

Report on Feedback from "Certification Roadshows"

January 27, 2000

With the help of SABES regional staff, we, Mary Jayne Fay and Carey Reid, have to date convened six open meetings with practitioners across the state. One meeting each was held in the five regions, with one additional meeting held at the Norfolk County House of Corrections in Worcester. An additional meeting was convened on January 25th for practitioners serving in several southeastern Massachusetts correctional facilities, but it was conducted more as a presentation rather than an open discussion. Feedback was sought at the end of this presentation, however, and the results are including in the section on balloting later in this report.

At each of these gatherings, we began by introducing ourselves briefly and then asking each attendee to introduce her/himself and then share one strong concern, idea, or suggestion with the group. We listed these items on a flipchart. We felt that this initial process would ensure that the group as a whole set the meeting's agenda rather than be guided by any concerns or biases that we might have and that the attendees would be more inclined to participate once they were certain that their primary items had been noted or were sure to be addressed.

We sometimes responded to particular items with points of information (e.g., the wording of the statute mandating the voluntary character of the ABE certification to be developed.) In most other cases, we responded to questions such as "What is DOE/the Certification Advisory Committee/SABES planning to do about such-and-such?" with a question that elicited preferences from the group, e.g. "What would people here like to see done about such-and-such?" In other cases, we asked for hand votes, for example to see how the attendees stood regarding issues before the Advisory Committee.

This report in draft form was sent to all attendees for editing suggestions. Corrections and clarifications have been incorporated into this final draft; additional suggestions have been collected in a later section.

Description of participants.

We did some fact-gathering via the sign-in sheet. In total, we have met with 121 practitioners to date. Of those individuals, 59 possess one or more K-12 certifications. 60 have fulfilled, or currently fulfill, more than one role in their programs (e.g., teaching ESOL and GED prep, or teaching and counseling, or administrating and teaching.) The wording for gathering years of ABE experience confused some people, who then lumped in years of teaching in other than ABE settings, but it would be safe to say that the great majority of the attendees had some ABE experience and a strong majority of those had five or more years.

Summary of major findings:

There was a great deal of consistency across meetings, though there were also several instances of strongly diverging opinion. In the course of discussion, several recommendations emerged as well as several unallayed concerns for system builders to consider. **Please note that a subsequent balloting through mail-in postcards (79 returned of 113 mailed) indicated significant shifts in opinion among those expressed during the Roadshows themselves.** In

sum, opinion shifted toward allowing greater latitude for fulfilling base-line requirements (bachelor's degree, literacy test) and toward providing forms of certification that reflect specialized areas of teaching (ESOL, basic reading, etc.) Two additional ballotings--one directed at practitioners who enrolled in SABES pilot courses last year or attended presentations on certification, and another conducted at the close of a January 25th presentation to a group of practitioners serving in southeastern Massachusetts correctional facilities--supported those shifts. The balloting results are reported in a later section.

What follows are summaries, by prevalent issue, of feedback received at the six original open discussion Roadshows.

Grandfathering or crediting for prior knowledge and skills. We pointed out that grandfathering per se has been prohibited by the 1993 Education Reform Act. The practitioners felt that there should be some method for acknowledging and counting the many years of schooling, training, and experience that so many ABE educators can point to. While some felt that a quick prior credit process could be developed, a roughly equal number felt that a deeper kind of scrutiny was required. A great deal of support emerged for a portfolio-based process, with a few attendees adding that the process should involve reflection on practice and even direct observation of classroom teaching.

Voluntary vs. mandatory. We pointed out that the legal statute mandating the provision of an ABE certification also mandated that the certification be voluntary and that employers not construe the statute to mean that they must require certification of their ABE employees. Regardless, there is a strong concern that once on the books the new certification might become *de facto* mandatory. Many felt that DOE might word RFPs or configure funding in ways that would force program managers to hire ABE certified practitioners, and many cited the inclusion of the Certification Survey with the current RFP as a reason for this line of thinking. Still more felt that employers would begin to require certification as a matter of local policy, thereby creating a prejudice against uncertified practitioners. Additionally, many felt that while the ABE certification is not now required that it will become so in the future.

