

## **Teachers Left Behind by Common Core and No Child Left Behind**

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### **Abstract**

The enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act (2002) and the subsequent succession of legislative acts have had a profound impact on educational policy. An increased emphasis on teacher accountability and effectiveness led to the use of standardized test results to determine tangible rewards or punishments. In response, a culture of teaching to the test emerged. From this pedagogical shift, many students have missed out on developing literacies. As many of the students whose literacy environment at school consisted of standardized test preparation are now reaching the stage of college and career eligibility, post secondary educators are struggling to prepare these students for positions as future teachers. To address the discrepancies between college eligibility and actual college readiness, I propose that improving early and elementary literacy environments may enhance the knowledge, skills, and achievement of future educators. From a review of the literature, a three pillar instructional framework emerged, grounded in pedagogy, choice, and strategies.

Subsequent to the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001<sup>1</sup> (NCLB), a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act<sup>2</sup> (ESEA), many bold changes in educational and instructional policies have led to the implementation and utilization of standardized testing to determine funding and other tangible rewards or punishments for schools. More recently, with much focus on educator and administrator accountability, rating systems that are based on students' test scores have arisen. In a compensatory effort, a culture of teaching to the test emerged and has only been further entrenched in today's schools thanks to the Annual Professional Performance Review outlined in the Common Core Standards (CCSSI 2017; NGACBP and CCSSO 2010). This forceful emphasis on standardized testing has grown increasingly threatening to the sustainability of a well educated, sociable, and responsible society.

As a result of the pedagogical shift among teachers, many students have missed out on multiple crucial aspects of the emergent and developing literacies that have been identified as essential to academic performance and, more importantly, the ability to think critically. Positive early and elementary literacy environments can mean the difference between the creation of a lifelong reader who is a lover of literature and a lifelong struggling reader (Nathanson, Preslow, and Levitt 2008). As many of the students whose literacy environment at school consisted of standardized test preparation are now reaching the stage of college and career readiness, post secondary educators are struggling to comprehend, accommodate, and adequately prepare these students for positions within their chosen fields (Henry and Stahl 2017). In the area of pre-service teacher education, the situation has become dire, as educators are staring down the barrel of a self-perpetuating cycle.

Liberating students and educators from this attrition-causing path should be a top priority for all. Based on the emphasis placed on early and elementary literacy environments in the literature, changes should be initiated to improve the literacy experiences of the current and all future generations. In the subsequent discussion, I provide a framework and rationale for the improvement of childhood literacy. This framework focuses on three educational pillars that may have a profound effect on a student's experience during literacy instruction: pedagogy, choice, and strategies.

Providing their students with the best education possible is still the dream of all educators; however, recent changes in educational policy continue to decrease educators' abilities to accomplish that dream. Federal laws (e.g., ESEA, NCLB), and competitive grant funding (i.e., Race To The Top) have placed increased emphasis on national standards and accountability, which has had an unintended effect on curriculum and instruction. In 2003, Linn explained, "It is no surprise that attaching high stakes to test results in an accountability system leads to a narrowing of the instructional focus of teachers and principals" (p. 4). Some authorities believe that mandated standardized testing is changing the environment and siphoning off time for instruction and enrichment (Crocco and Costigan 2007; Hynes 2017; Levitt 2007; Nelson 2013; Ruggles Gere et al. 2014). Because of the required testing and accountability implications of students' scores, many teachers have felt compelled to, and do, place greater prominence on material included on high stakes tests than they do on other content areas (Stecher and Hamilton, 2002; Taylor et al. 2001). Instead of inquiring or innovating, students are spending valuable classroom time preparing for the test (Crocco and Costigan 2007; Hynes 2017; Levitt 2007; Nelson 2013; Ruggles Gere et al. 2014).

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1. No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Pub. L. No. 107-110, 115 Stat. 1425 (2002).

2. Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, Pub. L. 89-10, 79 Stat. 27 (1965).

## **Laws, Reforms, and Initiatives**

### **No Child Left Behind Act**

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001<sup>3</sup> mandated that all public schools that received federal funding must administer annual statewide-standardized tests to all students, regardless of their race, ethnicity, first language, socioeconomic status, and learning abilities. Under this law, schools were required to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP); the amount of growth that students were expected to achieve by the end of the school year. To reach this goal, federal legislation imposed increasingly more stringent penalties on those schools that failed to achieve AYP in raising low-scoring students to proficiency. These sanctions included: allowing students to transfer to a better-performing public school in the same district, offering students free tutoring, setting aside a portion of federal Title I funds for changing schools and for tutoring, closing schools that continued to miss targets and turning them into charter schools, taking them over, or using another, significant turn around strategy, and ensuring that teachers were “highly qualified.” With the goal being that all students reach proficiency, many teachers followed a repetitive “testing script” for daily practice. However, at the time, there was little understanding of how this practice would affect students’ engagement, critical thinking, and creativity (Levitt 2007).

### **Race to the Top and Common Core Standards**

Building upon the reforms of NCLB, the Race to the Top (RTTT) initiative of 2009 aimed to generate rigorous standards and improved assessments, implement better data systems in order to provide more in depth information regarding student progress, provide professional development and accountability measures to increase teacher and school leader effectiveness, and place greater emphasis on the rigorous interventions needed to turn around the lowest-performing schools. To advance the objectives of this initiative, the RTTT competition was conceptualized and announced. To obtain the federal funds offered through this competitive grant, states had to agree to certain conditions and create a comprehensive plan to address the initiative. Approval of a state’s plan was contingent on the presence of certain concessions, which included: adopt college and career ready standards (which, at the time, were still under development), evaluate teachers based on their students’ test scores, and intervene in low-performing schools by dismissing the principal and some, or all, of the school staff (U.S. Department of Education 2016).

For those states that sought to compete for federal funding under RTTT, a national organization of public officials, the Council of Chief State School Officers, and the National Governors Association created the Common Core Standards to better prepare K-12 students for college and careers and to ensure that students in different states mastered the same academic principles (CCSSI 2017; NGACBP and CCSSO 2010). Although the adoption of Common Core State Standards was voluntary, the federal government has played a major role in encouraging states to adopt the standards. State education officials and school district administrators, worried by the threat of looming federal sanctions, adopted the Common Core State Standards and accountability measures with little foresight as to the results of the implementation of these changes in policy. To receive funds from RTTT, states had to adopt the Common Core State Standards within two months after their publication. However, some might question how adequately state education officials could review and consider these standards in only two months.

