Tougher teacher standards will help improve schools

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The College of Education and Human Services at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh supports new standards for teacher candidates announced May 15 by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education.

The standards represent a revolution in teacher preparation, according to the president of NCATE, and are a direct response to calls for better teacher preparation and more rigorous standards for teachers. They will require programs to demonstrate that a teacher candidate knows his or her subject matter and can teach it effectively in a real classroom.

The U.S. Department of Education recognizes NCATE as the professional accrediting body for teacher preparation in the United States. NCATE and the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction accredit the teacher education program at UW-Oshkosh.

NCATE’s new standards will make sure that from the time they are admitted to our program, candidates will be engaged in a rigorous process to prepare them for a career in teaching. They require that teaching candidates be supervised by university professors and cooperating teachers in their practice teaching. They must be observed on a regular basis, and their teaching must be comprehensively critiqued.

What will this mean for our future teachers? It raises the bar both for candidates entering these programs and graduates entering the classrooms of the future. They must have early experiences with students in real classrooms, and they must be carefully evaluated on those experiences. Future teachers must have opportunities to teach in their areas such as math, science, social studies, reading, music, language arts and physical education under the supervision of a practicing teacher and university supervisor with a minimum of three years of classroom experience. After they are evaluated, a determination must be made about their ability to student teach in that field at that grade level.

Evidence of successful teaching must be documented clearly. It will include a portfolio that shows a candidate’s ability to meet Wisconsin teacher standards. A teacher candidate in elementary education may have a portfolio that includes lesson plans and units in each of the subject areas taught at that level and evidence of evaluation of student learning that includes several methods of assessing their performance. It may also include evidence that technology has been integrated into teaching and that he or she can work with parents and school personnel to meet the learning needs of students.

Our college is ready to meet the new standards. The evaluation of teacher candidate performance and strong field-based programs are not new to us. In 1997, when NCATE last reviewed our programs, it commended their content and field-based components.
A major strength of our programs and one that supports a major element of the new standards is our unique and long-standing collaboration with schools in the Fox River Valley. Area superintendents, principals and teachers are a vital part of the life of our programs. Their expertise and cooperation is critical to the success of our graduates and the continuing improvement of our programs.

Examples of this collaboration include the faculty, teachers and student interns at Webster Stanley Elementary School of Oshkosh who are working on a project to show the impact of the reduction of class size on student achievement. Another example is a program with the Appleton School District in which faculty, teachers and student interns are working together in special education and regular education classrooms at Lincoln and Edison elementary schools. The project is focused on fostering a more inclusive climate and promoting successful teaching strategies for all students.

The new NCATE standards will help area schools. They will ensure that the best-prepared teachers will be in classrooms teaching your children and grandchildren. While there is much debate about issues in education such as methods, materials, buildings and other resources, research clearly shows that effective teachers are the key to helping all children become the best they can be.