Costs in dollars and time. Given the fact that most practitioners are underpaid and, for several reasons, have few spare hours to apply to certification requirements, how can they reasonably be expected to pursue certification? Many practitioners felt that DOE should monetarily support the efforts of current practitioners pursuing certification, especially if it involved high tuition costs. And nearly everyone agreed that the more flexibility the better regarding ways to fulfill competencies or training requirements, for example through SABES and YALD courses, mentoring, or distance learning.

Benefits of securing certification. Most practitioners who now hold a K-12 certification acknowledged the benefits of having an ABE certification toward which to direct their future learning. However, feelings among those without K-12 certification were decidedly mixed. While many felt that certification should be tied to higher pay scales, most of those individuals and many more as well held little hope that the costs and labor applied to securing an ABE certification would be financially rewarded. Several practitioners expressed the hope that ABE certification would be recognized by the teacher's union and that they would have access to the

same benefits, including retirement options and pay scale. While several individuals cited the potential for increasing skills among the practitioner ranks, as many pointed out the failure of K-12 certification to ensure quality teaching.

Bachelor's requirement. Over all, most of the attendees felt that a bachelor's degree, without equivalent, should be a basic requirement. Several suggested that some kind of provision be made for current practitioners, but not for individuals just entering the field. More than a few were openly worried the requirement would prevent worthy instructors who don't happen to have a bachelor's degree from pursuing certification, albeit voluntary.

Literacy test. Most of the attendees felt that a literacy test should be a basic requirement for ABE certification. A significant number, however, felt that the current MECT (Massachusetts Educator Certification Test) might not be fair or appropriate, especially for practitioners whose first language is not English, and urged that it be looked at carefully. Many of the Norfolk HOC group wanted their support to indicate that they were "not opposed to" a literacy test, rather than in favor of the MECT test or a literacy test in general. Several members of the Boston group felt that a good portfolio assessment approach would cover "literacy" requirements and more fairly than a test would.

Form(s) of certification. Taking the Roadshows as a whole, most of the attendees felt that there should be one certification for all practitioners regardless of role or specialization. The argument that held most sway was that practitioners are required to be flexible--to fulfill different roles, cover different kinds of classes, piece together part-time jobs, or react to funding swings--and did not want the certification process to impede their ability to be so. The Central group stands out in sharp opposition to other groups because nearly all of the 16 attendees present felt that both roles (teacher, counselor, administrator) and specializations (ESOL, math, reading, writing, etc.) were sufficiently distinct to warrant their own forms of certification. One of their central concerns, that administrators without teaching experience cannot evaluate instructors properly, was voiced by more than a few attendees of other Roadshows. Across the Roadshows, many attendees felt that there should be some way of at least recognizing significant training in certain areas, if only in print. The Boston group voted strongly for a model that gathered favor as the Roadshows progressed, that practitioners specialize at the points of re-certification. It should be noted too that the Western group did not reach consensus on this issue.

The present and future influx of younger learners. Many practitioners were concerned about the great numbers of high school dropouts now coming to ABE programs for GEDs. Another contingent pointed out developments surrounding MCAS testing requirements and predicted that, regardless of the Governor's most recent remarks, a future wave of MCAS non-passers would swamp ABE programs (starting in the year 2003, high school students who cannot pass the MCAS will not be allowed to graduate.) These concerns combined into a warning: The field was undergoing a serious challenge that the new certification might need to address. For example, should there be additional competencies for serving younger learners? Should the ABE certification be very different from K-12 secondary level certifications if we are expected to serve a considerable number of younger learners?

Recorded votes.

We asked for hand votes at various points, but time did not always allow votes to be taken easily or in a consistent manner. (We have since sent a mail-in ballot to 113 of the 121 attendees to get firmer counts, which are provided later in this report.) For the record, here is what we did manage to record:

Southeast Region (19 in attendance, 14 with K-12 certification)

- The majority were in favor of the requirement for a bachelor's only (no provision for equivalent).
- The majority were in favor of a literacy test, but many were against the current MECT.
- The majority were in favor of one level of certification.

Central Region (16/7)

- On the bachelor's question, the vote was split: 6 wanted a bachelor's with equivalent; 7 wanted the bachelor's alone.
- The majority voted in favor of a literacy test.
- Nearly unanimously, the group voted against one level of certification and in favor of certifications that reflected different roles and specializations.