As part of the adoption process, states were expected to generate policies and procedures that would build assessments and data systems to measure student growth. Also, states needed to inform teachers and principals of ways in which they could improve instruction. Plans to recruit, develop,

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3. No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Pub. L. No. 107-110, 115 Stat. 1425 (2002).

reward, and retain effective teachers and principals, as identified through Annual Professional Performance Reviews (APPR), were also implemented. Additionally, states were to turn around the lowest achieving schools and increase the number of privately managed charter schools (CCSSI 2017; NGACBP and CCSSO 2010; U.S. Department of Education 2016).

### **Every Student Succeeds Act**

Because of mounting concern that the NCLB's prescriptive requirements had become increasingly unrealistic burdens for schools and educators, the federal administration sought to enact legislation that focused on preparing all students for success in college and careers. In 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act<sup>4</sup> (ESSA) was signed into law. ESSA was a reauthorization of the 50-year-old Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the nation's national education law and longstanding commitment to equal opportunity education for all students.

Under the ESSA, states have a greater ability to determine their own standards for college and career readiness; however, states are expected to maintain high assessment standards. States are expected to submit their entire plans in the 2017-18 school year, outlining their respective goals around accountability, assessment, monitoring, and support. Before submitting the plans to the federal government for approval, governors, legislatures, and state schools chiefs must agree on the ESSA plans (US Department of Education 2017). In their Education Week article, Wohlstetter, Brown, and Duff (2017) pose the question, "So, are state education agencies—and, more important, state governments—up to the task?"

Although ESSA legislature suggests that states explore innovative assessments, it appears that early submitters may still employ the same assessments that they used under Race to the Top, with an added nonacademic indicator of student performance. Wohlstetter, Brown, and Duff (2017) reported that almost 80 percent of early state submitters are members of a testing consortium, such as the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, which was created during the RTTT competition. Only a quarter of states have indicated their intention to submit plans in September, there by using all of the time provided to generate what is hoped will be the new direction of education (Wohlstetter, Brown, and Duff 2017). However, with such divergent plans, uncertainty surrounds what lies ahead for education. Many educators wonder if these differences will mean that not only children, but also teachers (and whole states) might be left behind under the new law. Indeed, fifteen years after the implementation of NCLB, Common Core Standards and most recently, the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, schools across the country are in turmoil (Henry and Stahl 2017). When reviewing the specific stipulations outlined in the laws, the problems facing today's students, educators, administrators, and parents become clear.

### **Actualized Implementation and Reactionary Fallout**

Since its enactment in 2002, NCLB, and in 2010, CCSS, and now the next generation of standards have specified what students should be able to accomplish at the end of each school year. As mandated, each year, students must complete a battery of tests on various subjects to assess their progress; however, the growth that has been identified since the start of this practice has been minimal (Lee 2006), while the associated costs have soared (Nelson 2013).

Researchers at the largest professional interest group in the United States, the National Education Association (NEA), collected and analyzed phone data from 1500 teachers of Pre-k through grade twelve. After the analysis, four distinctive factors emerged, revealing the impact that the high stakes testing had

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4. Every Student Succeeds Act, Pub. L. No. 114-95, 129 Stat. 1802 (2015).

on the moral of the teachers and the students. Seventy-two percent of the teachers indicated that they felt stressed by the school and district administrators. Over forty percent of members reported that their school placed “moderate” to “extreme” emphasis on students’ test scores to evaluate their performance. Typically, teachers reported spending about thirty percent of their work time on testing and related tasks, such as preparing students, supervising, collecting, gathering, and analyzing results of standardized tests. Interestingly, seventy-five percent of the surveyed teachers responded that they are passionate about their work; yet, forty-five percent of them contemplated leaving the profession because of standardized testing (Walker 2014). This testing environment appears to have had a profoundly negative effect on teachers, contributing to their dissatisfaction and the possibility that they will abandon the teaching profession. More worrisome is the effect that this environment has had on the enrollment of students in teacher preparation programs. In 2015, the NEA surveyed more than 1500 members teaching in the grades and subject areas required to be tested. Unfortunately, they found that seventy percent of the educators did not believe their state assessment was developmentally appropriate for their students (Walker 2016).

In accordance with these policies (NCLB and CCSS), states categorized their students, rated their teachers (CCSS), and ranked their schools based heavily on the students’ results on standardized tests. In 2014, during her speech to the Modern Language Association, Ravitch contended that these mandates resulted in a massive demoralization of educators, were an attack on teachers’ rights, and caused an unprecedented exodus of experienced educators, who have often been replaced by less experienced teachers.

In response to the uproar of teachers, teacher unions, parents, and concerned citizens, in December 2015, the NYS Board of Regents voted to implement a four-year moratorium on the consequences of using Common Core State Assessments and state-provided growth scores in teacher and principal evaluations. Despite this moratorium, the tests are still administered, and the results are used to calculate what are called transitional APPR ratings, which are to be used for advisory purposes. At this time, teachers, administrators, and parents are seeking to reconcile their beliefs about what advisory purposes the transitional APPR ratings will be used for in the future. The policy makers have failed to heed the cries that are being echoed across the nation regarding assessment; under ESSA, states are required to assess all students regardless of disability or primary language (US Department of Education 2017).

### **Toll on Teachers, Prospective Teachers, and Students**

As teachers in many school districts across the country were forced to use only the commercially produced or state generated modules, lessons, and scripts, many experts and practitioners have questioned whether such an approach can adequately address the educational needs of the whole child. Some argue that teachers were deprived of the opportunity to perform a fundamental facet of teaching, which is tailoring their lessons to meet the diverse needs and abilities of their students. With these limitations, literacy instruction frequently centers on teaching to the test, and classroom assessments often are designed to match the high-stakes assessment format. Consequently, students have relatively few opportunities to demonstrate the full extent of their literacy knowledge. The narrowing of the curriculum initiated by NCLB (Au 2007; Hamilton et al. 2007; McMurrer 2007), and furthered by the CCSS is best summed up as “cognitive decapitation,” (Kozol 2005, 119).

