

A Minute With Chris Roegge  
Executive director of the Council on Teacher Education at the University of Illinois  
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The Illinois House of Representatives is considering an education reform bill, Senate Bill 7, which the Illinois Senate passed unanimously in April and the House is expected to support as well, that would place higher priority on teacher performance when making tenure, retention and layoff decisions, and would give the state school superintendent the authority to revoke the teaching certificates of poorly performing teachers, among other measures. Chris Roegge is executive director of the Council on Teacher Education, which oversees all teacher preparation programs at the University of Illinois, and director of the Illinois New Teacher Collaborative, a statewide partnership of educators, business leaders and other organizations interested in attracting and retaining new teachers and promoting student learning. Chris recently spoke with News Bureau reporter Sharita Forrest about the bill and the changing climate toward the teaching profession in the U.S.

**This bill is being called ‘historic.’ What’s historic about it?**

It is historic because there was overall agreement between the unions and the senate on most major aspects of the bill. It also softens some of the perceived “ironclad” protections of teachers’ jobs, but in a reasonable way. It represents part of a new reality for the teaching profession.

The unions have bought into this bill because they were able to preserve some key protections and still establish a fair, performance-based, evidence-driven system for evaluating teacher effectiveness. If implemented properly, it should provide a much more solid basis for tenure and dismissal decisions, as well as for improving teacher performance.

**What performance measures will this legislation put in place? Have they been defined yet?**

Not all the details are complete, but teacher performance will be rated on four levels: excellent, proficient, needs improvement, and unsatisfactory. The state has adopted a framework for determining these ratings and their Performance Evaluation Advisory Committee is working on procedures and rubrics. Districts do have the option of adopting their own framework provided it meets the criteria for establishing the ratings.

**How are bills like this changing teaching as a profession?**

Today’s college students who want to go into teaching face a much different reality than those in past years. There is a real emphasis on raising the floor in terms of the academic qualifications of those who aspire to enter teacher education programs. So, it’s harder to get in the door than it used to be. Teacher candidates jump through more hoops, some of which have costs associated with them. It generally takes longer to complete a program and it’s more expensive. A couple of our secondary science programs cannot be completed in four years.

Once they finish their preparation programs, the graduates will pay more for their teaching license. The job market is tight. Teaching jobs aren’t as secure as they once were. They will have to work more years before being eligible for full retirement. They will have to “pass” more rigorous evaluations to attain and retain tenure. Those aren’t necessarily bad things – they’re just new realities.

And, teaching is still not a high-status job in the US. Depending on location, salaries are still comparatively low. The benefits have traditionally been good, but depending what state you’re in those may be in peril. Given all this, the dilemma we face is competing for top students with other fields of study whose graduates generally enjoy higher-status and better compensation.

**Are new standards changing the type of student who goes into teaching?**

In order to be accepted into a teacher education program, students have to pass the Illinois Test of Basic Skills. The Illinois Board of Education recently raised the ‘cut’ scores on each of the four subtests, and students must pass all four to pass the test. The first time the test was administered using those new scores the statewide pass rate was less than 30 percent. This obviously means that applicants will need to be better prepared, but it also means that the overall pool of potential teacher candidates will shrink.

Illinois also is considering implementing a capstone assessment during the student-teaching period that would be an intensive, performance-driven assessment modeled after the process that practicing teachers go through to receive National Board for Professional Teaching Standards certification.

If anything, students who choose teaching as a career have to be even more determined and persistent than in the past. Hopefully, given the new realities, the myth that teaching is a “fall-back” career has been permanently debunked.

### **How is teacher preparation changing?**

Certification requirements combined with degree requirements put us at capacity in terms of ensuring that an undergraduate can complete the program in four years. We need to be creative and innovative to deliver a program that addresses various mandates while remaining time-efficient and reasonably affordable. We also need to recognize that teacher development doesn't end when our candidates graduate and get their certificates. Induction and mentoring are becoming more and more essential for teacher retention and success.

The College of Education at the U. of I. is in the process of redesigning its teacher preparation programs. A major emphasis in the redesign is identifying the desired characteristics of a “U of I teacher.” That's a little difficult because a standards-based environment encourages uniformity. Our challenge is to look beyond the standards for those aspects that make our programs, and our graduates, distinctive.

### **In general, there seems to be a backlash against teachers' unions right now. What's driving that and where do you think it's headed?**

I think it's part of a larger backlash against teachers and the teaching profession. The current policy environment is fixated on the fallacy that “poor quality teachers” are to blame for all the ills of society. Unions, institutions that prepare teachers, and state agencies that certify them are all seen as co-conspirators. The only way to dispel these notions is with good data and forward-looking, innovative approaches to preparing the next generation of teachers.