Northeast Region (17/11)

- No vote was taken on the bachelor's and/or equivalent question, but several attendees felt strongly that some recourse should be open to effective practitioners who do not have a bachelor's degree.
- No vote taken on the literacy test requirement.
- The majority were in favor of one level of certification.

Western Region (24/11)

- There was no vote on the bachelor's and/or equivalent question.
- There was no vote taken on the literacy test requirement.
- The vote on levels of certification was 4 in favor of one certification, 4 in favor of multiple certifications, and 11 abstentions.

Norfolk County House of Corrections (16/16)

- The majority voted in favor of a bachelor's requirement, but only for new persons coming into the field.
- The majority were in favor of a literacy test, but several asked that their votes be recorded as "not opposed to" a literacy test.
- Unanimously, the group voted in favor of one level of certification.

Boston Region (29/9)

- The majority voted in favor of a bachelor's degree with no provision for an equivalent.
- The group split nearly evenly on whether or not to require a literacy test of any kind.
- Nearly unanimously, the group voted for one certification but only if specialization were allowed at points of re-certification.

Other concerns and points of interest:

There were at least two more matters that came up just often enough to be worth mentioning in a summary report of this kind.

- The idea of piloting the new certification was an appealing idea to many attendees. Several wanted to be involved directly, and others were concerned that the plotters represent the range of practitioners.
- Most of the attendees seemed to like the competencies listed in the Interim Report, while they understood that refinement would be needed; however, a few attendees in the Western group were either opposed to a competency-based model in general or felt that the draft competencies needed a thorough revision. They were invited to suggest changes.

Individual responses to first draft:

Eight attendees sent in letters or photocopied pages with corrections, clarifications, or comments. Corrections and clarifications have been incorporated in this final report. Individual comments are quoted, paraphrased, or summarized below:

- "I think that many current and prospective practitioners will be discouraged to follow up on ABE certifications and stay or come into the field if certification regs are strict and time consuming and expensive."
- "In addition to the costs in time and money to individuals, another concern is the enormous costs to the ABE system to implement and maintain a certification process."
- In response to several practitioners' hope that the new certification would be recognized by the [Boston] teachers' union, enabling them to access and accrue benefits: "Very few practitioners in the Boston region [and other regions?] belong to a union which could work for the improvement of salary or benefits."
- "The issue of professional certification of adult education instructors is not being accorded the care and reflection that teachers, instructors, and administrators deserve. Over time, this issue has profound implications for the productivity and quality of life of many hundreds of thousands of people. It requires careful study by committed teams of learners, instructors, and administrators." These teams should consider "requiring successful completion of college-level methods courses in instructional areas: math, reading, writing..." and the provision of tuition and release time for "instructors to up-grade their skills to professional levels."
- Certification should mean competency for full-time teachers, not part-time.

- Two respondents suggested that a portfolio-based assessment model could also cover bachelor's degree and literacy test requirements, thus accommodating good teachers without a college degree or those who are not native speakers of English. Another respondent suggested that the bachelor's degree requirement could be covered by a candidate's passing the MECT general teaching test and an additional ABE content test.
- One respondent felt that any monetary benefits that become tied to certification should be accrued in ways that reward those with years of experience over newcomers to the field; another felt that ABE certified instructors without benefits should be rewarded with an increased hourly rate.
- Two respondents sent a letter which expressed grave concerns that "continued emphasis on standardized certification that conforms to the contours of K-12 models must be jettisoned" because they will be "irrelevant to the communities we serve." Further, "the notion of 'certified' purveyors of knowledge is antithetical to the fundamental nature of ABE's non-hierarchical structure." These two individuals propose a "politicized model" in which certification would be granted to those practitioners who successfully help learners to affect positive change in their communities.

First balloting

Over the course of the Roadshows, several basic questions regarding the ABE certification took shape. We thought it might be a good idea to put together a ballot and send it out to, first, those persons who attended the Roadshows, and, second, additional persons who have shown interest in some way in the progress of the certification's development. We had, or were able to get, good addresses for 113 of the 121 Roadshow attendees. We sent the ballot displayed on the final page of this report on a stamped, pre-addressed card. Of the total of 113 sent, 79 responded--an extremely strong showing. The following are the breakouts on the voting for each of the three sections.