Across the United States, with a federal mandate that requires states to test students and that makes high test scores a priority, many districts have abolished extracurricular areas, such as recess, art, music, and physical education; instead, they have substituted more blocks or periods focused on English Language Arts (ELA), math, and test preparation. Recently, in an opinion piece, a school district superintendent discussed the hypernormalization of public education, which he asserted has been creeping

into our schools. What in the past most considered normal is no longer normal. Outdoor play, problem solving with friends, enjoying art and music, exploring science, experiencing social studies, and taking field trips are no longer normal (Hynes 2017). As the superintendent stated, the “new normal is teach less and test more. And because of the high stakes attached to the tests, schools are forced to focus on academic outcomes at the expense of child’s social and emotional growth” (Hynes 2017). This new normal is taking its toll on our precious children and their disheartened teachers.

## **Opt-Out Movement**

Across the country, parents, teachers, educators, and administrators share concern regarding the use of standardized tests for accountability purposes, holding both students and teachers accountable. Many school personnel contend that students are over-tested or burdened with tests that mainly benefit test generators and producers of test preparation materials. Further, parents who decide that testing is not in their child’s best interest are part of an “Opt-Out” movement that is growing across the country. The New York State Union of Teachers (NYSUT) fully supports parents’ right to choose what is best for their children—including NYSUT members who decide as parents to opt their child out of state tests (NYSUT 2017).

## **National Data on Post-Secondary Teacher Preparation**

A recent review of the literature revealed a lack of consistent data regarding the effects of the CCSS, the associated high stakes testing, and other converging factors. As shown in table 1, the first graduating class of students who were educated primarily under NCLB did not graduate from high school until 2014. Students who would have been educated completely under CCSS and ESSA are projected to graduate in 2022 and 2027, respectively. Students, parents, educators, and administrators have voiced the beliefs that the system, as it currently stands, is not working, and as a result, each subsequent change to the education system has been cut short and replaced. Despite this shortened shelf life, the irrevocable and undeniable damage to the education system, and more importantly to the students, has already occurred.

Proponents of NCLB argue that it did succeed in one respect; more students are graduating from high school and attending college. Nationally, from 2002 to 2014, the number of first time degree seeking students admitted to institutions of higher education increased from 1.6 million to 2.3 million (see fig. 1). Additionally, from 2002 to 2010, the admission rate of these first time students increased from 55.8 to 62.2 percent (see fig. 2). Although a 38.9 percent increase in enrollment is admirable, this change has come at a cost, as post-secondary educators are finding that many of their students are inadequately prepared for the rigors of higher education (Henry and Stahl 2017).

One area of post-secondary education that has been impacted negatively, as a result of the unstable primary education system, is teacher preparation. Many of the students who enter this field as prospective teachers are inadequately prepared to succeed in higher education (Henry and Stahl 2017), which may contribute to the decline in the number of students who complete their teacher preparation programs successfully. From 2011 to 2015, the national average of successful completers fell from 4,261 to 3,394. Geographical factors do not appear to play a role in this trend, as twenty states across the country, including Illinois (-47.1%), Maine (-37.8%), New York (-34.2%), Kentucky (-32.2%), Oregon (-30.9%), North Carolina (-29.4%) and California (-25.3%), have seen a negative overall percent change of twenty percent or more in the number of students completing their teacher preparation programs (see fig. 3).

The turmoil associated with our education system has had even further reaching effects. That is, both in-service and pre-service teachers are apprehensively awaiting the finalization of their state’s plan under ESSA, which will determine the means through which they are assessed, and, eventually, either

tenured or fired. Though the enrollment in postsecondary education has increased year in and year out, the enrollment in teacher preparation programs has declined. During the fall of 2008, the total national enrollment in teacher preparation programs had reached 688,277 students. However, by the fall of 2014, that number had slipped by 41.2 percent, settling at 404,608 students (see fig. 4).

Declining enrollment is having a profound effect on various aspects of teacher preparation. For example, when there are too few students, administrators cancel and close sections of courses, citing economics as the deciding factor. This practice may often lead to several unfortunately inevitable outcomes. Students who are unable to take certain courses due to closure may require additional time to finish their program of study. This increases the likelihood of frustration, stress, and possible withdrawal. Those programs that consistently have low enrollment risk falling victim to the scrapyard, and once there, resurrection is unlikely due to the enormity of logistical considerations needed to launch a teacher preparation program.

Students' diminished preparedness, a problem linked to NCLB, may be contributing to the low enrollment in teacher preparation programs. Many prominent scholars and post-secondary educators have noticed a marked decline in the writing abilities, pedagogical knowledge, intrinsic motivation, and, most dishearteningly, critical thinking skills of post secondary students (Arum and Roksa 2011; Conley 2007; Henry and Stahl 2017). This unfortunate development is commensurate with a decline in the passing rates of students on their respective state credentialing exams. The national average passing rate dropped from 95.7 percent in 2009 to 92.7 percent in 2015 (see fig. 5), as thirty-three states, or 68.8 percent, experienced a decrease in passing rate. During this period, the passing rate of students in twelve states experienced more than a five percent decrease. Though the decreases were not isolated to a particular area, many of the states with the largest decreases in enrollment were again among the states with the largest decreases in student credentialing exam passing rate. These states include Pennsylvania (-20.6%), New Hampshire (-19.8%), Indiana (-18.6%), Vermont (-11.5%), New York (-9.6%), Minnesota (-8.8%), and North Carolina (-8.3%).

In consideration of the trends exhibited in the data, a national discussion should be initiated regarding the possible implications of the college and career readiness push for inadequately prepared high school students transitioning to postsecondary schools. It is necessary to highlight the struggles that many undergraduate and graduate students face to meet the rigor needed to understand complex academic theories and achieve the deeper learning required to be successful and fulfill their desired goal of higher education. Because students complete high school successfully and are college eligible does not ensure their readiness for college-level studies (Arum and Roksa 2011; Conley 2007; Henry and Stahl 2017; Katz et al. 2007). College faculty expect students entering their classrooms to employ higher order thinking skills, which include critical thinking and reflective inquiry. Despite the promises of closing the achievement gaps (ESEA and NCLB) as well as the assurance that CCSS would raise student achievement and support college and career readiness, many post secondary students are unable to live up to these expectations.

The current path of education, advocated by many policy makers and reformers, might be described as one of unsustainability. Not only is the number of students who want to become teachers steadily declining but also the number of students who are able to complete their teacher preparation program and obtain certification is falling as well. If the nation continues in this attrition causing direction, there likely will be an increase in teacher shortages across the country. The next problem in contention on the list that faces this country's educational system may no longer be the next set of reforms, but instead how to survive the teacher shortage crisis (Berry and Shields 2017).

