Teacher College Standards To Be ‘Performance-Based’

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The private organization that accredits teacher colleges yesterday announced new "performance-based" standards dependent upon how well graduates score on state licensing exams, how much command they have of academic subjects and whether they can actually "cause children to learn," Wise said.

Although the council accredits only 500 of the 1,300 colleges that train teachers, accredited schools tend to be larger and produce two-thirds of the nation's teachers. A study released last year found that graduates of accredited schools were more successful in passing licensing exams than those who attended other colleges.

The revised standards will have a phased impact. Each year, a fifth of the accredited colleges have their status reviewed, meaning it will take five years for all 500 to undergo a performance-based evaluation.

In Maryland, the impact will be accelerated by a law requiring colleges of education to secure accreditation from the council by 2004. Of 22 teacher training programs, five already have accreditation—including the University of Maryland at College Park and Bowie State University—and three have applied. The other 14 could face financial consequences if they do not comply.

"There is a possibility those colleges of education will lose funding," said state superintendent Nancy Grasmick, who attended the news conference announcing the standards and heartily endorsed them.

Maryland is among the states that have moved to tighten licensing requirements for prospective teachers. Wise acknowledged that one complication in evaluating passing rates on teacher licensing exams is that states use different tests and cutoff scores.

Amy Wilkins, principal partner of the Education Trust, said that generally "the exams are too easy, and the cut scores are too low. [The council] should be advocating tougher exams and higher cut scores if they want to improve teacher education."

Wise noted that the Educational Testing Service has been strengthening its Praxis II exams, which 35 states use to evaluate how much knowledge prospective high school teachers have in their primary subjects.