<i>A bachelor's degree should be required for ABE certification.</i>	48
<i>Either a bachelor's degree or a fair, sound equivalent should be required.</i>	26
<i>I do not agree with either of these options.</i>	5

Comments:

- *Why create more bureaucracy? Leave it up to the programs*
- *Certification should be demonstrated by knowledge and skills alone.*
- *A bachelor's in education should be required and teachers' training.*
- *The notion of "certification" is antithetical to ABE's non-hierarchical structure.*

<i>A literacy <u>test</u> of some kind should be required for ABE certification, either the MECT test or a fair, sound equivalent.</i>	33
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<i>Literacy ability should be required, but determined via oral and/or written processes other than testing.</i>	35 (2 people stated either of first two ok.)
<i>I do not agree with either of these options.</i>	13

Comments:

- *Use either a non-MECT test or the portfolio.*
- *Bilingual counselors are one case among others where English proficiency is not essential.*
- *The notion of "certification" is antithetical to ABE's non-hierarchical structure.*
- *Literacy ability would be proven already by a bachelor's degree.*
- *Literacy ability can be determined during a hiring process, by a resume, or by on the job observations.*
- *I would have to review any test before agreeing to take it.*

<i>There should be only one general certification for all ABE practitioners regardless of roles and specializations.</i>	17
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<i>There should be only one general certification when first applying but specializations possible at points of re-certification (required every five years).</i>	28
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<i>There should be a different certification for instructors, counselors, and administrators from the start.</i>	1
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<i>There should be a different certification for instructors, counselors, and administrators from the start AND specializations allowed for instructors (ESOL, ABE, etc.)</i>	26
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<i>I do not agree with any of these options.</i>	3
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Comments:

- *The notion of "certification" is antithetical to ABE's non-hierarchical structure.*

Conclusions:

We assume that the balloting has allowed the Roadshow attendees to think further about the issues, and in many cases, change their minds about how they voted at the Roadshow sessions. Overall, this first balloting indicates a swing toward more flexibility with entry level requirements and toward forms of certification that reflect specializations.

1. Bachelor's degree requirement. The votes indicate a strong desire for a bachelor's degree with a definite swing in opinion toward allowing a fair, sound equivalent.
2. Literacy test requirement. The votes indicate a strengthening support for a formal check for literacy skills. However, a bit more space was created for methods other than formal testing to be acceptable, and perhaps even preferable. For example, scanning the proposed portfolio for literacy or routinely screening for literacy skills as part of the hiring process. A significant number of voters pointed to the possible redundancy of requiring both a bachelor's degree and a literacy check.
3. Form(s) of certification. The votes indicate a definite swing away from the earlier support for a single, general certification for all practitioners. In fact, this is the most dramatic shift that the balloting might have captured. While there is no clear winner among the three top vote-getting options, it would be safe to conclude that those voting want some opportunity to pursue and have recognized areas of specialization. It would also be safe to conclude that support has grown for creating certifications for administrators and counselors.

Second ballotings:

The same ballot, along with an information sheet that described the most often voiced pros and cons for each issue, was sent to 35 individuals who have attended focus groups or presentations about certification developments in the past. Data on number certified, years in the field, and so forth, were not collected for this round; also, in some cases, people declined to cast a vote in a certain category.

<i>A bachelor's degree should be required for ABE certification.</i>	11
<i>Either a bachelor's degree or a fair, sound equivalent should be required.</i>	6
<i>I do not agree with either of these options.</i>	1

Comments:

- *"Regardless of how much or how little education a person has is irrelevant. I was hoping for a program of studies for certification which is undergraduate."*

<i>A literacy <u>test</u> of some kind should be required for ABE certification, either the MECT test or a fair, sound equivalent.</i>	7
<i>Literacy ability should be required, but determined via oral and/or written processes other than testing.</i>	7
<i>I do not agree with either of these options.</i>	3

Comments:

- *Need more info about the test before deciding (2).*
- *Literacy ability would be proven already by a bachelor's degree.*
- *Literacy ability can be determined during a hiring process.*
- *"An intensive course should be provided which reviews basic English skills/grammar, then goes to much greater depth, and then a test for certification."*