## **Catching up with the past**

When considering the current and projected future course for education, teacher educators must ask themselves the following question: “Are we preparing a generation of teachers who are only concerned with preparing children for high-stakes tests, when the demands of an ever-changing global society require so much more?” Unfortunately, for many, the answer is yes. The next logical question is how do we make the changes necessary to right the sinking ship that is this country’s current education system. In light of these present educational concerns, I would like to share a vision that goes beyond test preparation, one that focuses on a three-pillar approach: pedagogy, choice, and strategies.

### **Pillar One: Reconceptualized Pedagogical Approaches**

Although the literature presents various theories, I have selected several pedagogic approaches that are centered on the well-being of students, their unique gifts, personal interests, and willingness or desire to learn. This approach is grounded in a social constructivist framework (Vygotsky 1978) where the social-emotional engagement of students is intentionally supported (Cambourne 1995, 2000, 2001; Smith et al. 2017). It is imperative to listen to our students, observe their strengths, and be responsive to their interests and their needs, which can be accomplished through highly interactive “kid watching” (Cambourne 1995, 2000, 2001; Goodman 1985; Nations and Alonso 2001; Wilhelm 2016). By making time to listen to and discuss students’ ideas and life experiences teachers can begin to build the rapport and knowledge of student that are necessary to form a caring transactional relationship that may be used to increase motivation and capitalize on situational interest (Birch and Ladd 1997; Cambourne 1995, 2000, 2001; McTigue, Washburn, and Liew 2009; Pianta and Hamre 2009; Sanacore 2012).

Reading aloud provides another important means through which students may be motivated (Gambrell 1996; Ivey and Broaddus 2001) and is the single most important activity for building the knowledge and vocabulary required for eventual success in reading. Students have valuable experiences when listening to read alouds. Read alouds give students an opportunity to hear the teacher model fluency and expression in reading literary language, acquainting them with the style and form of written language. Also, read alouds help students’ enrich their background knowledge, encounter new ideas, and enhance their vocabulary. Importantly, read-alouds help students become aware of the many possible book choices that are available to them (Fisher et al. 2004; Johnson and Blair 2003; Rasinski 1988; Sanacore 1999; Stone and Twardosz 2001).

Motivation is a critical factor in learning, not just for primary and secondary students, but for pre-service teachers as well. Additionally, motivation is a central tenet of literacy development (Marinak and Gambrell 2010). It is important to understand that there are multiple contributors to motivation, some of which include intrinsic motives, level of interest, and degree of engagement (Springer, Harris, and Dole 2017).

Intrinsic motivators are internal factors that move an individual to perform an activity for its own sake (Csikszentmihalyi 1990; Deci et al. 1991; Gottfried 1990; Guthrie et al. 2006; Guthrie and Wigfield 2000; Marinak and Gambrell 2008; Ryan and Deci 2000; Shim and Ryan 2005). Self-efficacy beliefs motivate an individual to perform an activity in order to achieve internally construed goals predicated on expectancies of likely success or failure (Bandura 1977, 1997, 2001; Deci et al. 2001; Pajares 1996, 2003; Schunk 2003; Schunk and Zimmerman 1997; Unrau and Schlackman 2006). Guthrie et al. (2009) described intrinsic motivation and high self-efficacy beliefs as ‘affirming motivations’ that tend to produce positive effects on reading performance. Nathanson, Preslow, and Levitt (2008) suggest that teachers’ values and behaviors exert as powerful an influence on students’ hearts and minds as the curriculum itself. During their work on intrinsic versus extrinsic motivators, Brophy (1986) and Deci (1971) also found evidence of teachers’ ability to affect student motivation.

Research has shown that a student's interest in a particular subject can have a synergistic effect on his/her motivation and engagement. Students who are interested and engaged may be motivated to take risks and to expend more cognitive effort. In the area of reading, this interest may enable a student to read more difficult texts and/or more readily acquire knowledge.

### **Pillar Two: Structured Book Choice and Opportunistic Interest**

For more than twenty years, many researchers have known and expressed the importance of interest and choice in literacy education. Allowing students to self select or choose books is a highly efficient means of promoting motivation and engagement (Gambrell 2011; Johnson and Blair 2003; Ollman 1993; Rasinski 1988; Sanacore 1999). For many students, reading less difficult or developmentally appropriate books can be motivating. They feel comfortable and confident regarding their ability to read, leading to the students' pleasure, which increases the students' positive attitudes toward reading. Additionally, students may also read texts that are otherwise too difficult for them if the texts interest them (Worthy and Sailors 2001). When students are interacting with literature on a subject that interests them, they benefit from the synergistic nature of the interdependencies of engagement, interest, and motivation (Baker 2002; Johnson and Blair 2003). In fact, the interest level is often more powerful than the readability of the material when it comes to comprehension and recall (Darigan, Tunnel, and Jacobs 2002).

Departing from the belief that students should only read the classics may be difficult for some; however, there are various solutions for the inclusion of classic, curriculum mandated, and teacher chosen books as well. Although the student is selecting the book, the selection can be limited to a classroom library that contains various books that are developmentally appropriate, align with curricular goals, and have an associated accountability measure in place. One relevant way to monitor students' understanding is through oral or written responses to texts. Students may converse during a group discussion, with a peer, or with the teacher during individual conference time (Johnson and Blair 2003). Additionally, providing students with opportunities to discuss topics of interest and prior/current reads may initiate situational interest for other students. With choice, students reap the benefits of being given the ability to choose their book (Baker, Dreher, and Guthrie 2000; Darigan, Tunnel, and Jacobs 2002; Gambrell 2011), while teachers are able to align lessons with the curriculum and maintain student engagement (Kragler 2000).

### **Pillar Three: Intentionally Targeted Strategies for Purposeful Outcomes**

After learning about students' individual interests, teachers can consult this knowledge to recommend books of various genres with written and visual representations that are well organized, with descriptive, exciting details, relevant to the students' life experiences, that will initiate and maintain their engagement. Once an appropriate text has been chosen, the teacher should select before, during, and post reading strategies that capture and maintain student interest, that aid in the construction of meaning, and that reinforce the major themes or expected learning outcomes (Gallagher and Anderson 2016). I will discuss one example strategy for each phase of the reading process; for a full listing of selected strategies see table 2.

