowest qualifying score reported by a school system was 425 on the common and 420 on the optional. Considerable tendency was observed on the part of the school systems reporting to require the NTE for employment as local policy where no state requirement exists. Also, where no local or state policy presently exists, comments from many systems indicated that they are moving in the direction of establishing such policy in the not too distant future.
2. There was evidence that at least two states within which institutions reporting are located are presently requiring applicants for certification to take the NTE. Comments from the respondents in these two states indicate that failure to achieve satisfactory scores will affect salary and certification levels. An additional state is actively considering adoption of the NTE as an aspect of its certification process.

Conclusions

From the above data it would seem safe to conclude the following:

- 1) That, insofar as the sampling in this study can attest, institutions which prepare teachers in our region do not make extensive use of the National Teacher Examinations as was originally assumed at the outset of this study.
- 2) That, of the number who do employ the NTE there is almost complete absence of critical minimum scores which must be

attained by a student in order to qualify for graduation. One is led to speculate as to why this is so. The scope of this study did not permit assessment of this aspect of the problem. Is there reluctance to commit such weighty authority to one single instrument when the student has successfully completed all requirements of local origin? Is it fear that NTE results, as with any test other than actual performance, may constitute insufficient evidence of ability to perform effectively in an actual situation? Or could it be that our programs have simply not grown as there was some indication of, to the point where a device of this nature has become an integral aspect?

- 3) That, on the other hand, there is evidence that employing systems in our area are making use of the NTE as a screening device in establishing eligibility for employment and/or determination of salary level. Such systems establish critical scores and refuse employment to persons failing to achieve the minimum.
- 4) That the percentage of school systems which presently employ this device, as revealed by this study, while not a majority, does seem to indicate that the agencies which employ our graduates tend to use the NTE as the measuring rod. The approving statements of systems not now employing the NTE plus the seeming trend of state certifying agencies acting as a spur leaves the impression in this study that the trend, at least in our area, will be toward a more extensive use of the NTE by employing agencies as the screening device for determining teacher selection and employment.

Finally, there can be no doubt that the function served by the NTE in our institutions as revealed in this study is vague and indecisive. There is, possibly, need for concerted action on the part of the institutions preparing teachers to assess the potential of NTE for revealing teacher potential so that we may have a basis for decisive action in our programs designed to realize upon that potential. It would appear that employing agencies are going to make increased use of NTE as a measuring device. We should either reveal its invalidity, if that is so determined, or design ways for effectively incorporating it as an aspect of our programs so as to assure that the most effective practitioners possible complete our programs and present themselves for employment as teachers in our schools.