There should be only one general certification for all ABE practitioners regardless of roles and specializations. 12

There should be only one general certification when first applying but specializations possible at points of re-certification (required every five years). 2

There should be a different certification for instructors, counselors, and administrators from the start. 1

There should be a different certification for instructors, counselors, and administrators from the start AND specializations allowed for instructors (ESOL, ABE, etc.) 8

I do not agree with any of these options. 1

Comments:

- *"Why wait five years [to specialize]?"*
- *"I was hoping for a year- or two-long program of courses for certification which everyone would have to take regardless of education or experience so we can all start off on the same footing."*

A third balloting was conducted at the conclusion of a presentation to 21 practitioners serving in correctional facilities throughout southeastern Massachusetts. The practitioners explained that there is near-requirement for both a bachelor's degree and K-12 certification, which are expressed as "strong preferences" in hiring processes. Of the 21 practitioners in attendance, all but two have K-12 certification. On average, they have worked in the ABE field well over 5 years.

The presentation outlined the history of certification efforts and the most recent activities of the Advisory Committee and the work group and staff that support it. An information sheet, attached, outlining the pros and cons usually associated with key issues was provided and explained. After about fifteen minutes of open discussion, the attendees were asked to fill out ballots. The voting was as follows:

A bachelor's degree should be required for ABE certification. 12

Either a bachelor's degree or a fair, sound equivalent should be required. 7

I do not agree with either of these options. 1

Comments:

- None.

A literacy test of some kind should be required for ABE certification, either the MECT test or a fair, sound equivalent. 4

Literacy ability should be required, but determined via oral and/or written processes other than testing. 10

I do not agree with either of these options. 4

Comments:

- "Not sure." (2)

There should be only one general certification for all ABE practitioners regardless of roles and specializations. 3

There should be only one general certification when first applying but specializations possible at points of re-certification (required every five years). 6

There should be a different certification for instructors, counselors, and administrators from the start. 4

There should be a different certification for instructors, counselors, and administrators from the start AND specializations allowed for instructors (ESOL, ABE, etc.) 4

I do not agree with any of these options. 1

Comments:

- "Not sure." (2)
- "If this ABE certification is wanted [by practitioners?], make it mean something--give it the respect it deserves by requiring degree, etc."

Conclusions from the second and third ballotings

It appears to us that these two ballotings continue and strengthen the trend toward leaving room for an equivalent to the bachelor's degree and toward providing an equivalent or alternative means of indicating literacy skills.

We were frankly surprised at the vote counts in the balloting conducted with the southeastern Massachusetts correctional practitioners. We assumed that because they are nearly required to have bachelor's degrees and K-12 certifications for employment that they would vote the same base-line requirements for others. That assumption was reinforced by the nature of the open discussion, in which several of the practitioners argued strenuously for the bachelor's-only option and no one argued for a bachelor's equivalent or an alternative to literacy testing.

Mary Jayne Fay
DOE Certification Specialist

Carey Reid
SABES Staff Development Specialist

Attachments:**Composite of Ballot Votes, Ballot, Information Sheet
(169 ballots distributed/118 responses)****Composite of Ballot Votes**

A bachelor's degree should be required for ABE certification. 71

Either a bachelor's degree or a fair, sound equivalent should be required. 39

I do not agree with either of these options. 7

A literacy test of some kind should be required for ABE certification, either the MECT test or a fair, sound equivalent. 44

Literacy ability should be required, but determined via oral and/or written processes other than testing. 52

I do not agree with either of these options. 20

There should be only one general certification for all ABE practitioners regardless of roles and specializations. 32

There should be only one general certification when first applying but specializations possible at points of re-certification (required every five years). 34

There should be a different certification for instructors, counselors, and administrators from the start. 6

There should be a different certification for instructors, counselors, and administrators from the start AND specializations allowed for instructors (ESOL, ABE, etc.) 38

I do not agree with any of these options. 5

Ballot**Certification Ballot #1***Check one in each group*

- A bachelor's degree should be required for ABE certification.
- Either a bachelor's degree or a fair, sound equivalent should be required.
- I do not agree with either of these options. Comments:

- A literacy test of some kind should be required for ABE certification, either the MECT test or a fair, sound equivalent.
- Literacy ability should be required, but determined via oral and/or written processes other than testing.
- I do not agree with either of these options. Comments:

- There should be only one general certification for all ABE practitioners regardless of roles and specializations.
- There should be only one general certification when first applying but specializations possible at points of re-certification (required every five years).
- There should be a different certification for instructors, counselors, and administrators from the start.
- There should be a different certification for instructors, counselors, and administrators from the start AND specializations allowed for instructors (ESOL, ABE, etc.)
- I do not agree with any of these options. Comments:

ABE CERTIFICATION BALLOT DISCUSSION SHEET

This sheet is a listing of the arguments for (pros) and against (cons) each of the topics on Certification Ballot #1 that we heard in the ABE Certification Roadshow. These pros and cons do not reflect the opinions of DOE or SABES.

1) Bachelor's degree:

Pros: a bachelor's degree is required of all k-12 teachers in Massachusetts; a college degree is required in most professions

Cons: may discount good teachers who don't have a bachelor's degree; may limit the number of teachers who can be hired directly from CBO's

Bachelor's degree or a fair, sound equivalent:

Pros: would allow persons with persons with equivalent experience and knowledge to obtain certification

Cons: there is no equivalent to a bachelor's degree

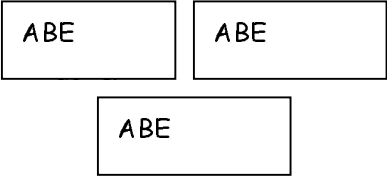
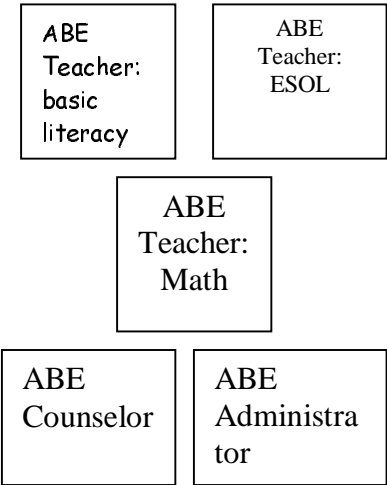
2) Literacy test:

Pros: test of literacy is required of all k-12 teachers in Massachusetts

Cons: there is no information on whether the current teacher test is appropriate for teachers whose first language isn't English; testing goes against the philosophy of ABE teachers

3) Form of ABE Certification:

<u>Form of Certification</u>	<i>Description</i>	<u>Representation</u>	<u>Pros/Cons</u>
1) General ABE Certificate (no specialization noted)	This certificate would include teachers, counselors, and administrators.	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;"> ABE Certificatio </div>	<p>Pros: general, flexible because doesn't separate teacher from counselor from administrator</p> <p>Cons: might imply that specializations are not necessary in the ABE field.</p>
2) General ABE Certificate With specializations at the time of recertification	This certificate would include teachers, counselors, and administrators, but would name specializations.	<pre> graph TD ABE[ABE Certification] --- Counsel[Counsel] ABE --- Admin[Admin] Counsel --- ESO[ESO] Counsel --- Literac[Literac] Admin --- GED[GED] </pre>	<p>Pros: allows practitioners to specialize at the time of recertification; recognition of special skills/knowledge required of individual areas; and the special skills/knowledge of teacher, counselor, and administrators</p> <p>Cons: specialties may be cause for discrimination by employers; could be confusing for practitioners</p>

<p>3) Separate Certificates for teacher, counselor, and administrator</p>	<p>These certificates would have separate requirements for each certificate.</p>		<p>Pros: distinguishes between teachers, counselors, and administrators from the start; recognizes special skills/knowledge required of teachers, counselors, and administrators Cons: practitioners might need appropriate certification in order to be hired for each area; could be confusing for practitioners</p>
<p>5. Separate Certification for administrator, counselor, and specializations allowed for instructors (ESOL, ABE, etc.)</p>			<p>Pros: gives option for teacher to specialize in a particular area of interest and gain depth, recognition of special skills/knowledge required of teachers, counselors, and administrators Cons: separate teaching certificates might result in hiring discrimination; could be confusing for practitioners</p>