Time for a Close Up is a pre-reading strategy in which the students are provided with a small portion of an image from a text that is enlarged to increase visibility. Then the students can be prompted using questions or model statements, depending on their age and ability levels. Following a brief discussion, the students are provided with another small portion of the same image that has also been enlarged. Students are then given time to brainstorm, discuss, and make predictions about the image and then the text. While reading the text, students are able to confirm or revise their predictions. Pre-reading activities that utilize concepts similar to this succeed in peeking students' interest by encouraging

curiosity and authentic inquiry. When students are thinking about a text, they become active listeners and are more readily able to make text-to-self and text-to-text connections.

Open-Mind Portraits, a during-reading strategy, are a way for readers to look inside the mind of a character and explore his/her thinking at an interesting, important, or critical moment. Readers must consider what the character may have been thinking, either during or immediately following the event, and reflect upon the impact on the character from the character's viewpoint. In this way, students can monitor their understanding of the text. Students can respond to the literature digitally or with paper and pencil. There are two parts to the portrait; the face of the person is on the front page and the mind of the character is on the inside page(s). Students draw and color a portrait of the head and neck of a character in the text. On the second page, in the mind of the character, students draw five to eight items that represent what the character is thinking about at the specified moment in the text. The completed portraits can be shared with the class and be used to initiate discussion regarding the characters and pictures the students chose to include in the mind of the character. Completing this strategy during a secondary or subsequent reading may assist in improving student focus and understanding, as students must concentrate on story elements, such as dialogue, in order to successfully interpret the presented characterizations.

Although it can be used at any phase of reading, Conversational Notes is often utilized as a post-reading strategy. Students are asked to respond to the text or to a prompt provided by the teacher. Once all of the students have finished their responses, the students find a partner and sit together. The students exchange the paper on which their response was written with their partner when the teacher calls for a switch. The students exchange papers, then read and respond to their partner's writing each time that the teacher calls for a switch. This trading eventually forms two conversations in which each student participates. The conversations are then discussed with the rest of the class. For increased variety, multiple prompts can be used, and each pair of students can repeat the process with another pair of students to form groups of four. Engaging students in conversations with peers promotes the development of socio-cognitive connections, deeper understandings, and receptiveness to the ideas and beliefs of others.

With the widespread availability of technology, it is important to include digital and multimedia resources when discussing instructional strategies. Additionally, the added benefits of gamification, which include the enhancement of visual attention skills and the improvement of processing speed, are a fair trade for the increased amount of preparation required for its use (Dye, Green, and Bavlier 2009; Green and Bavlier 2003; Levitt and Piro 2014; Willis 2011). There are nearly endless uses of the various available technologies; however, two specific html/flash-based game websites are Kahoot and Quizlet. On the Kahoot website, teachers can search through a library of premade question sets that are appropriate to the text or create their own question sets that apply directly to the text. Once selected/created, the question set is used to play a quiz show style game complete with buzzers and score keeping. Another entry from this area is called Quizlet. Similarly, Quizlet enables teachers to prepare a vocabulary list and then engage students in multiple types of simple games.

## **Conclusion**

When we look back on what has transpired in education over the past fifteen years of testing, reform, and failure, there is little doubt that there needs to be a better path forward. Each new round of policy changes, despite being initiated and implemented by different people, has done little more than maintain the status quo; test the students into exhaustion and punish the teacher or schools whose students were not adequately taught to the test. With all of the voices and messages being echoed on each side of the issues, one very important designation has been somewhat forgotten. Standards dictate what skills a student should have and what tasks a student should be able to accomplish by the end of the year, while curriculum can be defined as the content that a student is expected to know by the end of the year. Neither

the standards nor the curriculum mandate assessment. Even so, some assessment is necessary to determine student growth and progress. What these assessments should not determine is which teacher is tenured, which schools receive funding, or which schools are shut down, and that is where the problem truly lies. All of the stakes that have been attached to one end of the year summative assessment has enabled that high stakes assessment to shape and mold both the standards and the curriculum. Until policy makers understand the true problems facing the education system, the gap between college eligibility and college readiness will continue to grow.

Secondary school teachers and college faculty must act together as change agents in a partnership to promote more effective transitional models to bridge the gap between secondary education and college readiness, especially in the area of teacher preparation. Further, college faculty also must partner with primary and early educators to ensure that during their early and formative years students receive the base of social, interpersonal, critical thinking, and academic skills, which they must possess to be successful in post secondary education and in a globalized world. I believe it is reasonable to assert that the path forward must begin long before secondary education. The challenges facing education cannot be met with simply proficiency in language arts and math as measured by standardized tests. Over the past two decades, my experiences as a primary and post secondary educator have refined and reframed my approach to instruction. In the preceding discussion, I proposed a three pillar student-centered model for instruction that requires teachers to focus on pedagogy, to provide students with choice, and to utilize strategies in their instruction. Research and experience suggest that learning occurs more readily when students feel comfortable taking risks, sharing ideas, and making socio-emotional and cognitive connections.

As of June, 2017, many states have yet to determine how they plan to comply with the ESSA. It is my sincere hope that some of the points I raised will be considered when states decide how to move education forward in this country. Above all, we must find a way to free students and ourselves from this testing culture and enable educators to rededicate themselves to inspiring students to be passionate lifelong learners and inspire at least some to pursue a career in education.

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Table 1. Projected graduation dates of students educated under specific education laws.

School Grade	Projected Graduation Year Under		
	NCLB - 2002	CCSS - 2010	ESSA - 2015
Kindergarten	2014	2022	2027
1st grade	2013	2021	2026
2nd grade	2012	2020	2025
3rd grade	2011	2019	2024
4th grade	2010	2018	2023
5th grade	2009	2017	2022
6th grade	2008	2016	2021
7th grade	2007	2015	2020
8th grade	2006	2014	2019
9th grade	2005	2013	2018
10th grade	2004	2012	2017
11th grade	2003	2011	2016
12th grade	2002	2010	2015

Table 2. Selected instructional strategies.

Strategy/Activity	Description/Instructions
Book Bites	Book bites are carefully selected quotes or lines from a text. The number of bites will depend on the length of the text and the number of students participating. Each bite is read, and then students reflect upon what impression they now have about the text. Once all of the bites have been read, the students perform a quick write or discuss their impressions.
Book Boxes	Book boxes contain a collection of artifacts built around the book or a character. They are useful in building background and generating interest in a text. Book boxes can be used to evaluate students' understanding of a text or character when used as a post reading activity in which the student creates the book box.
Character Blogs	Blogs are interactive websites that serve as online journals. Students respond to characters in the books they are reading. Teachers can set up classroom blogs. Blogs provide an environment for students to assume the voice of a character, recount the experiences, thoughts, and hopes of the character. Classmates respond to the blog entries with questions and comments.
Digital Book Trailers	Digital book trailers introduce a book using a variety of multimedia, usually consisting of a video or slide show that is accompanied by enticing music and a brief synopsis of the important events and/or characters. These trailers increase students' interest, engage students with the text, and enhance comprehension.
Graphic Organizers (herring bone, story map, character map, semantic map)	The use of these visual displays of key concepts and ideas about a topic or text provides students with a variety of structures through which they can access, organize, and evaluate information in any language. The use of graphic organizers also enables them to use their prior knowledge and experiences and relate them to new concepts and ideas to be learned.
Know-Want to Know-Learned (K-W-L)	This activity moves students from what they already know (or think they know) about a topic to what they have learned through the construction of a chart. Pre-reading activities can include brainstorming, categorizing, thinking aloud, and generating questions. During the reading the students answer the questions, review and revise their prior ideas,

	and add to their knowledge about the topic. After reading, the students discuss the learned information, and perhaps raise additional questions about the topic. Additional variations of K-W-L charts may include how to find out the answers to questions posed, and what may still be learned on the topic (K-W-L-H-S).
Opinionaires/Questionaires	Opinionaires/questionnaires help students build relevant prior knowledge, promote deep understandings of content topics, and motivate students to learn about certain topics. When creating opinionaires, select provocative statements from a text which have no right or wrong answer. Students choose a stance and explain their reason(s). After reading, students support their responses by sharing evidence from the text. Provide time for students to revisit and revise their opinions.
Picture Carousel Walk Picture Packets Picture Walks	Picture carousel walks, picture packets, and picture walks can spark student interest and provide opportunities for students to begin thinking about the text, while making connections to their own experiences. These activities help students set a purpose for reading, which increases comprehension. Select pictures from the text or representative of the vocabulary or concepts so that students can easily identify what is happening in each picture. Students describe what they see in the pictures, make predictions, sequence the images, and discuss their responses. Picture carousel walks involve the teacher displaying the pictures around the room, and students walking from picture to picture. Picture packets involve distributing a packet containing selected images to each student. Picture walks involve a more in depth preview, as the teacher walks the students through the text from image to image.
Questioning the Author	Select a passage, phrase, or word of which students may need a better understanding. Invite students to explain what the author is saying or what the word means, and the significance of the passage, phrase, or word's use. Also, students can select the passage, phrase, or word and question the class.
Reader's Theatre	Dramatic responses help students visualize what they read, assume various perspectives, connect to and elaborate on a text, as well as reflect and interpret text. This activity involves a performance of literature, in which a text is read aloud expressively by one or more persons. This practice has been recommended as a good way to acquire a second language because it involves a great deal of repetition. As the students rehearse, the words become part of their vocabulary without conscious memorization. Students can also be encouraged to write their own scripts based on information learned in a nonfiction text.
Sketch to Stretch	Sketch-to-stretch is a literacy learning strategy that works well with all language learners. When students sketch in response to an oral or silent reading, they demonstrate how they have understood the content of the passage. They may not be able to do this yet with language. When learners share their sketches, they speak and listen. Sketch-to-stretch helps students create meaning through drawing and demonstrate understanding as a response to a reading or oral presentation. Students stretch their understanding beyond the literal level to a personal interpretation. By comparing and discussing sketches, learners realize that not everyone responds to a passage with the same interpretation. Students also gain new insights into the meaning of a passage through the act of transferring their understanding from one communication system, language, to another, art.
Songs/Chants	The use of songs and chants provides students with an opportunity to meaningfully "play" with language. These forms of text allow for word and sound play, and they create "chunks" of useful language that can be incorporated into the students' repertoire at almost any age or proficiency but are particularly helpful in the emergent levels of literacy. The deliberate redundancies, the rhyming words, and the repetition tend to lower student anxiety. In addition, songs or chants on specific subject matter can help to reinforce learning materials. With older learners, for example, songs can be used to demonstrate literary techniques, such as satire, irony, metaphor, and simile.
Story Impressions	The story impressions strategy enables readers to predict a story line using sequentially presented key words or phrases derived from the reading selection. The concepts are ordered to encourage students to predict a story line as close to the actual selection as

	possible. After reading the key phrases, readers develop an impression about the material they are about to read. Then, they construct their predicted passage and use this as a blueprint to be confirmed or modified as they encounter the new information in the actual text. This practice enables the reader to understand how important key words are in predicting and in helping to recall what was read.
Tableau Vivant	Students create a <i>tableau vivant</i> (French for “living picture,”) is a frozen scene that captures a significant moment or idea in the book. Students work with peers to represent an event or concept with their bodies, creating a statue to depict the event. Classmates try to interpret each <i>tableau vivant</i> , or students can

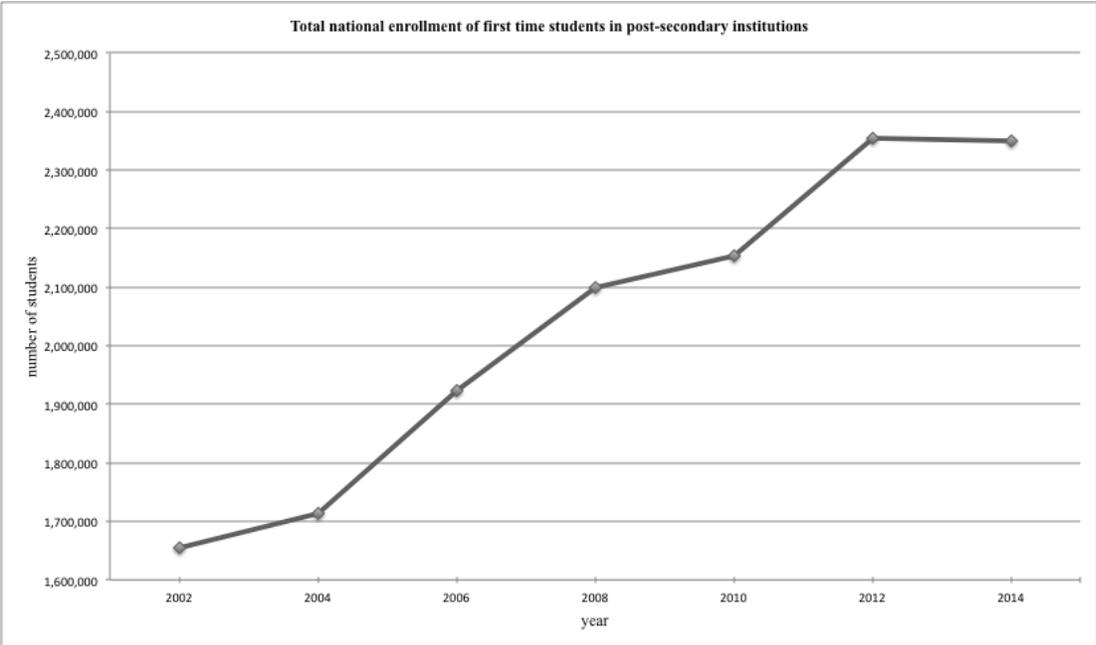


Figure 1. Total enrollment of first time degree seeking students enrolled directly after high school. *Source:* Data from NCES (2017).

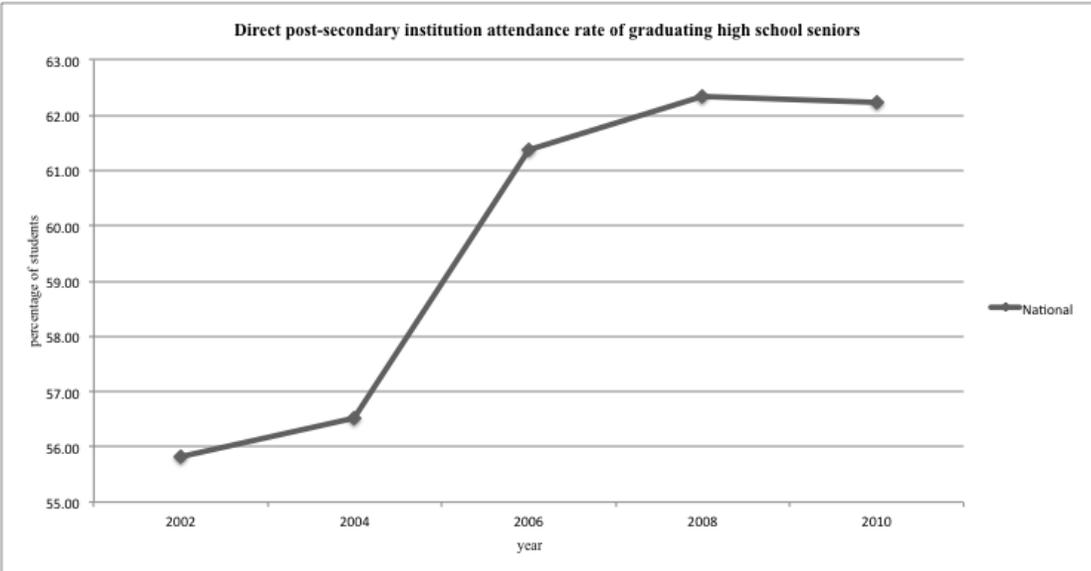


Figure 2. Percentage of first time degree seeking students enrolled directly after high school.

Source: Data from NCES (2017).

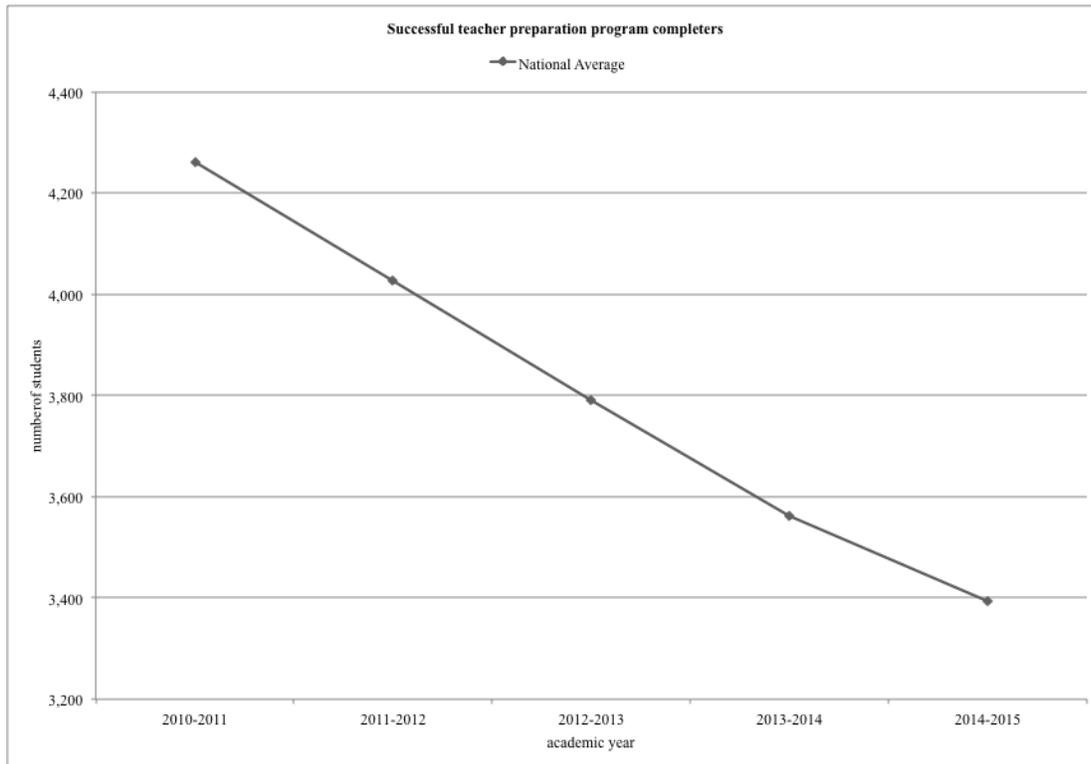


Figure 3. National average number of successful teacher preparation program completers.  
Source: Data from US Department of Education (2016).

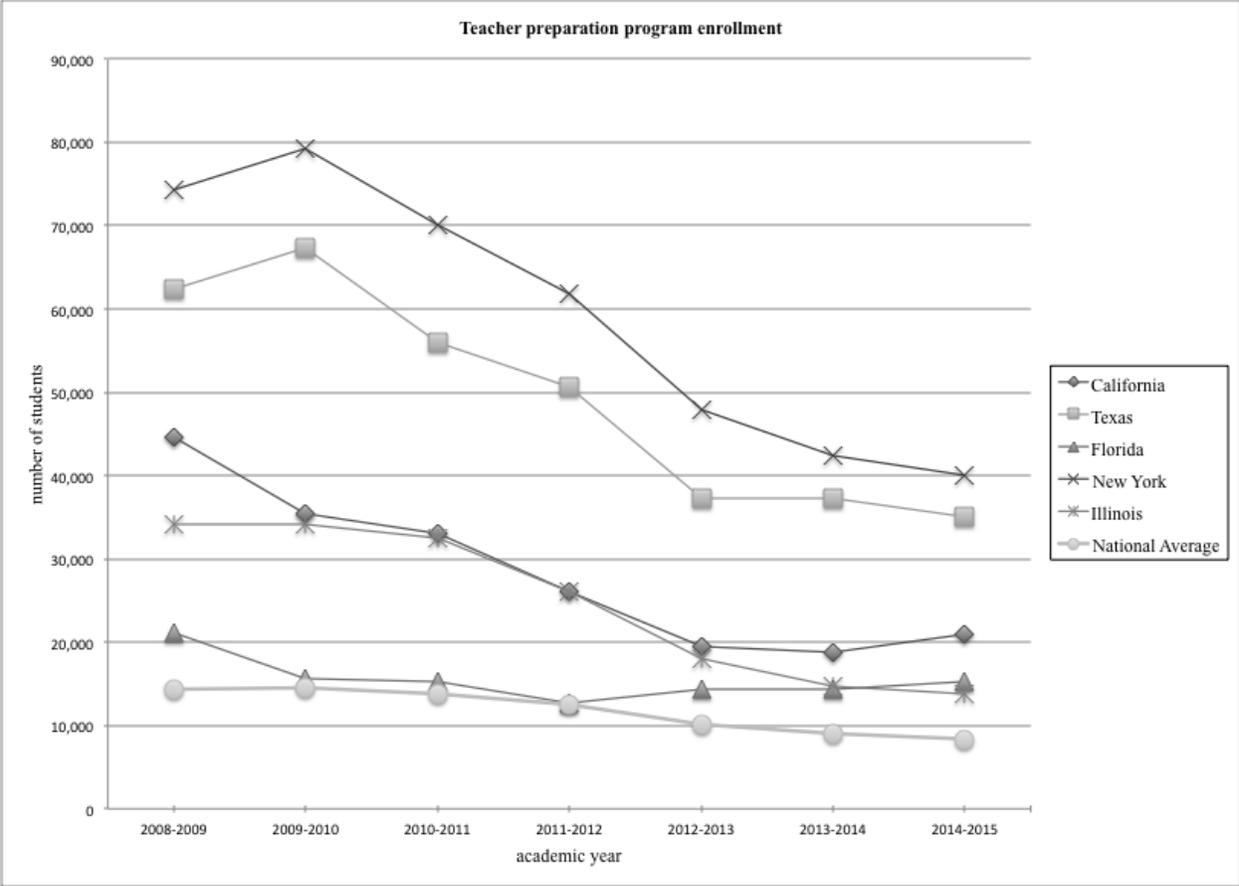


Figure 4. Teacher preparation program enrollment comparing national average to state totals.  
 Source: Data from US Department of Education (2016).

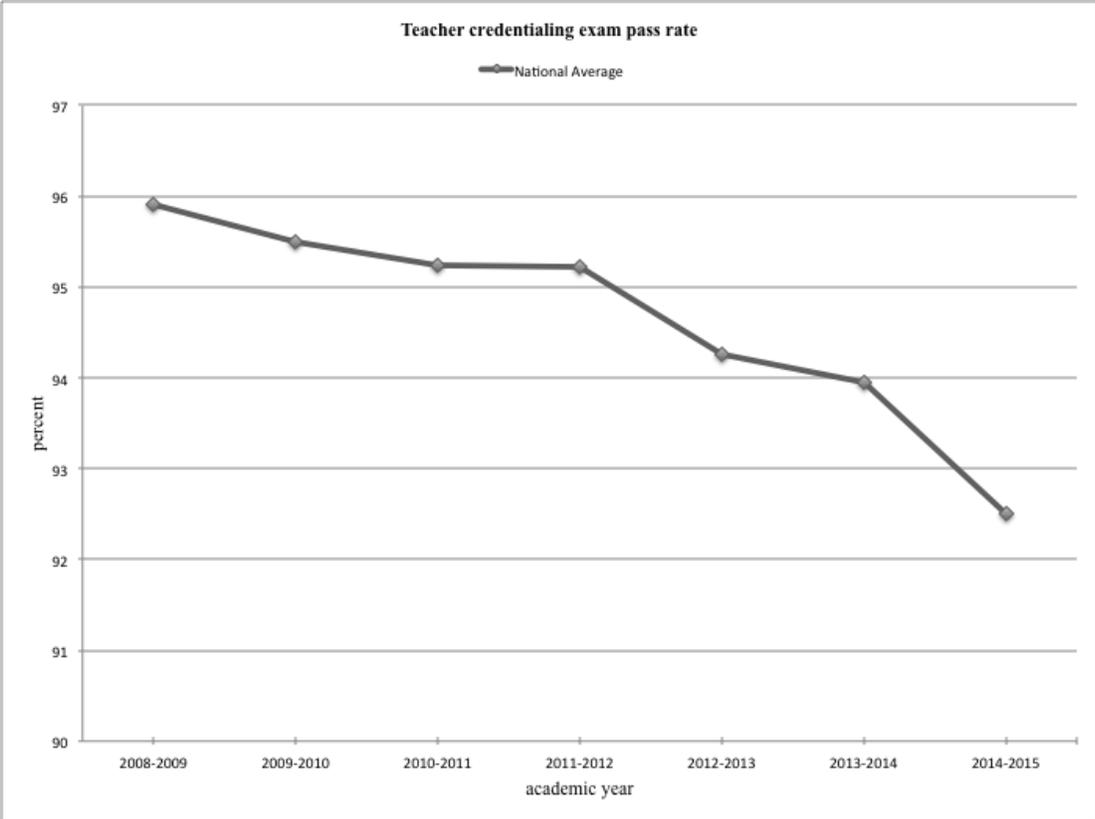


Figure 5. Average national passing rate on teacher credentialing exam.

Source: Data from US Department of Education (2016).